



**Capernwray, Lancashire
and Hodge Close, Cumbria
12-14th November 2004**

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Trip Report by Steve Clark, with JK/DLJM dive details by David Martin

Divers:

- John Kendall
- David Martin
- Matt Worsley
- Steve Clark

The surface photos are from Steve's recce a fortnight earlier. Underwater shots are video stills by JK and are © John Kendall (2004).

Friday 12th Nov 2004

JK and Matt travelled up from Cambridge, picking up David from Nottingham on the way. They arrived at chez Steve around 9ish with a grossly overloaded car. My house was serving as base for the weekend's diving and as a comfy lecture theatre for my Combined Nitrox lectures - *Cheers guys*.

Saturday 13th Nov 2004 - Capernwray

[Capernwray](#) is an inland dive site 8 miles north of Lancaster. It has a similar professional setup to Stoney Cove and generally not so busy. Visibility in the water is good, with easy access via a shallow slipway. On the downside, the underwater attractions are few and far between. Max depth 20m.

Dive 1: John Kendall & David Martin
Max depth: 14m
Time: 37 min
Mix: Nitrox 32 (7L stage)

We wanted to keep the twinset full of Trimix for the Hodge Close dive, so we had decided to breathe 7L stages for the dive; this was the first time that we had used stages for bottom gas, rather than as decompression gas. We started our dive at the "cave" which Capernwray claims provides "a very realistic overhead environment suitable for lining-out etc. whilst providing safe access and exit from each side". Sadly the "cave" is an old 40-foot shipping container, and the fact that we were never more than a metre from a two metre wide hole meant that it was somewhat lacking in realism. Tie-off points on the smooth metal walls were also limited, so we headed to the quarry side to tie off to some of the rocks there. John selected some awkward rocks for me to tie-off to, since we couldn't rely on regular easy tie-offs at Hodge Close. The remainder of the dive was spent shooting (unspectacular) video, whilst trying to avoid the occasional unobservant or panicking trainee.

Dive 1: Matt Worsley & Steve Clark
Max Depth: 17.3m
Time: 53 mins
Gas: Air

After a gentle walk in entry, we headed over to the 6m training area to do some inversion drills with my modified drysuit. Much easier now the fins stay on my feet. We took a bearing to the Gypsy Moth and arrived at the large wooden boat via a swim around couple of cars. Again we took a bearing for the helicopter and arrived at a large shipping container with a hole in the side. Quick look inside and we ascended to find a large bit of kit off an oil rig perched on top of the container. We somehow failed to notice the Wessex helicopter also atop the container! We swam over towards the wall, which we ascended with stops on the way, before a quick bumble around Shergar the enormous plastic horse. Matt deployed a DSMB and we made our ascent to the surface.

Dive 2: John Kendall & David Martin
Max depth: 17m
Time: 40 min

Mix: Nitrox 32 (7L stage)

Neither of us had seen many of the things placed underwater, so we headed for the Podsnap and African Queen to the left of the entry point. We found the latter, and spent about a minute swimming over it, before heading away from the shore towards where we thought the Podsnap was. I took the video, and kept it running for practice, since I'd only used it very briefly before. We got lost and ended up on the far shore, before turning right and swimming along the wall. We gradually worked our way up, and surfaced when John was down to about 10 bar, within a few metres of the furthest point from the exit that was still in the lake. A long dull surface swim, followed by a longer duller video review session awaited us.

The stages had been simple to use, and whilst it added a small amount of extra kit for a simple dive, it certainly wasn't an issue in anyway. We had each used approx 5 bar of backgas across the two dives.

Dive 2: Matt Worsley & Steve Clark

Max Depth: 17.5m

Time: 35 mins

Gas: Air

Not taking any chances this time, we swam to the buoy marked with a big 'H' and descended onto the Wessex Helicopter! We had a good look around and before I got totally confused by Matt's "I am not cold" signal. I pulled a random (requested) out-of-air drill on Matt and he returned the (unrequested!) favour a few minutes later. Boredom prompted some mask mid-water mask clearing and reg recovery skills before we headed over to the shipping container ("cave" is not a fair description!) and ascended next to the oil rig.

Sunday 14th Nov 2004 - Hodge Close

[Hodge Close](#) is a disused and flooded [slate quarry/mine](#) just north of Coniston in the [Lake District National Park](#). The site is renowned (even amongst other superb [Lake District Sites](#)) for its excellent visibility and an extensive network of flooded mine workings. Overall, the quarry is approx. 100m x 50m on plan with an original worked depth from ground level of ~100m. In its disused state, the water level is about 50m below ground level and significant rock falls from the sheer faces have partially in-filled the base of the quarry leaving a water depth of 30m.



Left: Hodge Close Quarry as viewed from the upper car park. Right: the stream bed and long tunnel to reach the water's edge.

The quarry is accessed down a single track road off the A593 just north of Coniston. After about 2 miles of climbing (to ~200mASL) the valley opens up into a vast area of open cast workings and the upper car park. The large hole in the ground on the right hand side of the road is Hodge Close. Access to the water's edge 50m below from the top of the quarry is only possible by abseil or a steep climb down the scree slope on the left.

To access the water for diving, drive for a further 200m and stop at a bungalow on the right. Pay £5 per car to the local and he'll remove the rusty iron post and allow access down a narrow track on the left. At the bottom of the hill, drive through the stream and park on the left beneath a giant heap of slate spoil.

Now all that lies between you and the water's edge is to: kit up; walk up the stream; walk through a 120m long, 5ft high, dark, flooded tunnel; climb down a 10ft high scaffold ladder; and finally, over a few rocks down the slope to the little beach/ledge next to the water. In kit with a single set it's pretty tricky; with 3 twinsets, 2x15s, 7x7L stages, an O₂ kit, a video camera and housing, and an oversize lunchbox full of pies; it's a multi-trip expedition.





Dive 1: John Kendall & David Martin

Max depth: 27m

Bottom Time: 41 min

Total Time: 59 min

Max Penetration: 109m

Mix: Trimix 30/30 (twin 12L plus 7L stage) + 100% oxygen (7L stage)

Deco: 1@12, 2@9, 6@6 (100%)

After the last of the kit had been brought through, we could complete the kit preparation; putting new batteries into the Scout backup lights. We chose to kit up on what appeared to be a convenient ledge covered in six to eight inches of water; we soon realised the error of our decision as we struggled awkwardly into the sets – which Steve caught on video. John took the camera back, and we headed to the shotline for the descent. The visibility had looked good on the surface, but without significant reference points, we couldn't really tell on the descent. As we passed 12m, we caught sight of divers just above the bottom (at 25-27m), confirming that the vis was pretty good (although not at the 20-25m levels apparently reached in summer).

We got to the bottom of the shotline and then had to look for the cave. We had been told that it was at approx 24m, and near-ish to the shot. Sadly, it wasn't easily apparent. The good visibility enabled us to swim further apart as we looked for the entrance; each dark spot seeming hopeful, only to dash the expectation once we swam a little further, or shone a torch into the shadow to light up the rock behind. As we circled back around towards the shotline again, John noticed an orange line. It quickly became obvious that this was the way in, so I made the primary tie-off, confirmed that we were good, and headed in. (We realised after surfacing that we'd forgotten to perform an S-drill before entering.) John had the video, so I ran the line. About 10m in there is a slight bend to the left with a small recess on the left at the same point. The large rock at this point provided our secondary tie-off. We deposited our decompression stages, switched to backgas and then deposited the backgas stages.



Backgas and oxygen stages at the secondary tie-off.

Feeling noticeably more streamlined we headed onwards. The tunnel is about 1.8m high, and 2.5m wide, and is almost completely level. The walls are fairly smooth, with limited tie-offs and the rock appears far lighter in colour than the dark slate cliffs above the water. The floor in this first section consists of broken rocks. Soon after the bend the permanent guideline parts company from the left wall, and sweeps in a long diagonal to the right-hand side of tunnel; at this point the line is about 80cm above the floor, which left just enough room for us to swim underneath.

The passage soon enters Chamber One. In comparison to the tunnel, this chamber is rather large –the far wall, across the shorter dimension, was not visible until we were a couple of metres away from the entrance. As we swam across we were unable to see either side-wall, or the roof. We were surprised to encounter the chamber since the sketch-map that we'd seen suggested that this chamber was accessed via a side passage, whilst the main passage passed by. Plastic signs were fixed to the wall next to the tunnel passage, arrows with cut-out "OUT" pointed back the way we had come, whilst an ominous skull and cross-bones marked the way ahead.



Sign at the exit to Chamber One.



In the second tunnel section, the floor soon changes from broken rocks to regularly spaced approximately square slabs, each about 40x40cm, with much smaller broken rocks between them. The permanent line is on the left hand side again. This section had a slight left bend over the whole length, as well as one distinct left-bend. We came to a split in the tunnel, one passage headed off sharply to the left, the other was just right of straight-ahead. Both were of equal sized to the earlier tunnels we were in. We had used half our bottom time, and whilst part of this had been used outside the tunnel, looking for the entrance, it seemed a good place to turn back. I tied a knot in the line to measure the penetration (estimated at ~80m from the line left on the reel, measured afterwards as 109m); then we headed back.

It was good to see that we hadn't disturbed the visibility too much on the way in except at a couple of the tie-offs where the rocks or metal pins were covered in fine silt or rust. We paused briefly in Chamber One both considering whether we should interrupt the return journey to explore it a little, but this wasn't time to make changes to the plan, so the thought went unsaid. All too quickly we were back at the secondary tie-off, and the depo'd stages with the faint green glow of the open water just visible.

Once in open water I deployed a DSMB to confirm to Matt and Steve that we were OK. I chose to deploy it on a spool, but in future I'd probably just send up the DSMB, to save reeling in, then collect it once we'd surfaced. John's suit had leaked again, and throughout the ascent he was looking forward to getting onto the O₂ at 6m (the one downside of Trimix [other than cost] being the chilling effect of the helium).



David on the ascent.

We really enjoyed our dive, and whilst hardly a significant cave dive in the grand scheme of things, it was significant for us. We plan to come back, to explore the chambers, and possibly to do some mapping.

Dive 1: Matt Worsley & Steve Clark

Max Depth: 28.5m

Bottom Time: 25 min

Total Time: 44 min

Gas: Nitrox 36 (twin 12L) and Nitrox 32 (7L) (Matt); air (Steve)

Deco: 1@12, 1@9, 6@6

Having spotted David & JK's DSMB we were more relaxed about the potential need to explain ourselves to the emergency services and kitted up at the water's edge. We swam to the shot at the far side of the quarry and dropped through the 7°C water to a weighted plastic drum at 28.5m. We estimated the vis at approx 8m – apparently the worst all season, due to the remains of the summer algae and falling debris from the trees above.

Although clear at the bottom, it was quite dark, with torches needed to read gauges clearly. Having found the tunnel entrance slightly above us at 24m, Matt proceeded to take a look inside. Steve's torch dimming in the distance indicated a definite reluctance to follow and we satisfied ourselves with a look at the entrance and the lines disappearing into the black hole.

We had a look around at the scrapyard of cars and vans, mangled from the 50m drop to the water, and played with a plastic chair and pair of boots arranged on the bottom. The base of the quarry is defined by a disordered array of giant boulders. The original depth of the quarry can be gauged by the narrow gaps between, descending out of sight.

At 25 mins, Matt clipped the DSMB and reel to the shotline and sent it to the surface. Or at least that was the plan - at 18m we were reunited with the blob, tangled in a loop on the shot. We ran out the reel and unclipped it and to use as a conventional DSMB for the ascent. Matt did a practice gas switch to his stage bottle at 15m and we shivered through cautious stops: 1@12, 1@9, 6@6.



As you can see, the pie box proved central to the day's activities! Left-to-right: John, David, Matt and Steve.