



**Plymouth  
Mount Batten  
June 29th - July 3rd 2005**

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**Organised by Ian Gregory**  
**Trip report by Freija Glansdorp [*cheekily edited by Ian Gregory and David Martin*]**

**The line-up: (In alphabetical order - at David's insistance!)**

- Seth Bell
- Steve Clark
- Leigh Connor
- Freija Glansdorp
- Ian Gregory
- Mark Hallworth
- Rachael Macdonald
- David Martin
- Stuart Moore
- Camus Nimmo
- Ben Russell
- Matt Worsley

With a special guest appearance by Lisa Lim.

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### **Sample costs:**

- Accommodation in the Mount Batten Centre: Triple rooms £30 per night during the week, £40 per night at the weekend.
- Seeker hire: £350 per day.
- RIB hire: £35 per person per day (2 dives).
- Van from Cambridge: £230 hire (4 days) plus £80 fuel.

Typical trip cost per person (including transport) was £230.

### **The dives:**

- [The Glenstrathallen](#) (Max Depth = 18.3 m)
- [Tinker Shoal](#) (Max Depth = 16.6 m)
- [HMS Scylla](#) (Max Depth = 18.1 m)
- [James Eagan Layne - Dive I](#) (Max Depth = 21.3 m)
- [James Eagan Layne - Dive II](#) (Max Depth = 20.6 m)
- [Breakwater Fort](#) (Max Depth = 15.7 m)
- [The Persier](#) (Max Depth = 28.5 m)
- [The Great Mewstone](#) (Max Depth = 12.3 m)

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### **Day 0: Wednesday 29th June 2005**

Most people were actually at the kitstore on time. Which meant we got a lovely opportunity to sit around doing very little until Ian arrived with the van, during which time Matt managed to lock himself out of his house, go to the Porter's lodge at Downing, let himself back in to get his keys and return the spare keys, on foot, and we all managed to eat our lunch. And all of it in the sunshine, it felt like a holiday already. When Ian arrived with the van after being stuck in Cambridge's traffic for far longer than he cared to, we quickly loaded up all the kit which we had sorted out the day before. I joined Ian in the van, while Matt, Leigh and Mark joined David in his car for a little side mission: after Porth Kerris the training logs had ended up at JK's house, so they had to be retrieved by conducting a little break-in. Although I unfortunately missed out on these criminal exploits, I was later told it was disturbingly easy, but thanks to their natural skills [*though it probably owes more to the fact that JK had left his fanlight windows wide open*] they had somehow managed to avoid being arrested.

The journey went very smoothly, my personal highlight being seeing Stonehenge on the way, which I can now confirm has always very

accurately been described to me as a stack of very big rocks. *[It ought to be mentioned that this was not an incidental passing. Ian had been constrained to take the A303 route from very early on in the journey - specifically so that Freija could see Stonehenge].* We had some food on the way, and arrived at the Mount Batten Centre in the early evening, where we met up with Camus and Rachael. The rest of the evening was spent in the pub *[the Mount Batten Hotel the bar at Batten was closed during the weekdays]* while the rest of the party trickled in, debating such important topics as what a shark skeleton looks like, and how to save the Gange's river dolphins. Stuart meanwhile spent the entire evening phoning Ian every few minutes asking for directions while driving around Plymouth in a taxi, trying to find the water taxi stop on the other side of the river, before finally missing the last one and then getting the taxi to drive him all the way around. Once he arrived we had a short briefing and then went to bed, where we all managed to get some sleep after adjusting to the rather violent plumbing in the Mount Batten Centre...*[at least, we hoped it was the plumbing!]*

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## Day 1: Thursday 30th June 2005

A rather grey day, but spirits were high at the excellent fried breakfast. *[This cost an extra £5 per day, but it is totally worth it if you are into big breakfasts in the morning. Some weren't, and had cereals in their room - we found out afterwards that continental breakfasts are also available at reduced prices - d'oh].* After a remarkably efficient moving of the required kit, we all got on board the Seeker *[Deep Blue's 12 man hard day-boat, complete with tail-lift]*, setting off for our first dive site of the day: the remains of the **Glenstrathallen**. The skipper threw in a shot line and started taking us to it in pairs, from where we descended down to the only remaining bit of the wreck: the boiler, which turned out to have the shot line right against it. For me, it was the first dive in British seawater, and I was quite amazed by how much life there was in it (I admit I imagined it to be a lot darker, murkier, and to consist of not much more than sand and water). The boiler itself was full of cod, the kelp beds nearby contained lots of starfish and sea urchins, and I saw my first Ballan wrasse. I certainly never imagined to see anything that colourful! And such a curious fish, it actually came out to take a look at us. *[Ian also had a great dive, seeing a lot of cotton spinners, and Camus successfully deployed his first delayed SMB - well done!]* After the ascent we were picked up by the Seeker, which is rather luxuriously fitted out with a lift. Most people had had a good dive, though a few had a rather short dive since they hadn't taken the warnings regarding sea sickness quite seriously enough ...

We made lunch on board (the Nutella, especially, was a popular feature - such a great idea to get a jar of that) while sitting behind Plymouth's breakwater where the water was calmer. After a suitable surface interval we set off for the day's second site, **Tinker Shoal**. I still consider this one of the best dives I've had, though opinions varied within the group. We made a free descent straight into a huge kelp forest. I had a great time exploring through all the gullies under the kelp connecting slightly larger more open spaces, seeing lots of starfish, huge sea urchins and several poor cod, and lots of pretty sea shells which I brought up with me. We also spotted a Cuckoo wrasse, and, very excitingly, a John Dory, which I didn't actually spot until Matt pointed it out to me as it was facing me head-on. This dive certainly left me feeling very impressed with British diving!

After we returned to the centre we took the water taxi across and had some food at the 'Pizzagethi' *[the Italian pizza restaurant where we dined on a previous Plymouth Trip - good food but a bit on the pricy side]*, followed by a wander to the Hoe. A very insignificant *[ermm!?!]* wall-climbing incident was followed by a drink in the Admiral McBride, after which we just caught the last water taxi back.

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## Day 2: Friday 1st July 2005

Another excellent fried breakfast followed by a day of wrecks. The Seeker first took us to **HMS Scylla**. Opinions on this particular wreck were rather variable, to say the least. Sunk only in March 2004, this wreck doesn't have much life on it yet, and is therefore in my personal opinion little more than a very big lump of metal with holes in it. Lots of the boys, however, got very excited about seeing the helicopter deck and the torpedo launching tubes and other stuff. *[It has to be said that there was lots more life than the previous year, with anemonies already starting to take hold on the hull. Oh, and they are not torpedo tubes you fool, they are Exocet missile launchers].* Lunch was again had in a slight drizzle, but spirits were high due to the consumption of large amounts of bananas with Nutella.



HMS Scylla.





The second wreck of the day was the **James Eagan Layne**, a liberty ship which was torpedoed in WW II, which was a lot more to my personal liking because it was completely covered in beautiful seaweed and kelp and anemones and dead men's fingers which look like they should glow in the dark. Another encounter with a curious Ballan wrasse completed a great dive. *[There was quite a bit of current flowing across the wreck on this occasion, but there was plenty of shelter inside the hull].*



James Eagan Layne.



Dinner was had in the Mount Batten Centre, where they served us lots of decent pub food for a very reasonable price. The rest of the evening was spent in the centre's bar (the 'Isobar', don't you just love nautical puns), discussing the Scylla vs. James Eagan Layne issue and Star Wars Lego computer games. Poor Lisa only managed to leave Cambridge late that evening so arrived at the Mount Batten Centre in the middle of the night to collect her keys from Ian who had kindly picked them up from her B&B nearby. *[It gave Ian's room-mates a bit of a fright to be woken by his phone at one o'clock in the morning, but he gave the poor caretaker a much bigger fright, whilst roaming the foyer in the dark].*

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### Day 3: Saturday 2nd July 2005

Another day, another fried breakfast. And the first of our two days on RIBs. Eight of us were on the Searcher while the twinset divers amongst us plus their buddies ended up on the Loyal Watcher *[Ian thinks you mean the Sea Horse - the Loyal Watcher is for 'proper' divers only - you have to be carrying at least five cylinders and six 'D' rings to be allowed on there :-)].* Well they missed out, at least all the female members of our party agreed our RIB was definitely the place to be! As one of us pointed out, 'anyone that can look that good in bright orange'... *[Although the other four 'techie' divers that they were sharing the boat with provided a small amount of ongoing entertainment with their kit configurations, high fall time, short dive times and high frequency of kit malfunctions/aborted dives etc].*

The first dive of the day saw us return to the **James Eagan Layne**. And as I had the good fortune of being buddied with Ian that day who knows the wreck inside out, I certainly had a great dive. This time I personally spent more time on the inside of the wreck, where a lot of the cargo was still present, ladders, lots of 'agricultural wheels' and really big cooking pots. And to my great delight, lots of big crabs and huge fish. The end of this dive was marked by my first ever attempt at gracefully re-entering a RIB from the water. I probably don't need to point out quite how miserably I failed at that, beached whale was definitely not far off the accurate mental image. And I broke all my sea shells too...

But despite the fact that it was rather ungraceful it did go pretty smoothly with everybody helping out getting all the kit in and out of the way as quickly as possible.

Lunch was had picnic style out the front of the Mount Batten Centre. Yes it involved lots of Nutella, great stuff.

By the time we set out for the afternoon dive the weather had decided to show off a bit, there was a noticeable increase in waves and still plenty of rain. The plan was to dive the Great Mewstone, but when we got there skipper Chris decided he wasn't happy to let us go down due to the large swell, which was a great shame but we sure had a wicked boat ride there! His girlfriend Sally was a little bit less pleased as without a drysuit she got rather soaked, but did see the funny side of it. The back-up option was to dive the area around the **Breakwater Fort** to the north of the breakwater. Not the most exciting of dives admittedly (some even described it as 'like Gildy') but I was entertained by Ian putting a poor unsuspecting starfish on his face and re-enacting the scene from Alien. He certainly worried the nearby techie divers... We did see lots of leopard spotted gobi, and some cool cone shell trails (and of course I collected some empty ones). And Ian got into a bit of a fight with a huge grumpy spider crab which made a swipe for his finger when he pointed it out to me, before the crab decided Ian was definitely too much for him and made a run for it.



Breakwater Fort.

*[As the boat returned to the pontoon, Lisa dropped her mask into the harbour in about 3 m of water. We were given permission to retrieve it, so long as the divers went in as a buddy pair, and a fully kitted diver was available as standby. Matt and David made the dive, whilst Lisa sat on the pontoon 'just-in-case' (with another mask). A vertical pontoon restraining pole provided a convenient reference for the descent and, and would have acted as the tie in-point for a search pattern - however the mask was sitting on the bottom not more than half a metre from the post in vis not dissimilar to that of the afternoon's 'proper' dive. David opted not to log it as his 400th dive].*

We crossed the harbour into Plymouth once again for dinner, and we decided on a nice Chinese restaurant where we all had the nicest food of the trip, and then on to the Admiral McBride. Some people now decided to go for a short walk in Plymouth, while most of us had a drink and then took the water taxi back to the Isobar. We were the only people there, and the limping bar lady was certainly less than pleased to see us, as she was busy watching 'Live8' in the lounge. But, as a very special favour she decided to serve us anyway, and we had lots of lovely chocomilk. Meanwhile, the people in the walking party went for a rather longer walk than intended, as they managed to cross a swing bridge which was subsequently shut for the night. Conversation in the Isobar quickly turned to the rather dashing skipper of the Searcher, the girls all agreed that was definitely the right RIB to be on, although Seth thought their skipper wasn't too bad either...

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## Day 4: Sunday 3rd July 2005

Some frantic packing this morning, but we managed to have our breakfast, get all our stuff in the van and check out before the first dive. The weather had certainly improved: beautiful sunshine and hardly any wind. And the first dive was quite a treat, we got to dive the wreck of the **Persier**. This was an especially exciting dive for me since it was the first dive I got to do without an instructor and at the same time it was the deepest dive I have ever done: 28 metres. *[Unfortunately, the skippers announced that the Eddystone was off, due to the risk of adverse weather on the return. They suggested the Persier as an alternative, the depth of which prompted a slight worry for those marshalling, although after consideration the David and Ian felt that the divers on their respective boats were sufficiently experienced for the dive.]* Stuart was my buddy for the day which I was particularly pleased about since I didn't need to worry about losing him, he's so visible! We had a great dive, the Persier turned out to be a stunning place. Most of the wreck was covered in beautiful pink sea fans, lots of multicoloured sea cucumbers and big fat sea urchins. Some of the others also spotted the resident conger eel, which I'm told was quite an experience.



Persier.



Another picnic-style lunch outside the Mount Batten centre, and then off for the last dive of the trip, **The Great Mewstone**. Finally a chance to see some dogfish? The skipper requested DSMBs up at all times so he could see where we got to, after which we made a free descent to the kelp forest below and headed NW, away from the actual Mewstone. We had a nice long shallow dive in a lovely area, which was also rather colourful due to the moderate depth and sunshine above. Stuart and I spotted several large starfish, some wrasses and a red-eyed velvet swimming crab, and came across Ian and Lisa who directed us towards a lobster pot with lobster. No dogfish though! We had an interesting moment while we were doing our 3m deco stop when a wave suddenly lifted the nearby Searcher right on top of my DSMB which then of course got tangled up, but all worked out fine and we had a great dive.

And after we'd safely collected everyone again, we got a nice surprise on the way home, the skipper spotted what he thought was a basking shark near the surface, but which turned out to be a huge ocean sunfish, which was very cool!

Back in the harbour we said goodbye to Chris and Sally, at which point the skipper said how nice it was to have had such a professional group aboard for the weekend, which we all felt rather chuffed about. We then moved all our stuff to the back of the dive centre and started the sizeable task of rinsing all our kit with fresh water. This of course resulted in a few water fights (which is a whole new experience in a drysuit) but overall things went pretty smoothly, and because it had turned so nice and sunny we even got a chance to dry our things to a reasonable level. Ian fetched the van, and despite having to move it several times to allow a group of rowers to stow their boat and oars we managed to load everything up and some of us even managed a quick shower. David and Ian went off to sort out the paperwork at the centre, at which point people started to leave, so many goodbyes were said.

Most people were starting to feel the effects of suddenly having spent a whole day in full sunshine (Ian's bright red hands were quite spectacular) so we were happy to just sit around in the shade until the remaining party finally set off on the return journey to Cambridge. Matt kept Ian company in the van, I joined Lisa in her car and Leigh and Mark went with David. We stopped for some Burger King near Bristol while discussing how well junk food can really fill you up when you're very hungry and reading the silly bits of writing on the coke cups. Then back onto the road. Time flies when you're chatting, so we soon arrived in Cambridge (well it was about midnight by then), unloaded the kit (which was thoroughly checked by David), and all returned to our respective beds where, for those of us that didn't pass out instantly, we could reflect on a really great trip.

*(Photos Copyright Stuart Moore 2005)*