



Pembrokeshire
July 15-28
2005



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Trip report by Dan Reynolds

The Team:

- Becky (Ross)
- Andy (Peel)
- Dan (Reynolds)
- James Donnelly (Marshal)
- Geoff Elliott
- Joakim Eriksson
- Mark Holmes
- Lisa Lim
- Rachael Macdonald
- Nim De Mendonca
- Andy Peel
- Andy Penfold
- Dan Reynolds
- Rich Van Der Hoff



Where:

- [St. Brides' Bay](#)
- [The Smalls](#)
- [Wreck of the Dakotian](#)
- [Skomer Island Marine Reserve](#)

Why:

- Because there's no sea in Cambridge!

Zoe had booked the trip some time back. I'd been in the area before, one time to collect stock for an aquarium (not from the nature reserve before you ask) so I knew there was plenty to see. Being a peninsula you have a good chance of decent conditions at least somewhere, especially with sheltered inlets like Milford Haven. For Andy, Becky and I planning a trip for the first time, it seemed like a good bet. In the end we were lucky - three days of fine weather and great diving.

How:

- Transport: Van hired from [AVA](#)
- Gas, accommodation and fried food: [West Wales Divers](#)
- Boat: MV Overdale, [Dive In 2 Pembrokeshire](#)

DAY 1: Friday 15th July

1. Getting there

Lots of people were already on holiday, in fact Nim, Geoff and Mark were already in Pembrokeshire, so we hired a big van to take down most of the kit in one go. James, Joakim and I collected the van in the morning and set off around lunchtime. We avoided the worst of the end of week traffic jams and made good time until the very end, when we had to find the centre! The roads around Little Haven were very narrow and steep, not the best place to drive a couple of tons of compressed gas, weightbelts etc. Nim and Geoff were waiting at the centre, having been on holiday for a few days previous. Becky unfortunately was unable to make it. I could tell you why but I would have to kill you. Anyway, on to the diving!

2. St. Brides Bay



Andy and Dan grinning at what is "in store".

St. Brides Bay is a small cove to the west of Little Haven. Joakim wanted a check dive with James, having not been in the water a while and wanted some practice with the club gear before jumping off a boat, having left his own suit and twin 4 litre tanks back in Sweden. I just wanted to maximise my dive-to-drive ratio for the trip!

James and Joakim went in first, and cruised around the reef while I followed on the rocks above. It was a lovely evening and there was still plenty of sunlight left, though not enough to use my flashless camera underwater. After they returned, James and I went back in with snorkels. It was warm even in a shorty, with great visibility and lots of big fish lurking about the colourful rocks and jellyfish in the open water.

Back at the centre, we messed around with kit and waited for everyone to turn up. Rich made it in next with Rachael, despite having broken some part of his car's steering. The club toolbox was produced but unfortunately the CUUEG wrenches were siezed up and proved inadequate for the task. Lisa arrived with the two Andys around midnight, having set off after a full day's work, and Mark met us the next morning.

DAY 2: Saturday 16th July

1. The Smalls

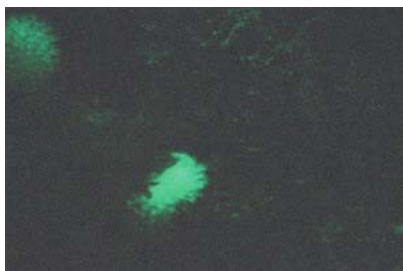
Things got off to a good start with a fry up. We drove down to Milford Haven following Andy, one of the crew of the boat. All was calm as we left port, with Andy giving very thorough instructions on the operation of the heads. Our destination, the Smalls, is a tiny rock 18 miles offshore, so there was plenty of time to get ready. The swell picked up as we got clear of the inlet, and our lack of sealegs began to show. This was made worse when we passed a few miles downwind of Grassholm and its gannet colony.

In some places, a volcanic island remains above the surface even when long dead, due to the action of corals, building up the island and depositing fresh material by their growth. Here, it seemed the same effect was being produced by a different substance. The island resembled one massive bird dropping, and we were glad when we were out of range. Personally I felt as sick as a dog, but as soon as I was in the water and breathing out of a can, it was fine.

Underwater, visibility was good, probably 10 metres or more. Skipper Bob dropped us some distance from the island itself, at a depth of just over 20 metres, and then worked our way inland towards the shallows. There were steep gullies of rocks encrusted with mussels and dead mens fingers. Joakim and I were a buddy pair. Before coming to Cambridge, Joakim used to study pycnogonids or sea spiders, strange creatures which contain most of their organs within their legs. He spent long hours underwater looking for them in the hope of finding some brooding eggs so that to study their development. Unfortunately in Sweden they were thin on the ground but here they were very numerous. Sounds like an excuse for a second visit! There were all kinds of creatures wandering about, fish and colourful flatworms. Joakim also found an enormous lobster claw discarded on the seabed. It was way too large to store in a pocket so I had to put it in my drysuit bag and tow it behind me.

Shortly after, we found some seals. The first one we saw was lying motionless on the bottom of a gully, like a big grey slug. We moved on, not wanting to disturb it, but it followed us wanting to play, and was soon joined by more. One of them came right up to me and chewed on my suit's shoulder valve while I gave it a stroke! I had never before met a seal underwater, and it was a total contrast to their appearance on shore, where they either seem fat and lazy or scared of people. Here they were in their element and felt safe enough to be curious and friendly, an amazing sight. Coming to the surface, we had to swim back to deep water to rejoin the boat, where I was persuaded to throw the lobster claw over the side on account of the smell, so its awesome dimensions are lost to history.

Anyway, as far as I know, everyone had a great dive there, although those wearing thin wetsuits got fairly cold. I recommend it as a dive and would certainly go back again. As it is so far offshore the water is extremely clear and there is a lot of life. The downside is the travel time, and the inaccessibility in bad weather. We had a very fine day, and there was still a fair bit of swell. You can read what West Wales Divers have to say about the place [here](#). Here are some pictures taken in the calmer, seal free, moments. I did them with a Kodak single use camera. These are waterproof way beyond the stated 10 metres, although as you can see lack of light becomes a problem around 20 metres, and go much deeper and you can't press the buttons, although they remain watertight at least to 30 metres.



Live man's fingers, holding a pycnogonid

Dead man's fingers.

Joakim on a safety stop. I hope his ego will not be stung if I say it is soft in the head to have such a shocking haircut

2. The Dakotian

Next dive was the wreck of the Dakotian in Milford Haven. This apparently sunk during the second world war with a cargo of tinplate and Christmas pudding, having hit a mine while trying to avoid being bombed. Divernet has a good description of the wreck [here](#), which is pretty much how I remember it, and West Wales Divers describe it [here](#). It is a very big wreck but the only recognisable structure I saw was the stern with the rudder, the rest is mostly a pile of slanting metal plates. Maximum depth for Joakim and I was 17 metres, and here were lots of fish lurking in the interior including some very large wrasse and some smaller ones that appeared to be cleaning them, and the usual pollack and suchlike. We also saw nudibranchs and lobsters, though none very big. Unfortunately there was a lot of sediment in the water and the visibility was rather poor. This caused some people to get separated in the confusion, and Nim also surfaced feeling disorientated, probably from ear trouble, and breathed oxygen on the way back just in case.

In Milford Haven there are a large number of oil tankers. Someone pointed out the fact that their lifeboats, rather than being hung from the sides like normal, are on a type of escape chute behind the cabin. This is so the crew could get out in seconds if the thing looked like blowing up! Getting back, we made the blunder of leaving all the gear on the boat, which then set off for its night moorings, losing the chance to dive at St Bride's Bay during the night. This was no loss to Rich, who had been struck by misfortune yet again with a flooded canister light. (I wonder, if I said what make, would they pay me to shut up?) On the upside, the club's only functional wrench turned up and he managed to fix his car. The sun was still out so we had a barbecue outside the centre. Andy Penfold taught people how to play Perudo, and later got some laughs with his PADI Encyclopedia of Diving. I also took the chance to walk round the headlands with some friends who happened to be in the area.



Coming back for the second dive: the wreck of the Dakotian in Milford Haven. From left to right: Mark, Rachael, Lisa and Andy.



A bit of the scenery. I have underwater pictures for this dive but they suck.



Chilling out between dives.



Not a boat to play chicken with.

DAY 3: Sunday 17th July

Skomer Island Marine Reserve

Another early start and fry up, and down to the boat. On the way down I was a passenger in Rich's mended car. Despite the repair we managed to overshoot a turning while following the van, coming to rest in the entrance to a farm. There was a hissing from behind so he stopped to check the cylinders were closed, and a car drew up and gave us a talking to for speeding! The boat ride out to Skomer was much calmer than yesterday's, and we did two dives in max. depth of around 16 metres. This time I was buddied with a guy called Trevor from outside the club. First dive I think was at the North Wall, but the pair of us somehow got lost and ended up in a large area of sand and gravel. There was plenty of life nonetheless, and occasional big Stonehenge-like rocks.

We basically took it easy chilled out in the sun and had our lunch while Andy (crew) had a dive. Second dive for us was an area called High Point. more scenic for me at least- the pink sea fan corals the island is famous for, black filter feeding sea cucumbers, hand sized hermit crabs and a sizeable dogfish. I only wish I could have stayed down longer... one day times may change...

What the centre has to say about the place is [here](#). We had to pack up and get back very quickly for my liking, but we'll be back.



A dogfish. I collided with this one because I was looking down the viewfinder



This is Trevor, my buddy that day, with a jellyfish



A full grown male spider crab. I am told these lazy beasts spend their lives in the comfort of the depths, while the females risk being washed up in order to spawn in the shallows

With thanks to:

- James Donnelly
- Geoff Elliott
- Joakim Eriksson
- Mark Holmes
- Lisa Lim
- Rachael Macdonald
- Nim De Mendonca
- Andy Peel
- Andy Penfold
- Rich Van Der Hoff



Going home, against my will.

What a place! What a team! What a trip!