



**Fun Days!
DIR-Fundamentals Course
Cambridge/Gildenburgh
21-23 October 2005**

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Trip Report by Mark Hallworth

GUE Instructor

- Richard Walker

Organization and Assistance:

- John Kendall
- David Martin

Students:

- Freija Glansdorp
 - Jen Sambrook
 - James Donnelly
 - Mark Hallworth
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Friday 21 October

Trying to find JK's house and Doing it Wrong already. Howard Road was evidently numbered using Lancelot and Set of Balls number 3, and is riddled with wormholes in the space/time continuum for good measure. Eventually found the fiendishly concealed entrance behind a skip and a motorbike. JK had graciously allowed us to invade his front room as the lecture base for the weekend, even though our intrusion would undoubtedly perturb the minimalist Feng Shui karma (- imagine a branch of Mike's, Maplins and MFI in one room with an untethered rhino).

The course instructor is **Richard Walker**, a BSAC Advanced Diver and GUE, TDI, IANTD & BSAC Instructor. Rich is an experienced Trimix and cave diver, with a relaxed, friendly manner that immediately makes us feel at ease. Introductions completed, we settle down for the first theory lesson, in which Rich begins by explaining the historical background and philosophy behind DIR and GUE, before outlining the purpose, structure and requirements of the [Fundamentals course](#).

"Fundies" is open to any OW diver, and is NOT a techie course. It is simply about becoming proficient in a basic set of skills applicable to any level of diving in any environment. The session ends with a comedy finning routine which involves lying face down across a chair and attempting to frog kick without incurring hernias or spinal damage. It was a relief to know the curtains were shut, although this relief was somewhat shortlived when it emerged a few days later that the whole sordid episode had been broadcast live by webcam.

Saturday 22 October

After a fairly faff-free foray to the kitstore, we're all barrelling down the A14 towards Peterborough in an environmentally-friendly 6 cars - 7 people kind of way. Dawn has revealed an overcast October sky, but it's mild and spirits are high. By 10am we're idly sipping Darjeeling as the cool blue lips of Gildenburgh's crystal water softly caress the verdant grassy shore. Dappled light dances playfully across the shimmering.....sorry. By 10am we've finished arguing with the air filling station, and have humped our kit into a square fortress formation around a patch of mud and goose guano.

Rich kicks off by appraising our harness and hose routings, resulting in a bout of D-ring repositioning, frenzied scissor action on hose sleeves and some valiant attempts to melt wet cave line. It emerges that my back-up hose is too long, and my crotch strap needs lengthening, but it's nothing that can't be remedied with amazingly cheap internet medication. I also reveal my ingenious and cunning strap-on pocket accessory for storing DSMB and spool – but more of that later.

Dive 1 (1258hrs) Max depth: 7.6m, Duration: 55mins

So, after a thorough briefing and a few dry runs, we kit up and slip gracefully into the inviting lagoon, as Jen/James and Freija/Mark buddy pairs. Alighting on the westernmost 6m platform, we are dumbfounded by the gin-clear visibility. Why, it must have been nothing less than a

full 2 metres! With nowhere to hide from the penetrating stare of David's video lens, we begin our routine of *S-drills* and *valve drills*, sure in the knowledge that, even with a 75% chance of not being in shot, David would unerringly capture that uncontrolled buoyancy/trim moment for posterity and latent ridicule.

Next up we experiment with different ways of thrashing our legs around in the hope of moving forwards without kicking up too much gloop. *Frog*, *modified frog* and *modified flutter* are all fine and noble fin kicks for energy-efficient propulsion, and turn out to be much easier to execute without the chair. Freija also explores the pros and cons of attempting this with a flooded mask.

An uneasy notion was dawning on me around about this time that my innovative pocket scheme for spool/blob stowage was not so much cunning as shit. Luckily for me, the slipped, rotated and part-tethered bag flapping wildly between my knees was kindly captured on video and later used in evidence. With the first dive done, it was back to Camp CUUEG for debrief, air and food fills. We also had the privilege of witnessing the spectacular launch of Gildy's latest underwater attraction.

Dive 2 (1544hrs) Max depth: 7.6m, Duration: 64mins

Same buddy pairs, same 6m platform, but now JK has taken over from David as videographer. We begin with further *S-* and *valve drills*, followed by a centre of gravity exercise to check out *trim control*. After that we try *backwards finning* and *helicopter turns*. Impressed by Freija's task loading attitude from Dive 1, I too try to do this while simultaneously and involuntarily flooding my mask. It doesn't work so well, and might be deemed by some to be doing it wrong. The session concludes with an en masse blob launch, which, to be fair, wasn't a resounding success, but at least we were all reassured that it was all on videotape.

With diving over by 5pm, it was time to pack up and head home. Delighted by the prospect of demonstrating our sporting prowess, we had agreed to stop off en route at St. Ivo Leisure Complex to conduct the compulsory course *swim test* (275m in under 14 minutes and a 15m breath hold swim). James took an intrepid route across the fens at the head of a 4-car convoy, which in true CUUEG style inevitably resulted in separation, confusion and many phone calls before we got to the pool. With the swimming successfully concluded, and feeling not in the slightest bit absolutely exhausted, we limped back to JK's for more lectures and a run through of the video footage. (During our swim test, John and David had gone ahead and organized tea, coffee, salad, garlic bread and pizza - which was a star effort and most welcome. Thanks guys!)

Apart from being painfully revealing, watching yourself diving on video is tremendously instructive, especially with Richard's expert critical assessment. Aside from the oft-repeated mantras (get your knees up Mark, just how much air is in that wing, James?), the analysis is fair, illuminating and constructive. It is not just about identifying faults, but thinking of practical solutions to rectify them and improve diving technique, which is, after all, what the course is all about. We finish up around 11pm, and after a quick kit switch at the store it's bed time.

Sunday 23 October

9:30am and we're back at Camp CUUEG on Gildy's sunny south shore. Rich gives us a briefing, and explains that today's dives will be conducted as a team rather than buddy pairs, which adds an interesting group dynamic element to our planning. Once again, David and John are sharing video and surface cover duties.

Dive 3 (1110hrs) Max depth:7.3m, Duration 57mins

After a controlled descent to 6m, we're straight into a routine to demonstrate the *5 basic skills* of reg removal, reg exchange, mask flood/clear, mask remove/replace and a modified S-drill, all whilst hovering just above the platform. This is followed by further *S-* and *valve drills* before we're told to fin off on a 6m contour anticlockwise around the lake. Having been forewarned that a *situation* may arise, it was now just a case of waiting. Sure enough, I was soon instructed to throw an *OOA*, which was promptly responded to by James. After a brief bumble (in the wrong direction!) an up signal was called, and Freija was delegated to *shoot a blob* since James and I were sharing air. Freija was somewhat startled to reel her deflated blob back down again a few minutes later, but I should emphasise that this was down to some surface shenanigans by Rich, and not through faulty deployment.

Dive 4 (1358hrs) Max depth: 7.3m, Duration 42mins

The dive after lunch followed a similar pattern of drills practice while fielding random curveballs. I got to deploy a blob, interrupted with an *OOA* between Freija and James. The exercise was cut before we ascended, meaning I had to restow my DSMB and spool - a feat not fully dealt with which resulted in the their subsequent stealthy theft by Rich later in the dive. We finished with a rather intimate team fin clockwise round a 6m contour until we ran under a platform, at which point another *deal with it OOA/blob* combo was introduced. By the time we'd blagged our way to the surface, it was dive over and time to pack up and rag it back to Cambridge. Sunday evening involved a bit more theory, a bit more pizza and a debrief using the video footage, concluding with individual assessments and grading of our performances. By 8:30pm we were out of the door, commiserating on the street with itinerant postmen and paper boys still trying to complete yesterday's round.

In summary, the course was intense and challenging, but fun, which is exactly what I hoped it would be. DIR is all about common sense kit, methods and practice designed to minimise f**k-ups and reach a level of competence to deal with them when they happen. I have a much clearer understanding now where that level lies, and what I need to practice and improve to reach it. As students, we ranged in experience from recently qualified SD to DL/OWI. None of us were perfect, and we made plenty of mistakes, but I'm sure we all learned a great deal from the weekend and came away as better, safer divers. Richard combined expert instruction with clear, uncomplicated advice, genuine helpfulness and is quite simply a nice guy. I hope the others will join me in thanking him. Many thanks also to John and David for all the

organisation, hospitality, surface cover, video, tea and pizza. A great weekend, and a thoroughly enjoyable and worthwhile course.