



Advanced/Combined Nitrox Course Capernwray September 9-10, 2006

or 'I think we've gone too far?'

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The Instructors:

- David Martin
- Matt Worsley (aspiring Nx Instructor)

Basic Nitrox trainees:

- Matt Watson
- Kat Clark
- Leigh Connor
- Karin Muller

Advanced/Combined Nitrox trainees:

- Jon Knight
- Stuart Moore

First things first: Steve and Kat deserve great thanks for putting up and feeding a horde of divers for an entire weekend. They'll be glad to have their house back. So, many thanks from CUJEG and many happy returns?(hihihi).

The Journey up

We had had a cunning plan: all our kit was laid out ready in the kitstore on Wednesday pub night to avoid any faff on Friday and assure a quick getaway from Cambridge; Leigh, Jon, Karin and Matt were to meet for loading at 4 pm sharp. However, circumstance prevented us from being effective - as usual. Leigh and Matt were both delayed at work and Karin had been parked in at her department, so they were all late. Loading was further hampered by parents picking up their kids from Perse School, jamming the whole area with large 4-wheel drives. The only person to be effective was Jon, who had packed his car Thursday evening and got off from work directly. David had opted to drive straight from London.

Before setting off, we agreed to meet up at a service station about halfway and 'Sandbach' was chosen from the map. Leigh and Jon arrived there first. Karin and Matt pulled into the service station, ended up in the bus car park, and after passing the petrol station realised it was impossible to loop back to the restaurant and car park. Initial temptation of reversing back was quickly stamped out by a highway patrol policeman who unmistakably told them that 'that-a-way!!!' was the only way they'd be going - pointing to the exit. So, north to the next exit, over the bridge, back to Sandbach on the wrong side and over the footbridge - ppphew!

Sandbach Services had been a bad choice - Wimpy. Even Matt's Trucker Size Mega Burger and milkshake turned out to be a sad affair. Fatefully, he decided to top it up with a Mega can of 'Relentless', some sort of high energy, high caffeine, high E-numbers, high in everything-that's-bad-for-you drink with gothic writing on it. So off we went, towards Preston - i.e. over the footbridge, south to the next exit, cross-over and then north?! The traffic had calmed down and we had a clear run. Matt and Karin started an animated conversation about swimming, so animated that they didn't realize they had overshot their exit by about 35 miles? Only when 'Windermere' was signposted, Karin started to think that something was wrong - 'Hey Matt, I think we've gone too far?'. So, again, out at the next exit, cross-over, and back south?! I blame the 'Relentless'.

Eventually, we arrived at Kat and Steve's, sat down to a much-needed beer, and a few (not so much needed) piss-take remarks. Sleeping arrangements were soon made with Matt Worsley, David and Stuart sleeping upstairs; Karin, Matt and Jon sleeping in the living room supervised by the cats and the intrepid Leigh 'Ray Mears' Connor had set up camp in the back garden, and was no doubt feverishly honing his 'bush craft' skills as the rest of us drifted off into the land of nod?

The Theory Course

Early the next day, we were all up for our 9 am lectures. Leigh, having failed to snare any wild animals (and thankfully sparing Kat's pet rabbits), decided to join us for a more conventional breakfast of cereal, toast and strong coffee. Saturday was 'Theory and Dry-run Day'. After having breakfast, lectures started at 9 am. David handed out all the BSAC student packs containing a theory booklet, Nitrox Decompression Tables and a Nitrox Card order form. Then, he and Matt were taking turns in explaining to us the benefits and dangers of diving with Nitrox,

filling cylinders with Nitrox, using equipment with Nitrox, dive planning with Nitrox, using Nitrox tables, oxygen whole body and CNS toxicity.

Halfway through, exhausted brains were perked up with delicious hot cheesy tid-bits and copious amounts of pizza prepared by Kat and Steve. The weather was so wonderful that a barbeque was planned for the evening. After lunch, Steve took his DL theory test, while the nitrox people were in for more lectures and for practical sessions, such as how to analyse cylinders and how to mark them properly. Then, Jon and Stuart had their dry-runs for how to switch from back gas to stage cylinders and the correct way of signalling and buddy checking that goes with it. In the meantime, Steve had been shopping and fired up the barbeque. Accelerating the barbeque using oxygen from cylinders was mentioned, but luckily not put into practise. While burgers, sausages and chicken drumsticks started to grill over the flames, all the nitrox trainees started to grill over the questions of their theory test.

Thirty minutes later, CUUEG could sport four brand-new Nitrox divers, who were instantly rewarded with delicious food. Later in the evening, Jon and Stuart received their last practical lesson in: 'how to blow off a cylinder without waking up the entire neighbourhood'. After a final few cans, everybody settled in for the night and an early start the next day.

Diving at Capernwray

The next day, the weather was again absolutely lovely. Kat had volunteered to be dive marshall for the day and to take care of lunch. Steve unfortunately couldn't come along diving, but had to go to work to supervise a window being set - or broken rather. 'They will break it. I know it! They always do.', he said. After breakfast, everybody was ready to head for our dive site. In order to avoid 'Matt Muppet' and 'Karin - I think we've gone too far - Muller' to end up at Loch Lomond rather than Capernwray, Matt Worsley had drawn them a rather sophisticated map - and it worked! Well, apart from them taking the wrong turn immediately after leaving Steve's cul-de-sac, missing Preston altogether, but somehow managing to find their way to the M6. To be fair, Matt's map didn't tell them the way to the M6?



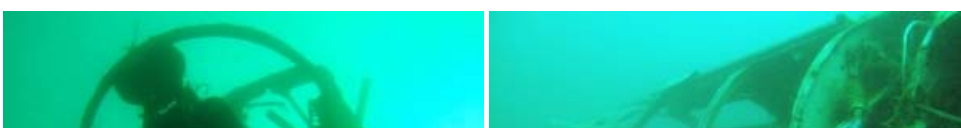
We arrived at Capernwray to a glorious and busy day. Capernwray is a flooded quarry somewhat elliptical in shape, surrounded by steep cliffs similar to Stoney Cove, with a maximum depth of 20m. Of course there also are the compulsory dive shop, a restaurant, and a gas filling station preparing Air, Nitrox and Trimix. Amongst the attractions of Capernwray are two helicopters, several boats, a small oil rig, numerous car wrecks, Blackpool pleasure beach horses Shergar and Lord Lucan, a Gnome Garden, perch and giant trout. We set up camp on the side on a nice little platform overlooking the jetty. Matt, Leigh and Karin were in for a couple of fun dives as a threesome?

Dive 1

Matt, Leigh and Karin did a surface swim to the blue buoy of the HMS Podsnap, a WWII minesweeper lying at about 18m. Matt was leading this dive and had various compass bearings written down on Leigh's wetnotes. After descending, we gave the boat a thorough inspection.



She is still in very good condition lying on her left side. Matt and Leigh entered the hold, but had to reverse out as the other openings proved to small to let them out (not surprising after last night's barbeque?). A bearing of 260o brought us to the Wessex Dragonfly helicopter, which is perched on a large metal container called 'The cave', because you can dive through it. On the other end of the container a small oilrig is mounted. The viz was about 10m, which certainly helped taking photos of it all.





The helicopter looked absolutely great perched on the container, rather than sitting on the bottom and sinking in the silt. Matt entered the cockpit doing a perfect hover - sigh. The next bearing of 2950 brought us to the 'Gypsy Moth', a look-alike of Sir Francis Chichester's yacht lying somewhat upside down at 17 m. On our way, we were escorted by small groups of perch.



The next bearing of 750 was to get us to the 'African Queen'. However, we had spent a little bit too much time on all the other objects of our dive and we were running out of time. We reached a small car wreck not marked on our map and Matt deployed his DSMB at the agreed time of 45 minutes. We did a Minimal Deco ascent of 1 min @ 12, 1min @ 9, 3 min @ 6 and 3 min @ 3m. While Matt and Leigh did a weight check, Karin got out, slipped on the gravel and gave an impromptu 'beetle-on-his-back' impression.



Lunchtime had arrived and due to Kat's good planning our lunch was infinitely more sophisticated than usual, lots of chicken drumsticks, sausages and delicious cakes. While chewing away, you inadvertently start to watch all the other divers around you. Right in front of us on a shallow gravel entry point, somebody performed rescue drills. Karin's attention was drawn to this by tremendous huffing-and-puffing audible from some distance. For some bizarre reason, a rescuer tried to beach his casualty while they were both still wearing their full kit. We wondered how long the casualty's arm sockets would hold up to this tugging and what the CPR procedure would look like with the casualty's spine being broken by lying across their cylinder. Thankfully, their instructor, who watched with some amusement for a while, prevented it from going that far. Soon, it was time to get back in.

Dive 2

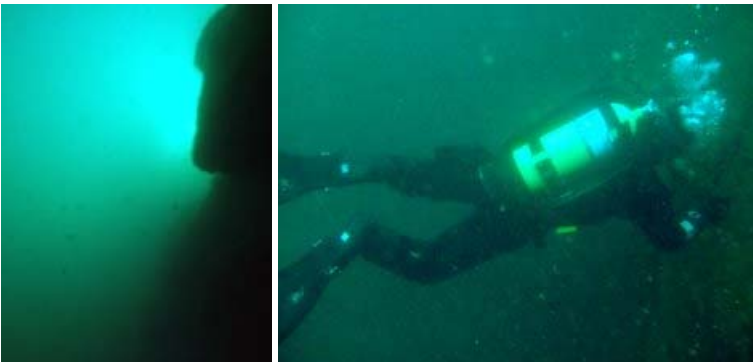
During lunchtime, we had noticed a pink buoy not marked on our map and wondered what was at the end of it. As we are called 'Underwater Exploration Group' after all, we decided to find out. After descending to about 12 m, we found 'The Answer'!



'The Answer' is a small pleasure boat, probably scuttled in Capernwray only a short while ago. It still contained a galley with cooker and sink. Leigh was posing on the bow, seductively leaning back and pretending to bask in the sun, while Matt was checking out the intestines of the boat. Before descending, Matt and Karin had taken a surface bearing towards the buoy of the 'African Queen' of about 2300. Miraculously, considering their appalling sense of direction on land?, they found the 'African Queen' without fail. As promised on Capernwray's website, this boat really does look remarkably like the vessel from the Humphrey Bogart movie.



From there we followed a depth contour at about 12 m along the quarry wall, which was supposed to bring us to Shergar and Lord Lucan. After passing several small car wrecks, we ascended on the quarry wall to a depth of about 6 m. Karin thought the wall was really great for perspective, looking up into the sun and looking down on Matt below her.



Once we had reached a plateau at 6m, no sign of the horses! However, we could just see the edge of the training platform on the right. This, together with the fact that Shergar is at 8m, told us that we had to look on our left. We followed the plateau, which was dutifully sloping down towards Shergar, who was somewhat concealed by a cloud of silt kicked up by the rodeo taking place there all day. Of course, Karin couldn't resist the temptation of riding him either and Leigh took photos.



When we approached the horse, Karin thought she'd noticed a somewhat embarrassed look on the horse's face. On more thorough inspection, she thought that this was due to the weird object dangling from the horse's rear. Matt, however, thought that Shergar didn't like being on her own and probably quite enjoyed having a moose dangling off her bum?





As we practically had already performed a 6m stop while playing with Shergar, Karin and Leigh both deployed their DSMBs and only held another stop, 3 min @ 3. We leisurely paddled back on the surface, Leigh and Matt performing yet another weight check.

While Matt, Leigh and Karin were enjoying the underwater attractions of Capernwray, Stuart and Jon were exposed to the infinitely more challenging drills of the Advanced/Combined Nitrox Course, going in together all bristling with back gas and stage cylinders?

Naturally, one of the most important things of any course is the briefing?



Here's Jon and Stuart, Matt and David talking about what they're going to do. A little while later, comes the kitting up.



Here's Matt trying to cool off while the trainees are still kitting up... Meanwhile, David is getting some of the stage cylinders ready. Finally, they are all ready and set to go down?



I can't tell you anything about what's happened down there. After all, I wasn't there?



Then, the second most important thing of a course is the debriefing?

By the time we all had surfaced from our last dive, it was 16.35 pm and we had to rush all the equipment back to our cars as the gates to the quarry close at 5 pm. Debriefing continued, first in the car park and then, just outside the car park, as Capernwray staff had escorted us out and closed the car park gates too. Then, David went straight back to London, while Matt gave Kat back a lift to Preston before enjoying dinner at his parents. (As Matt was looking forward to having all his four wisdom teeth out the following day, his Mum had probably foreseen the need for a good feed before the onset of 'it's got to fit through a straw' type of food.) Leigh, Matt, Karin and Jon prepared for their drive back to Cambridge. It had gone about 7 pm.

The journey back

Due to our Wimpy experience on the way up, we planned to meet at Keele service station sporting a KFC. On the way to the M6, Matt and Karin had yet another 'oops, I think we've gone too far experience', but found their way to the M6 south eventually. Immediately, we hit strong traffic and it seemed as if the entire south of England had spent their weekend in the Lakes. As we carried on, road signs informed us that the M6 would be closed entirely between junction 15/16, exactly at our planned stop of Keele services! Damn, we were cut off from the Colonel's tasty chicken thighs! Leigh, Jon and Karin and Matt chose to take different routes to circumvent the closure, none of which proved better than the other as the rest of the world tried to squeeze their way through the possible diversions. After suffering through a grid-locked Stoke-on-Trent, we decided to meet up at the very next service station after joining back on the M6, whatever it was. Leigh was ahead and gave it all a miss, going straight back to Cambridge. Maybe just as well: when we pulled into the services - yes, have a guess - it was Limpy Wimpy again - sigh. But we were hungry and not particularly choosy. After some chicken pieces, Karin's optimism had returned and she was sure we'd have a clear run to Cambridge now as the traffic was sure to have calmed down and it was already about 10 pm. Alas, the traffic was still strong and there were more roadworks squeezing the M6 from three lanes into one.

It was 11.30 pm by the time we reached Birmingham and 1 pm when we reached the kitstore. Kit was quickly signed back in and Jon headed back, looking dead on his feet. Karin gave Matt a lift back to his house. As Matt had moved house only very recently, it was only natural that he missed it? And with this, the last 'I think we've gone too far and have to turn around' manoeuvre for the day was performed.