



Pembrokeshire June 8 th – 10 th 2007

[Trip Report Index](#)

Organised by: Matt Watson

Trip report by: Ro Crawford (although mostly poached from Matt's dive log)

Video montage: John Kendall <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dIN4hzopW90>

The Important Info:

Diving, accommodation, and air all from Celtic Diving <http://www.celticdiving.co.uk/>

This is all a pretty good set up. You can stay in the dive centre lodge, get driven to and from the boat, and Tesco is just across the road for cheap food. The staff (we met Mark (our skipper), Mike, Cathy and Jimbo (the dog) are all really friendly and accommodating. It's all very easy and relaxed! (though arrange in advance if you want nitrox)

Sample costs:

- Accommodation: £18 pppn in the 4 person bunk rooms
- Hard boat charter (Wandrin' Star): £300 weekday, £348 weekend
- Amazing ice cream in the carpark: £1.70 1 scoop in a waffle cone

The Line Up

- Ian Gregory
- Matt Watson
- John Kendall
- Rachael MacDonald
- Louisa Whitlock
- Karin Muller
- Jon Knight
- Rowena Crawford
- Jen Sambrook
- David Martin

The Dives:

- Dinas Head/Newport Bay
- Gramsbergen (wreck)
- Reef off Strumble Head
- Dan Beard (wreck)
- Bola Bleiddyn
- Leysian (wreck)

Day 0: Thursday 7 th June

Various people left Cambridge at various times in the evening. For future reference: Fishguard is a LONG way from Cambridge (about 6hrs). Karin and I were the last to arrive (having gone via Mike's to collect oxygen), and pulled into the car park to find Jon high on energy drinks and sweets running around with a plastic flower! After bleary eyed greetings with the others we all just climbed into bunks and went to sleep.

Day 1: Friday 8 th June

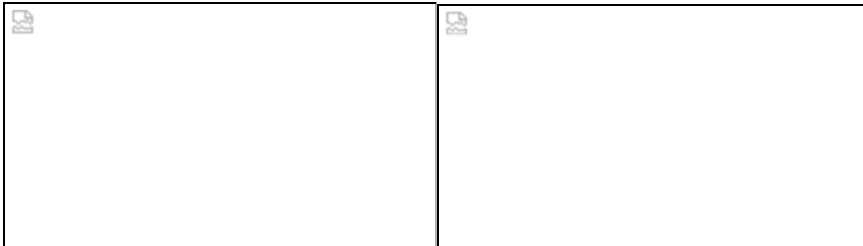
We woke up to the start of a marvellous day and after hauling each other out of bed headed across the road. The greasy spoon Matt had promised didn't seem to be open and he desperately questioned every local he could find as to why not. We trooped into the Tesco Express next door instead and bought ourselves lunch and by the time we emerged it was open so the demands for hearty cooked breakfasts were satisfied. (Although apparently the lack of HP branded brown sauce was a significant omission). After heading back to the lodge we had a quick briefing from the skipper Mark about the possible dive sites, and then set about the kitfaff. This was remarkably uneventful. We built our sets in the car park, analysed our gas, loaded everything we could possibly need into the minibus and trailer and then set off on the few minutes drive around the harbour to the boat.

Our hard boat Wandrin' Star was the size of a small aircraft carrier and although in true CUUEG style we tried our best to fill the space provided we still didn't entirely manage it. After everything was loaded we set off in glorious sunshine on a perfectly calm sea.

Dive 1 –Dinas Head (Newport Bay)

Matt's Dive Log:

"Just to get everyone warmed up, the first dive was a pick your depth reef dive just round the headland to the north of Goodwick harbour, rather than dropping straight into 25 m. After a leisurely steam round the headland, and an even more leisurely kit-up, we were ready to get in. Conditions were near perfect. Flat calm and 6-7 m visibility. We had been dropped on the shallow section of the reef and had been told to head North East down to the gravel sea bed at about 20 m. At about 6 m, we could already see the bottom, which was about 12 m. Well actually, we would have been able to see the bottom if it wasn't covered in spiny spider crabs. I saw more of them in 10 seconds on this dive than I have seen in all my other dives put together... Anyway, after the usual spider-crab-related shenanigans (namely, picking them up and attacking your buddy with them) and shooting a few minutes of spider crab porn featuring a couple of the more amorous specimens, the novelty wore off and we started to head down the reef. We saw a dogfish, which at the sight of us fled for its life, several edible and velvet swimming crabs, which I dutifully picked up and waved at Ro, and a few decent-sized wrasse. At about 20 m the bottom flattened out and there seemed to be less life, until with about a minute left before Ro launched her blob, we swam over a small patch of black brittle star. I had not seen any of these on a dive before, but sadly we didn't have time to hang about. Ro put up a blob and we made a steady ascent. Nice site, though I think they should rename it spider crab reef, as they had totally taken over in the shallows..."



Just a few spider crabs! An Octopus!!

Once everyone had emerged happy from a great first dive we steamed off to our second location, the wreck of the Gramsbergen. We all sat about the boat off-gassing, sunbathing and eating a leisurely lunch. Eventually people decided it might be an idea to go diving so gradually we kitted up and jumped off the side...

Dive 2 – wreck of the Gramsbergen

Matt's dive log:

"The Gramsbergen was a 498 ton coaster that sank in 1954 after breaking her anchor and drifting onto the rocks before her crew could restart the engines. She now lies well broken up on an 11 m seabed just off the cliffs at Penrhyn. We descended the shot and were rather surprised to meet John and Rachael (who had been one of the first pairs in) at the bottom. Interestingly the buoy was tied to a rather small piece of plating, rather than one of the bigger pieces of the wreck?! It transpired that John had headed off in completely the wrong direction, returned to the shot, lined-off and started a search for the rest of the wreckage. We, on the other hand, headed off on a North-Easterly bearing (as instructed by the skipper) and soon began to find some more significant bits of metal. The wreck was well broken, but not completely flattened, with some sections still standing 3-4m proud. The good visibility once again made navigation fairly easy (well, at least for most of the group), and we slowly picked our way around the wreckage poking our torches into many of the holes to see what was hiding. The wreck was teeming with life, We saw several large crabs, a few small shoals of bib and pollock hiding in the shelter of the wreck, a tompot blenny [yay! though the muppet forgot he had a camera in his pocket] and a dogfish. There were several large openings in the wreck, which I poked my head in, but resisted the temptation to attempt any swim-throughs. After about 50 minutes on the bottom we had worked our way almost back to where we had started and I put up a blob and we ascended."

After 2 fantastic dives we packed our kit away and headed back to the harbour. We took our cylinders ashore to get filled but left pretty much everything else on the boat which made everything very easy.

Back at the lodge we freshened up, watched some of JK's video footage and had a BBQ around the back of the lodge. Was good.

Jen arrived at about 11.30 but exciting tales of diving adventures had to be left until morning as certain room mates were trying to sleep. Instead we lay there listening to Karin's snoring which has an amazing 'ping' to it making her sound just like the sonar on a submarine ;-)

Day 2: Saturday 9 th June

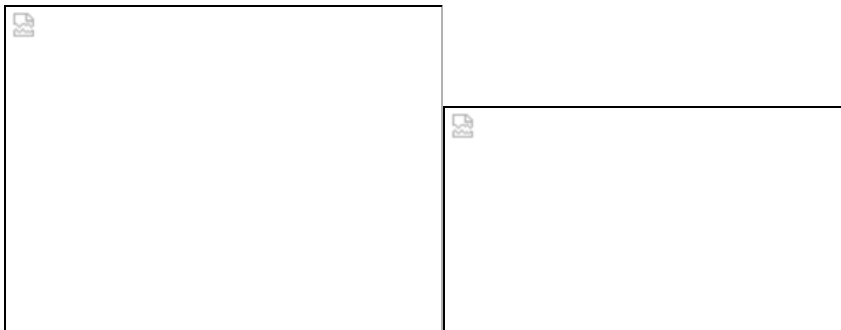
Another bright sunny morning, another Tesco shopping trip. Everyone passed up on a fry up and opted instead for the Tesco fresh baked goods, which were pretty good - more chocolate than croissant in their pain au chocolat J David also appeared to have arrived some time in the night and after breakfast busied himself kitfaffing in the car park, making holes in his new drysuit so his hands could come out of the sleeves (I've heard that can be useful). The rest of us sat about being relaxed while Ian flapped and berated everyone for being slow and unorganised. Eventually we set off, having loaded David's twinset, 2 boxes and 6 bags of random dive kit into the trailer. About a minute down the road... "I've forgotten my undersuit..." Ian!!!! This resulted in a lot of ridicule and a suitable amount of embarrassment. The offending undersuit was collected while we loaded the boat though so a major disaster (I was due to be his buddy for the day) was averted.

We steamed for an hour or so around to Strumble Head on another brilliantly calm sea. The first dive of the day was supposed to be on a wall above the wreck of the Calburga. Unfortunately, by the time we were kitted up a current had started to run across the wall so we opted for a change of plan and dived on a close-by reef just off Strumble head. There was a lot of sea mist which kept threatening to close in. Thankfully it cleared enough for us to dive, albeit towing SMBs.

Dive 1 – Reef off Strumble Head

Ian and I went down with Matt and David but deserted them when David seemed fine in his new suit. Moseyed off and dropped down into a deep gully and swam along at 25ish meters to do my depth progression. Ian 'found' a creme egg which was very exciting (although I hope it hadn't been in his drysuit pocket since Porthkerris!) We found quite a lot of life on our way up the reef: a scorpion fish (that I spent ages trying to convince Ian was not a rock!); a couple of common lobsters (that shoot backwards at the speed of light when they see Ian approaching) and loads of dogfish. I'm not entirely sure what it is about dogfish that gives Ian an almost primeval urge to hunt them, but it is quite amusing to watch him in stalking mode. He only managed to catch one though, probably due to the SMB he was towing impeding his progress. We also saw some comb jellies which I think are fantastic because the combs are iridescent and shimmer different colours. (The novelty of this may well wear off for more experienced divers but this was the first time I'd seen them).

Ian and I definitely had the best dive on this site. David and Matt saw "rock and seaweed and the occasional crab", and Jon and Louisa "had spent the entire dive finning like crazy to try and find 25m but to no avail".



Our little boat (in the mist) Dogfish

Again we steamed on in the sunshine and dropped anchor near the next dive site. After another leisurely lunch in the sunshine before going diving again just as the mist appears.

Dive 2 – wreck of the Dan Beard

"The Dan Beard was a US Liberty Ship launched on the 6th of June 1943 and whose namesake Daniel Carter Beard was a famous Illustrator and author, who was one of the founders of the Boy Scouts of America in 1910. The Ship was torpedoed by U-1202 on the 10th of December 1944. She now rests in the shallow waters of Pwll Deri Bay, off Strumble Head well broken up in about 10 m."

Again Ian and I had by far the best dive. We found loads of random wreckage to play with: anchor chains, jeep axels, blocks of wire, random metal plates etc. Ian found a metal pole and turned it upright and shimmied up it until it fell over. It was hilarious - imagine a cross between jumping around on a pogo stick and underwater pole dancing ;-). There was also wildlife to 'play with'. Ian tried to smash the brains of one crab out by dropping a big rock on its head (apparently he was stress testing its shell), and took another for a flying lesson humming star wars and pretending it was an x-wing. Went through a cool swim through (poor Ian had to go round with the blob) and through a wide channel. I saw a big metal wheel thing at the other end so shot off to investigate but turned to find Ian was still back down the channel trying to get the blob through so went back feeling sheepish and then proceeded when he was free again. We skirted around the bottom of the cliff and found the mast and bow winch leading into a big cave. Ian gave me some very 'interesting' hand gestures that apparently meant something about the mast going into the cave. We had a good explore around the cave. It was pretty big and the visibility was so perfect it

was as if there was no water there at all. After leaving the cave we found some shallow areas which had crystal clear water, green rocks and a massive shoal of little silver fish just under the surface. It was incredibly beautiful, corny though that sounds. Eventually we had to ascend which was a real shame because it was an absolutely fantastic dive. I did briefly contemplate not ascending but the whole not being able to breath underwater thing scuppered that plan. At least I had some more iridescent jellies to play with on the ascent.

When we were all back on the boat we headed back to the harbour and then back to the lodge. After freshening up we all settle down in the classroom area and JK gave us a talk on decompression and some better ways to plan deco stops and ascent rates. This was great until we realised we were so engrossed that it was now late and we hadn't even got the BBQ started yet... Not to worry, out came the oxygen cylinders! (This didn't actually do that much to help but it sounds exciting. Writing that we just sat around and waited for it to get going is somewhat less inspiring). Mark, Cathy and Mike came and joined our party when they got back from their meal out and there was much negotiation over the dive sites for tomorrow. We had met some divers who found a new wreck in 28m and some people wanted to dive that while others wanted to dive a more well known site. Finally we settled on diving some more established sites for which the tides were better known.

Day 3: Sunday 10 th June

Another morning, another breakfast, another boat ride on a sea practically made of glass...

Dive 1: Bola Bleiddyn

Matt's dive log:

"The Sea mist was playing games with us again today as we steamed towards today's first dive site, Bola Bleiddyn a reef just outside Abercastle bay, but fortunately it had cleared by the time we arrived. The plan was to drop us in deeper water just up-current of the reef, so people could get another 25 m box ticked. Jon and myself were the first off the boat and made a fairly hasty descent before the current had a chance to push us into shallower waters. We stopped a couple of meters clear of the bottom at 25 m for Jon to have a mini celebration, having finally logged a 25 m dive on the trip... We then descended to exactly 26.4 m (reed it and weep Jen) before heading off in search of the reef. The current was not quite running in the direction of the reef, so we started swimming across the it on the bearing the skipper had given us, but to no avail. Unlike many pairs we did manage to see the reef as the current swept us past it. After a couple of minutes trying to fin against the current, we binned the idea of a dive on the reef, I popped up blob, and we settled for a deep drift dive. As it turns out, luck was with us, this was by a long stretch the best drift dive I have ever done, possibly even a contender for best dive... The bottom was gravel and ranged between 19-27 m and there was tons of life, we saw several large edible crabs, three common octopuses, a huge crayfish and a couple of dogfish. Just to top it all off, approaching the end of the dive we drifted over a huge bed of white brittle stars. They covered everything as far as the eye could see and were packed together with their tentacles raised (presumably feeding?). After about 32 minutes, Jon had reached minimum gas and we ascended. This was a brilliant dive, probably infinitely better than the reef we were supposed to end up on. It transpired that none of the other pairs managed to make it onto the reef, but sadly no-one seemed to have been blessed with the same luck as us having had rather uneventful dives. Although we had a fantastic dive, I probably wouldn't recommend deliberately doing a drift at this site, as I think our dive was the exception rather than the rule."

Another lunch, a bit more sunbathing...

Dive 2: wreck of the Leysian

Matt's Dive log:

"For the second dive of the day we had a relatively short steam to the Wreck of the Leysian, which lies well broken up on a 10-15 m seabed in Abercastle Bay. Currents on the wreck are always weak meaning it is divisible at pretty much any state of the tide, but does tend to collect silt. We swam to the buoy and descended. The buoy had been tied to the prop shaft which was about 25-30 m long and raised about 2 m clear of the seabed. The visibility was again good (in the region of 5-7m) hence navigation was fairly straight forward, using the prop shaft to orient yourself with respect to the rest of the wreck. For the most part the wreck was a bit more flattened than the Gramsbergen, but there was a lot more of it. After a good rummaging around we spotted a couple of large Rock cook and bumped into David/Rowena and Rachael/John who for a change tried to dismantle Jon's Apex WTX wing rather than my kit. We then followed the prop shaft to a fairly intact section of the stern, which stood about 4 m proud and you could easily swim into. As we left the stern section we saw Jen and Louisa and set out to ambush them. After messing about with them for a while we decided to ditch the main section of the wreck and go explore the surrounding area, We found a couple of blennies, another large rock cook and some bib and spotted a large section of plating sat across a gully that looked like it made a good swim through. Jon went in and I followed him above trying to drop spider crabs onto his head through the many holes in the plating. By now we were getting a bit low on gas having been between 10 and 15 m for about an hour, so decided to swim back in the direction of the buoy for a few minutes and ascend. Another nice and easy shallow wreck dive in good visibility with plenty to see – nice dive to round off an excellent long weekend."

[Plus there were some big blue jellyfish, although with several metre long tentacles I really wouldn't get to close to these unless you can definitely back-fin!]

The boat set off back to Fishguard and we tried to enjoy a last spot of sunbathing although it was already late afternoon and the drivers were starting to think about the rather daunting drive back to Cambridge/London. Thankfully we managed to avoid the hassels of kit wash after much pleading and begging (quite of whom I'm not actually sure!) and promises that we would clean it all promptly on our return to Cambridge. We still found time for a shower and ice cream in the car park though J

All in all this was a fantastic trip. The weather was amazing, the dive centre was organised and above all relaxed, and the diving was easy but interesting and fun. Despite the long drive from Cambridge I think this is certainly somewhere CUUEG will return to.

The lucky B*ard award?**

This will have to go to Jon Knight (again!) who dropped part of the gas analyser 10m off the harbour wall, only to have it bounce off the steps half way down and into the boat where it was hastily snatched up by JK.

Runner up is David, whose fast reflexes rescued his big and very expensive camera from its short flying lesson.