



**Swanage**  
**July 7<sup>th</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup> 2007**

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Trip organised by Matt Watson and Rowena Crawford

Trip report by Matt Watson

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## **The Divers:**

- Leigh Connor (SD)
- Ro Crawford (SD)
- Jon Knight (SD)
- Rachael Macdonald (SD)
- David Martin (AD)
- Stuart Moore (SD)
- Karin Muller (SD)
- Matt Watson (SD)
- Matt Worsley (DL)
- Jen Sambrook (SD)

## **Accommodation:**

[Taunton House](#) (2 x Twin Room @ £35 pppn) Nicer, closer to the centre of town and en suite, but you pay a bit more.

Address: 4 Taunton House, Taunton Road, Swanage, Dorset

Tel: Day 01929 422413

Tel: Evening 01929 425220

[Beachway](#) (2 x Single Room and 2 x Twin Room) at £20-£26 pppn.

Address: 19 Ulwell Road, Swanage, Dorset

Tel: 01929 423077

## **The dives:**

Diving and gas was [Divers Down](#) on the pier. We were diving both days from their new Blyth Catamaran, Smooth Hound.

Address: Divers Down, The Pier, High Street, Swanage, Dorset, BH19 2AR

Tel: 01929 423565 (Diving Season) or 01929 423551 (November - March)

- Dive 1: Sat 15:20 [Kyarra shuttle](#) (max depth 30 m)
- Dive 2: Sun 09:30 [Aeolian Sky](#) (max depth 30 m)
- Dive 3: Sun 14:30 [Black Hawk](#) (max depth 20m)

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## **Getting to Swanage**

We all met nice and early at the kit-store at 8am on Saturday morning. Despite most of us having already packed our kit the night before, we still managed to faff for about an hour, delaying our departure until 9 am. A quick call to Divers Down lifted spirits "The sun is shining, the wind has dropped and the swell is starting to die down. Should be a good weekend for diving..." After one of the wettest Junes on record it was nice to know that the weather was on CUUEG's side. Sadly, the traffic wasn't (It just wouldn't be CUUEG now would it, if everything ran smoothly) even Jon Knight was forced to drive within the speed limit for almost the entire length of the M3 and M27...

Luckily we arrived in Swanage in time to get nitrox fills before our shuttle out to the Kyarra, and after half an hour of 10 divers running around like head-less chickens on speed, we assembled on the pier to analyse our gas and load up the boat. David was already on the boat and from what I could hear from the conversation with Matt Wo (we really need to do something about the number of Matts in the club) was devising a fiendishly complicated way of optimising the buddy pairings for the dive. As we loaded our kit onto the boat, we couldn't help but

notice we had gained a Diver (Mark, a PADI AOW diver). Mark didn't seem too keen on the Skipper's suggestion that he would have to dive solo (and nor were we) so David's well-laid plans were scrapped and, with the boat ready to leave David had to arrange buddy pairs "on-the-fly" (a bit like deco "on-the-fly", but best done before you get into the water).

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## The Kyarra

After a rather bouncy 20-minute ride out to the Kyarra, in which several people learned the benefit of kitting up before you get onto the boat, as Smooth Hound cut through the swell at full tilt, sending spray several feet above the deck, leaving those not yet zipped into their dry-suits soaked and David and Karin looking rather pale, as they clung onto the boat (and possibly breakfast) for dear life. When we got to the site there were already a couple of boats there (the Kyarra really is the main-stay of Swanage-based diving). Rather than everybody fighting to get there divers onto the shot first, I couldn't help but notice the unspoken hierarchy that falls into place at times like this. Luckily, we were on the biggest boat (nuff said).

I was buddied with our new compadre for the trip, Mark, after a rather-more-thorough-than-usual buddy check, in order to highlight the differences in kit configuration, we were ready to get in. We met Ro and Jen at the buoy, clinging to the rope trying (rather unsuccessfully, given the current and swell) to catch their breath. With yet more divers bearing down on us Mark and myself decided this was a bad idea and as soon as Ro and Jen had left the surface we headed straight down the shot. The couple of inspiration divers following us had a similar idea, but sadly for us seemed to have left common courtesy on the boat and by about 6 m had caught up with us and proceeded to climb over as if we weren't there kicking us several times in the process, while my buddy stopped to signal that he was having ear trouble (I'm not sure what's more dangerous, the yellow boxes themselves or the w\*nkners that were wearing them - end of rant).

Down on the wreck the vis. was pretty good and the current had died right down. The Kyarra is a big wreck, although much of it (or at least the tiny bit of it we managed to see with our 20 minute bottom time) has collapsed and is broken up, but the wreck still stands about 7 meters proud. The shot was tied in at about 25 m to the upper port side railings. We dropped of the shot before this and worked our way down the hull to the seabed at 30 m. there were some fairly substantial holes in the hull with lots of bib hiding in the gloom. I gave Mark my back-up torch so we could have a poke around as we worked our way round to a section where the wreck was more flattened finding lots of bib, tompot blennies, and a huge conger eel... We then swam over towards the holds there were lots of openings in the wreck - we did a couple of easy swim-throughs but nothing too adventurous, before heading up the shallower sections where I launched a blob and we made our ascent. The Kyarra was a nice dive, we only managed to cover a fraction of the wreck on this visit, but hopefully I'll get to explore a bit more thoroughly on my next visit. Most people had a pretty good dive at this site, apart from Leigh and Karin, who had a 20 minute dive on HMS seabed, after coming off the shot and missing the wreck.

Back at the pier we packed our kit away and put our cylinders in for filling, then headed off to our respective B&Bs. David, Jon, Leigh and Matt were stopping in the more expensive, but much more conveniently located Taunton House, while the impecunious and cheapskates had a 20-minute trek along the seafront to The Beachway Hotel.

After a quick shower we headed off to the Red Lion, our now regular haunt in Swanage, for a few Zooglegooglegoogles and a nice meal. Despite the cider being strong, everyone stayed relatively sober, and by about 10:30pm most people had voted for a walk along the beach as opposed to getting a couple more in before they called time. The sea air mixed with the alcohol did lead to some silliness, like pretending to throw Rowena in the sea, pushing people off the promenade onto the beach and trying to move a pile of sun loungers, while Jon was laid on top of them. Most people had headed back by now leaving David, Rachael, Rowena and myself to have a rather surreal and somewhat inappropriate conversation about 16- or 84-year olds while watching a group of scantily clad, barely legal "ladies of the night" (this should get the club website a few more hits on google...) chugging alcopops in a bus shelter, while a group of testosterone fuelled boys, attempted to win their affections by speeding up and down and popping wheelies on their scooters... Eventually the novelty wore off and Rowena remembered that Jon had sent her a message to tell David that he was locked out and needed the Key about 15 minutes earlier so if was off to bed for everyone...

Next morning, I jumped out of bed bright and early, excited about the prospect of today's first dive on the Aeolian Sky. I unfurled the curtains and was greeted by a cloud-less sky and flat calm sea... Perfect conditions for a day's diving. Next on the agenda: breakfast. A calm sea-state does wonders for the appetite and the copious quantities of fried food and toast provided by Helen were quickly dispatched. Then after paying up it was off to the pier to meet the rest of the group.

At the pier, kitting up was fairly efficient, by CUUEG standards, the limiting factor being the filling station who were still struggling to finish our nitrox fills from the previous evenings... The guy looked cool as a cucumber (Incidentally, according to my ex-housemate Nicki, this expression comes from the fact that the temperature inside a cucumber is approximately 4 degrees celcius below ambient. Sadly, she lived in a house full of scientists, and has never quite managed to live this one down...) as he finished air topping the last cylinder with about 30 seconds to spare, Phew!

The trip out to the Sky was about an hour, leaving us time to lounge around in the sun on the spacious deck. We arrived at the site and the skipper put in the shot while we kitted up and waited for slack. Again there were a couple of other boats on the site: Out Rage from Weymouth and a Small RHIB, showing the popularity of this site. I was diving with Rowena and Matt Worsley to do my (official) 30 m depth progression.

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## The Aeolian Sky

It was hard work getting down the shot with the current still running and we were glad to drop into the shelter of the wreck at 27 m. The first thing you notice (or rather don't until you start to swim around) is the sheer size of the wreck (nearly 11,000 tons of her to be precise). It was quite difficult to work out exactly where we were at first. Fortunately the skipper had told us that he had shotted the wreck amidships just to the south of the bridge and crew accommodation, so we started to pick our way around the wreck in a generally northerly direction. There were shoals of bib and pollock everywhere and plenty of nice swim-throughs amongst the mangled metal, which stood a good 10 m proud of the seabed in places. After about 15 minutes we started to head back south along the hull, gradually working our way shallower, Rowena spotted a tompot blenny and we had a long and rather tight swim-through (Matt Worsley taking some of the wreck with him on the final squeeze to get out). At 25 minutes it seemed a bit of a shame to be leaving the wreck with 140 bar left, but as they say: plan the dive and dive the plan (I can't believe I've just typed that, ugh...). I led the ascent and deployed a blob at the 15 m stop. This was a brilliant site and it will take a good many more dives to explore fully this huge (so big in fact that even Karin and Leigh managed to find it ;o)) wreck. Almost everyone had a good dive. Even David admitted it had been a good dive until a couple of minutes before the ascent, he back-finned into a sharp overhanging bit of wreckage and put a hole in his drysuit...

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## **Black Hawk**

After a nice relaxed lunch in the sun we headed over to our second site, which was to be the bow section of the Black Hawk. The Black Hawk was a US liberty ship that was torpedoed. The stern section sunk in deeper water but the bow section stayed afloat and was towed towards the shore and eventually sand in 18-20 m. The wreck was cleared by explosives as it represented a hazard to shipping, and was later blown up again when an outlet pipe was routed through the site, so as you can guess the wreck is pretty broken up...

I was diving with Leigh and Rowena. Leigh was leading, and true to form, we missed the wreck (Never mind Leigh, one out of three ain't too bad)... To be fair, so did everybody else, and even those who got to the wreck didn't manage to stay on it with the current running across the site and settled for a drift. We did see several bits of wreckage, lots of shells (both the sort that you put in guns and the sort that you find scallops in) and a large edible crab. There was however a distinct lack of fish on this dive. Leigh apparently saw a large thornback ray at one point, but Rowena and myself missed it. The bottom was mostly sandy and criss-crossed with furrows. I'm not sure whether these were left by scallop dredging or just the action of the current. Anyway, with not much in the way of wreck or scenery we decided on a scallop hunt. One would almost think that scallops had evolved specifically to make themselves easier for divers to catch... Once disturbed, they clap their shells together repeatedly and swim up a foot or so off the bottom - just about the right height for you to grab them as you drift over the bottom. Sadly none of us had brought a goodie bag, but we still managed to fit a few in our pockets. After about 30 minutes Leigh had reached minimum gas, I put up a blob and we ascended with Rowena swimming in circles around us at the 6 m stop?!

Back on the boat, it looked like everyone had a good dive, with scallops a-plenty sat in bucket on the deck. Jen had already started to prise them open and was busy stifling her face, with Rachael looking on rather horrified. We with no real rush to get home and the sun still shining the skipper took us on a scenic costal tour along the lovely Jurassic limestone coast. Back in Swanage we quickly washed the kit and packed up the cars for the drive back home, with the exception of Jon and Jen who disappeared off to an Oyster bar further along the seafront Grrrr...