



The Farne Islands September 8th - 9th 2007

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Trip organised by Edvin Deadman

Trip report by Mark Hallworth

The Divers:

- Chris Coomber
- Rowena Crawford
- Edvin Deadman
- Mark Hallworth
- Jon Knight
- Karin Müller
- Jen Sambrook
- Michael Thorn

The Boat: Glad Tidings VII

Skipper: William Shiel (01665 721297)

Accommodation: The Lodge, 146 Main Street, Seahouses NE68 7UA (01665 720158)

Air: Sovereign Diving, Seahouses Industrial Estate (01665 720059)

Friday 7 September.

2:15pm. Edvin, Karin and Mark meet at the kit store.

Ergonomic kit management has never been a particular forté within CUUEG, and without the help of Matt's ruthless efficiency, the whole protracted loading process dragged on for a full ten minutes before we finally set off. Since my car was sadly devoid of SatNav, the complex route had been committed to memory the night before (A1 then turn right), and somehow we made it to Seahouses and were checking in to the B&B by 8pm.

The Lodge has a fine and noble tradition as a dive base, with a small, cosy bar adorned with all manner of diving pictures, artefacts, wreckage, monster lobster claws etc. We were somewhat dismayed therefore to discover that the whole place had been gutted and refurbished in a stark, clinical style more reminiscent of a trendy dentist's waiting room. As if in anticipation of our disappointment though, the good people of Seahouses had organised a special welcome party for us, complete with cold buffet and raucous, blaring disco. Overwhelmed by their hospitality, we settled in at a quiet table outside to await the others. Jon and Ro arrived shortly after 10pm, and Jen, Mike and Chris happened on us about an hour later, having somehow failed to home in on the reverberating beat and dazzling light show.

Quite by chance, almost all the locals at our party were either related to, or good friends of, a girl celebrating her 18th birthday, and it seemed churlish not to let them join in our fun. Jon took great delight in chatting to a shy, demure Northumberland rose who had taken quite a fancy to his dreads. Tragically, we had an early start in the morning, so after a swift half, it was straight to bed for a jolly good nights sleep, and absolutely no doughnuts whatsoever.

Saturday 8 September.

6:30am. Edvin and I bound onto our patio as the golden sun climbed steadily in the azure sky. Jon, Chris and Mike were briskly towelling off after their early morning jog and swim, while Ro, Jen and Karin tucked into a hearty cooked breakfast. Time seemed to drag agonisingly slowly as we waited for 7:30am to come round, when we could set off for the harbour. (I may well be making some of this up..)

Our trusty boat, Glad Tidings VII, was due to set sail at 8:45am, so we settled into a leisurely kit-assembling routine on the harbour wall, and methodically stowed our minimal baggage on board the spacious deck, along with a mere 13 other divers from Dunstable and a bloke who was rather too familiar with seals for my liking. Somehow we managed to slip out of the harbour without grounding, and were soon charging

across the high seas bound for the Farne Islands, which are situated between 1 and 4 miles off the coast. The islands are split into roughly two main groups – the Inner and Outer Farnes – and consist of 33 islands or rocks at low water. They are composed of fine-grained basalt, and form an offshore extension of the Whin Sill, emplaced during a single phase of tholeiitic magmatism dated at 301Ma, near the Permian-Carboniferous boundary.....oh.... sorry.

Our skipper, William Shiel, is a well-known and experienced dive boat operator. All decisions of when and where to dive were left to his considerable local knowledge and judgement of the prevailing conditions, which were pleasantly benign. He gave ample warning of when to kit up, and provided clear and detailed briefings of the dive sites, the routes to follow and the likely conditions. With depths averaging around the 15m mark, all the dives were comfortably managed in terms of air and deco requirements within the 45 to 50 min dive times he imposed. His first choice of dive site took us to the E end of the Outer Farnes, at a locality called the Longstone.

Dive 1: (0920hrs) Longstone

Buddy pair	Max depth	Duration
Mark/Chris	18.0m	42mins
Karin/Edvin	19.8m	44mins
Jen/Rowena	20.0m	45mins
Jon/Mike	19.9m	42mins

The plan was to descend and follow a NW route keeping a steep wall on our left hand side. Chris and I worked our way down to 18m, spotting a few nice lobsters, along with the usual suspects of velvet swimming crabs, ballan wrasse, carpets of urchins and deadmen's fingers etc, but completely failed to see the colossal propeller witnessed by everyone else. Perhaps this was due to our dive being utterly ruined by the persistent and annoying attention of a playful young seal who simply refused to let us concentrate on the bare rock face. Chris's fins had evidently been manufactured from vulcanised sardine meat, and their ever-reducing length threatened to force the call to bag off long before air or deco constraints. At the surface, we had the pleasure of bobbing around for ages waiting to be picked up, after Edvin's considerable bulk had proved too much for the welding of the tail lift.

Finally back on board, seal stories were excitedly exchanged as we pootled round to Little Harcar for lunch. In an adventurous departure from CUUEG tradition, lunch consisted of bread, Nutella, ham, cheese, Nutella, bananas, Nutella and cake, although there was some concern about the mysterious disappearance of some doughnuts. Several members of our party followed this with some serious surface snorkel seal action, which by all accounts was truly awesome.



The big propeller off Longstone, and Rowena and Jen discussing their dive while Chris phones for new fins.

Dive 2: (1215hrs) Crumstone

Buddy pair	Max depth	Duration
Mark/Chris	14.6m	44mins
Karin/Edvin	15.2m	41mins
Jen/Rowena	14.7m	48mins
Jon/Mike	15.5m	39mins

Crumstone is an isolated outcrop at the most easterly point of the Outer Farnes, and is a well-known haven for seals, in addition to hosting the rusting remains of several ships whose captains had flunked navigation school. We dropped in at the E end to 15m, and followed a NW route with a wall to our right, shortly coming to a sand-floored gully buzzing with seals. Struggling to contend with an increasing current, we gave up and went with the flow, ending up on an 8m kelp-covered reef with sporadic bits of wreckage in gullies, and enjoyed numerous and frequent encounters with the cheeky little sea-puppies. A memorable dive enjoyed by all!

With the diving done ridiculously early, we carefully stowed our kit in the hold and headed back to harbour. Following a minimal faff with the cylinder run round to the filling station at Sovereign, we found ourselves with almost the whole afternoon free to chill out, before meeting up at 7pm for a fish and chip supper at Neptune's. By the time we'd finished demolishing the cod/pollack/haddock or whatever, the Crazy Golf course had shut and we were forced to retire back to the Lodge for some pool and a few beers, most of which Ro tried to smuggle home in her jeans.



Seals!

Sunday 9 September.

After a full-on breakfast with delicious, freshly-squeezed orange juice, it was back on board Glad Tidings VII and off to the islands again, riding through a calm, low swell under an overcast sky. Our first site was the Knivestone, the most northerly rock of the Outer Farnes.

Dive 3: (1000hrs) Knivestone

Buddy pair	Max depth	Duration
Mark/Chris	15.8m	48mins
Karin/Jen	15.8m	52mins
Edvin/Ro	15.9m	49mins
Jon/Mike	15.7m	43mins

On a rising tide, we were dropped just N of a narrow channel and descended to about 3m to follow a kelp-covered gully in a southerly direction. The gully hosted several seals, and contained an enormous anchor chain, before opening out into a rock-strewn slope that led down to the scattered wreckage of the Abyssinia at 15m. Her two boilers stand 3m off the floor, and are surrounded by a large debris field of plates and random metalwork. Chris and I had a bit of a hand-feeding session involving several large wrasse and an unlucky urchin, and came across one or two decent-sized lobsters. As usual, we had to bat away those pesky seals who would insist on spoiling our dive with their unwelcome inquisitiveness.

Lunch was more cake than sandwich, since our foodbag had not fared too well overnight in the steamy confines of the hold, but was sufficient to fortify us for our next dive at Blue Caps.

Dive 4: (1200hrs) Blue Caps

Buddy pair	Max depth	Duration
Mark/Chris	17.0m	44mins
Karin/Jen	16.1m	50mins
Edvin/Ro	17.0m	51mins
Jon/Mike	17.8m	46mins

To be honest, I'm blessed if I can remember much about this dive. I have a sneaking suspicion it involved seals, lobsters, seals and some more seals, but it's all a bit blurred now. Anyhow, we finished the diving on a high note and headed back to harbour against a freshening wind feeling jolly chuffed with ourselves.

After a fairly efficient kit-washing session, it was still only 2:30pm, and plenty time enough for an ice cream in town before starting the 5 hour trip back to Cambridge. On our way out of Seahouses, I seem to recall seeing a giant flying lobster fighting a panda in mid-air, but perhaps that was just me...

On the whole, it was a brilliant trip, and a special experience to dive with seals in such close proximity.....they really are great fun! Many thanks to Edvin for all the organisation, and to everyone involved for making it so enjoyable.

