



Farne Islands

19th - 20th September 2008

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Trip organised by Liz Inns
Trip report by Wiki Power

The Divers

- Joanna Argasinska (OD)
- Rowena Crawford (SD)
- Matt Forrest (SD)
- Liz Inns (OD)
- Jon Knight (SD)
- Lara Moss (SD)
- Karin Muller (SD)
- Jon Nobes (OD)
- Simon Parsons (DM)
- Bryony Robinson (OD)
- Georgina Stooke-Vaughan (SD)
- Matt Watson (DL)

The Diving

Glad Tidings, William Shiel.

William Shiel, 40 North Lane, Seahouses, Northumberland, NE68 7UQ, Tel: 01665 721297

Email: DIVER@FARNE-ISLANDS.COM

<http://www.farne-islands.com/diving/index.htm>

The 'Glad Tidings' fleet consists of 7 boats two of which have dive lifts. Diving costs £30 per diver per day

Our skipper for Saturday's diving was Craig and our skipper for Sunday's diving was William Shiel

Accommodation:

The Tackroom Bunkhouse, Annstead Farm.

Mrs Susan Mellor

Annstead Farm

Beadnell

Northumberland

NE67 5BT

Telephone: +44 (0)1665 720387

E-mail: stay@annstead.co.uk

http://www.annstead.co.uk/accomm_bunkhouse.php

£10 per person per night. Two six-bunk rooms kitchen and dining area with adjoining shower block, drying room and laundry facilities. There is a kitchen with 4 hobs and a microwave, but no oven. Don't forget 20p coins for the showers.

Saturday 20th September

Dive 1: Northern Hares (10:39)

Buddy pair	Max depth	Duration
Matt Watson/Jon Nobes	11.4 m	33 min
Simon Parsons/Joanna Argasinska	15.0 m	35 min
Jon Knight/Lara Moss	xm	ymin

Karin Muller/Georgina Stooke-Vaughan	13.3 m	45 min
Rowena Crawford/Matt Forrest	11.9m	49 min
Matt Watson/Liz Inns	9.7 m	35 min
Simon Parsons/Bryony Robinson	xm	ymin

For the first dive of the trip the skipper Craig had picked a shallow sheltered site.

I was in with Jon Nobes for my first dive at the site. We descended down a shot into the kelp at about 6 m. After a few minutes, Jon seemed fairly sorted so we headed off in a southerly direction, as advised by Craig, in search of seals. The bottom dropped away to a rocky seabed at about 12 m and we swam along a wall which was covered in dead men's fingers and sponges. The bottom was littered with rusting bits of wreckage, we even found one section standing a metre or so proud of the seabed. It was about now that we made our first seal sighting and quickly headed off to pursue our quarry as it zipped past us and disappeared into a gully. Just as we were starting to think we'd been given the slip, we were suddenly ambushed by several inquisitive seals. I began to suspect that Jon had been bathing in fish oil in preparation for the trip and they really couldn't get enough of him... Sadly all to soon time was up and I put up a DSMB for the ascent.

Next up it was Liz's turn and I was confident of plenty seal sightings. Sadly Liz didn't have that certain je ne sais quoi when it comes to seals, and although we were buzzed by several, including a big bull seal, not of them hung around to play. Not wanting to be disheartened we descended below the kelp line and went on a critter hunt among the rocks and wreckage. I'm not sure whether Liz shares the same enthusiasm as me for the various types of crustaceans, but she definitely looked excited about the lobster we found. Despite the paucity of seal encounters, this was still a nice dive and we felt better when we were back on the boat and realised that Simon had been on two dives and hadn't been nibbled by a single seal...



Dive 2: North Wamses (13:38)

Buddy pair	Max depth	Duration
Matt Watson/Jon Nobes	9.3 m	30 min
Simon Parsons/Joanna Argasinska	8.0 m	31 min
Jon Knight/Lara Moss	xm	ymin
Karin Muller/Georgina Stooke-Vaughan	14.8 m	45 min
Rowena Crawford/Matt Forrest	9.1 m	41 min
Matt Watson/Liz Inns	13.4 m	29 min
Simon Parsons/Bryony Robinson	xm	ymin

The Second site of the day was another shallow sheltered site with a few seals in the water that would hopefully come and play with us. I was in with Jon first and we started off following Simon and Joanna, but given the bad seal karma that seemed to emanate from Simon we decided to ditch that plan and true to form, within about five minutes a playful seal had joined us. We were then joined by Karin, Georgie and a couple more seals before we decided to head out into the bay along one of the less kelpy gullies, we found several velvet swimming crabs, edible crabs and hermit crabs as well as some pipefish and prawns, but no more seals.

There was a bit of a delay getting in for the second dive with Liz as Karin and Georgie were making a break for continental Europe after a slight navigational blooper led to them surfacing in piper gut...! Karin has to concede that she felt a complete idiot after surfacing, realizing that she had ended up exactly where she hadn't wanted to. After trying to retrace her steps - or fin strokes rather - once back on the boat, she came to the conclusion that somehow the both of them had managed to dive through solid rock! Obviously, if you want something to go horribly wrong, just give Karin a compass and send her on her way... Sigh!

For the dive with Liz I decided to contour further round the bay and descend into the deeper water at the northwest end of the bay. We found lots of velvet swimming crabs and a big lobster which I tried to entice out of its hole., but it looked again like looked like Liz was out of luck when it came to seals, until about half way through the dive when a young seal appeared out of the gloom and started following us as we made our way up the gully that myself and Jon had swum down on the first dive. One seal became two, then three as we made our way back towards the boat, but sadly we didn't have long to play as it was time to launch a DSMB and ascend.



The mother of all curries

In order to keep costs down, and to save us the long walk into Seahouses or Beadnell, we decided to go for a takeaway. After rifling through the yellow pages several times we were presented with two options: a Chinese in Seahouses or an Indian in Alnwick. For anyone who's ever been around CUUEG this is pretty much a no brainer... We'd probably have a curry for the annual dinner if the Saffron would give us a private room for the after dinner speeches! Some people even looked offended that we bothered to mention the Chinese.

For future reference, ordering a banquet for 12 was probably a little overambitious. When the curry finally arrived, we quickly realised that in these parts you're apparently not considered a "person" unless you are able to eat five currys complete with rice, nan, poppadoms and a selection of starters and side dishes...!

Sunday 21st September

Dive 1: Crumstone (11:28)

Buddy pair	Max depth	Duration
Matt Watson/Liz Inns/Jon Nobes	9.7 m	44 min
Simon Parsons/Joanna Argasinska/Bryony Robinson	xm	ymin
Jon Knight/Lara Moss	9.4 m	41 min
Karin Muller/Matt Forrest	11.0 m	46 min
Rowena Crawford/Georgina Stooke-Vaughan	6.4 m	50 min

Right, if you hadn't guessed already, there might be a few more seal mentions here...

Seeing as the ODs and trainees had done pretty well on the first day, and myself and Simon weren't planning to do two dives at each site we could be a bit more adventurous today and visit some of the more exposed sites, which is where most of the seals were.

For the first dive we were dropped in on the south side of Crumstone in about 6 m. Everyone know the drill by now jump in and bumble around in the kelp till the seals come. Sadly they didn't seem to want to play for the first 20 min of the dive and although a few made a bid to nibble Jon's fins, by the time him and Liz had turned round the pesky blighter had scarpered. After about the third instance of this I'm sure they thought I was taking the p*ss just to amuse myself. Running short on ideas I decided to stick up a DSMB as Billy had told us that the seals sometimes like to play with the DSMBs. Just for good measure I decided to yank on the line like a bell ringer to make the DSMB bob up and down at the surface, which despite making me look like a complete tit and confusing the hell out of my buddies seemed to have the desired effect... and soon enough the seals appeared to check us out. Various seal related shenanigans and some serious fin nibblage later it was sadly time to wave goodbye to the seals, but luckily a couple followed us on our ascent and escorted us back to the boat...!



Dive 2: Knivestone and the wreck of the Abessinia (14:20)

Buddy pair	Max depth	Duration
Matt Watson/Liz Inns/Jon Nobes	7.9 m	44 min
Simon Parsons/Joanna Argasinska/Bryony Robinson	11.5 m	48 min
Jon Knight/Lara Moss	10.8 m	44 min
Karin Muller/Matt Forrest	14.3 m	42 min

Unbelievable...! Billy had saved the best 'til last, and our last dive was going to be on knivestone. The plan was to drop us in on the northeast side of the rock where we could follow an anchor chain along a shallow gully to the southeast, where those who hadn't spend too long playing with the seals could go have a poke around the huge boilers which sit in around 14 m. A few of us decided that in a bid to attract more seals we would daub our fins with chocolate spread left over from lunch and it seemed to work... as within seconds of leaving the surface we were literally mobbed by seals! To this day I am still surprised my kit made it to the end of this dive intact after the relentless, albeit friendly, nibbling we were subjected to at one point I couldn't even fin as I had three seals trying to eat one of my fins. I also managed to tickle one of the more friendly seals under the chin and give it a hug, which seemed to amuse Liz and Jon. Needless to say we never made it to the boilers, which from the accounts of those who did were also teeming with seals, but nevertheless had one of the best dives of my life!

The Knivestone was also the best dive for Karin. After having visited the Farnes for three years in succession and not having been able to play with seals, she had developed a severe complex that these amiable animals just didn't like her or thought she was boring. Again, the same for the first three dives of the trip: more or less just a glimpse of the seals from afar. However, for the last dive the seals had obviously decided that she was the best thing since sliced mackerel - and no, I didn't rub my suit down with cod liver oil! After a thorough checking by the seals in the gully, MattF and Karin descended to the boilers of the Abbessinia. There, they were continuously pestered by several seals: hugging cylinders, nibbling fins, mask straps, scratching the neoprene hood - lovely. One large seal had wedged itself between two iron bars of the boiler and was resting, sticking its head out on the side. Matt and I proceeded to give him a thorough rubbing and cuddling round the chin and side and he thoroughly enjoyed it. So much so, that when we decided to move on, he hurriedly wiggled to get out from between the bars with a sort of desperate look as if to say: 'wait, don't leave me!' and followed us round the boilers. We were joined by two young seals, who played with each other and peek-a-boo round the boilers with us. Unfortunately, after 40 minutes we had to start our ascend, but one seal kindly decided to keep us company, watching us as we were slowly going up, reeling the DSMB. This was an excellent dive and will stick in my memory for a long time.

