



CUUEG Easter Training 2010 - Torbay

Friday 2nd – Monday 5th April 2010

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Trip organised by Ian Gregory

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From 2004 to 2009, CUUEG did Easter Training at Porthkerris Cove, in Cornwall. This year, the plan was a little different. First, we wished (as a branch) to explore some new sites (particularly shore diving, to keep costs down). Second, following a few years of poor weather, we were wary of a single large event being ineffective if we are unlucky with the weather. Third, many of our current instructors do not find it easy or convenient to take the time off work. Thus in 2010, CUUEG coordinated four dedicated weekend training trips to run at two-weekly intervals between 19th March and 1st May, to different destinations. Torbay was the second such trip.

The Divers:

Instructors:

- Emma Faid (Advanced Diver, Advanced Instructor)
- Ian Gregory (Dive Leader, Open Water Instructor)
- Matthew Watson (Dive Leader, Assistant Diving Instructor)

Assistant Instructors:

- Rowena Crawford (Sports Diver, Assistant Diving Instructor)
- Stuart Moore (Sports Diver, Assistant Diving Instructor)
- Karin Muller (Sports Diver, Assistant Diving Instructor)
- Christian Ashby (Sports Diver, Assistant Diving Instructor)
- Beccy Mant (Sports Diver, Assistant Diving Instructor)

Trainees:

- Christopher Rafaluk (Ocean Diver trainee)
- Steven Smith (Ocean Diver trainee)
- Ben Richards (Ocean Diver trainee)
- Alex Hoffman (Sports Diver trainee)

Others:

- Rachael Macdonald (non-BSAC member)

Details

We stayed at the [Park Dean](#) holiday site in Torquay, and booked apartments there. They were far more comfortable (and warm) than the traditional; caravans. And so highly recommended!!!

Torquay Holiday Park,
Kingskerswell Road,
Torquay,
Devon,
TQ2 8JU.

Despite a warning on their webpage that sat-navs don't work in the area, it transpired that actually they could get us there perfectly well! An excellent summary of possible dive sites can be found at the [Dive Torbay](#) website.

The weather ahead of the trip looked decidedly grim. Gale force winds and snow, sleet, hail and torrential rain savaged the south west, and on Dartmoor, a gritting truck had overturned. Earlier heavy rain in the preceding months had caused several cliffs to collapse in the area, and the visibility wasn't looking great. The glimmer of hope amongst all of this was the fact that the wind was blowing from the west – at least Tor Bay itself would be relatively sheltered.



Ahead of the training weekend, Stuart, Matt, Beccy and myself had checked out a few of the recommended dive sites. This exercise was very useful: as expected, the visibility was fairly poor pretty much everywhere. We also discovered the location of at least one dive shop, established that the matte laminated Dive Manager log sheets appeared to work very well, and confirmed that the quickest route from Babbacombe to the apartments is not via Torquay town centre. Brixham breakwater beach was identified as possibly the best of the bunch, and so to Brixham we went, on a rainy Good Friday.



Friday



Parking in the multi-story car park at Brixham costs £7 per day, so for future reference, it is worth rationalising cars. The van was able to park on the seafront, where the kit (pre-packed into green stacker boxes) was duly unloaded and distributed along the beach front for several miles in either direction! The beach itself was relatively large pebbles - ideal for keeping kit healthy – and shallow, so easy to enter and exit the water! There were toilets and a café on-site, and ample room for the conventional CUUEG kit-faff!

My personal dive logs for the day reported a maximum depth of approximately 8 metres on the high spring tide – ideal for Ocean Diver training. Owing to the first (to my knowledge) rooster-up of the week, Ben's kit had been left in the accommodation, so I took in my trainees individually for a 1:1 dive in the morning. The visibility was probably the most challenging I've ever experienced for new diver training, and it barely exceeded half a metre at times. It is to the credit of the professionalism of the instructors and the determination of the trainees that we got a very good day's diving in, in terms of skills completed. In particular, this was Chris's first UK diving experience, and Ben and Steven's first sea dives. Meanwhile, Alex got to grips with the Sport's Diver course by towing an SMB for the dive. Congratulations also due to both Karin and Stuart, who ran their first Open Water lessons under supervision. Needless to say, everybody managed to sign off the 'low visibility' dive experience. We completed 33 dives in total, with most people managing to squeeze in 3 dives.

It transpired that 'Nautique Diving & Watersports' no longer provided air fills at Paignton harbour, so we obtained air at Brixham.

Saturday

It wasn't broke, so we didn't fix it. Hence on Saturday we arrived again at Brixham for the second day of diver training, this time with all the kit present and correct. The Ocean Diver trainees continued to make very good progress, despite little or no improvement in the visibility, and Alex completed his Sports Diver Rescue lesson. 32 dives were completed. Despite the relatively uninteresting sea-bed, we found a remarkable variety of life: square crabs, harbour crabs and hermit crabs all in abundance, as well as starfish and anemones. Very few fish, though, it has to be said! At the end of the afternoon, as the tide turned after low water, the visibility did show signs of improving slightly, and I got maybe 3 metres at the breakwater side of the bay.

Running a simulated decompression stop with Alex was quite challenging: the first scheduled stop was at 6 metres and out maximum depth was barely 7 m. However, his DSMB deployment and subsequent stops at 6 metres and 3 metres were flawless, highlighting the very high standards of buoyancy control that CUUEG encourages. Upon surfacing, I wasn't overly surprised that we had both swum (in search of depth) and drifted (during the stops) a long way from shore. We conquered a long surface swim back to the beach, parallel to the breakwater, although it was only pride that stopped me from scrambling up the breakwater and walking back!

After diving, we drove the van up to Babbacombe, to fill cylinders at Divers Down:

Divers Down in Torquay
139 Babbacombe Road,
Babbacombe,
Torquay,
Devon, TQ1 3SR.
Tel: 07900 845288



Mike was very friendly and provided a map of Babbacombe Bay dive site, along with tips on how to get depth!!!

Sunday



For Sunday, we went to Fairy Cove, a pleasant and sheltered little beach in the very centre of the Tor Bay coastline. We parked above Paignton harbour, unloading the van at the harbour, and onto the beach. Fairy Cove comes highly recommended, and hence we were rather optimistic about the visibility and the underwater scenery. After unloading the van and dumping the kit at the head of the beach in front of an approaching sea – I undertook a quick mental ‘rule-of-twelfth’s’ calculation to establish that our kit would still be out of the water when we returned from the dive! It was!

The beach was pleasant enough, but the fine grit played havoc with unsuspecting (or maybe under-briefed) trainees, getting into direct feed hoses and dump valves. While the visibility was a noticeable improvement over the previous day (in a three, it was possible to see both buddies at the same time), the underwater scenery was somewhat disappointing, with less life than Brixham. It was also extremely difficult to get any significant depth (the average depth for the day was 5 metres) which made it difficult to do the shotline ascent and AS ascent practice that was originally planned. Ever ready to be flexible, we did ‘plan and lead’ exercises instead, with the trainees calculating minimum gas, turn around times and maximum operating depths. They also analysed their gas and subsequently completed a dive on 32% nitrox.

In hindsight, the scenery probably improved significantly upon swimming further from shore – the guide book indicated that we could even go out as far as the cardinal marker buoy. However, this was difficult to justify with trainees and an uncertain current in the shipping lane! Nevertheless, we completed all of our planned training and racked up another 25 dives.

Monday

After filling at Diver’s Down, we chose to dive out of Babbacombe (adjacent to the model village) on the final day. This involved driving down a long and very steep road to the beach – which may not be easy in a LWB van. To aid our journey back to Cambridge, it was to be a truncated day, with plans to finish up at about 2pm. There was also a café and full toilet facilities on site, and good parking, although it got quite busy at times.

Following local advice, we did a stride entry from the steps at the end of the sea wall, and headed out to sea on the promise of getting 10 metres depth. This we achieved. Just! The visibility was noticeably better than the previous days, although still a distinct lack of anything alive! After completing Chris and Ben’s diver rescue lesson, we packed up and prepared to drive back to Cambridge. We completed 18 dives – a fair achievement given the rescue training and the half-day!



Upon reflection, the trip was very productive as a training event, and great socially in the evenings. It did, however, lack diving of interest for the non-trainees that came along, which possibly might have been the case even with better visibility.

It isn’t appropriate to do a formal ‘Porthkerris versus Torbay’ comparison, but for future years, the following points are probably worth bearing in mind:

- Porthkerris does have more interesting diving, including underwater life, rocks and sea-bed, so is probably more suitable if experienced divers want to come along and do ‘fun’ shore diving alongside the training. The visibility is also better. In a way, the lack of distraction at Torbay did help focus the training, meaning trainees got more specific skills practice done, but less experience at generally planning and running dives. Torbay is much more sheltered against westerly winds than Porthkerris, and hence it was very easy to enter and exit the water, whereas the beach at Porthkerris has a fearsome surf at times.
- It is possible to fill cylinders on-site at Porthkerris, adding convenience but providing less incentive to be economical. At Torbay, owing to the restriction of filling cylinders only at the start or end of the day, we managed to get 2, sometimes even 3 dives out of a single cylinder, probably saving money. This is dependent, however, on having 2 cylinders per person (and a means to transport them). It would probably not work so well with more divers, so realistically is limited to 12-14 people or so, whereas we have taken over 25 to Porthkerris in the past.
- Torbay is closer to Cambridge than Porthkerris. Only by a couple of hours, but significantly, this makes the difference between requiring a whole day to travel in each direction, and being able to travel after work / after diving. For people that have to take time off work, this is an important factor.
- None of the sites had anywhere obvious to wash down kit in fresh water – obviously an inconvenience on the last day. In hindsight, one option might be to go to Vobster quarry on the way home, and dive the last day in freshwater both for more depth experience and also to wash salt off the kit.

Many thanks must go to the instructors who made the training on this trip possible. An examination of the dive logs reveals that we managed 118 person-dives during the trip, including the reconnaissance dives on Wednesday and Thursday. I would also like to thank the Dive Managers for excellent record keeping! In terms of training, congratulations to Ben and Steven for completing the Ocean Diver course. Chris and Alex are well on the way to Ocean and Sports Diver, respectively, after completing their first ever open water dives in the UK.

Finally, some comments from trip attendees!

Many thanks again to both of you for all your efforts and the organization of the trip, and to all the people putting so much effort into

instructing.

Personally, I really quite enjoyed the trip as a whole, and if visibility was not so great, I guess it was for the better with respect to getting training in reasonably bad conditions so that one feels more comfortable in better ones. Probably this is better than the other way round. There is, in my opinion, not much or say, nothing really, to be 'criticized', and not having too much time available to take off, I found that going over a prolonged week-end with holidays was definitely a good option (as opposed to going for a whole week). Bearing that in mind, and the limited time available, I know that this leaves little scope for many other things to do apart from diving. The only tiny thing I might have enjoyed apart from what was organized would have been a bit of extra time to explore the local scenery and go for an excursion either in Dartmoor or around the nice coastline (I have not extensively travelled England and am in a desperate need for some scenery variations living in Cambridgeshire :). But I also prefer to have got as much diving done as a trainee as possible, so maybe that is a good option once one is qualified and decides to take a (half) day off (or for bad weather days).

Again, thanks a lot for everything,

Cheers,

Lex

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Thanks for this. I'd say it was one of the best organised trips I've been on - congratulations!

Nothing major to say really re feedback. I think the dive plans worked well, and I think everyone felt like they had options. I would say that the larger van at capers helped - esp in bad weather.

May be a good recommendation to always use a LWB van (if people are happy to drive it).

Great trip - thank you!

Christian.

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Thanks again for Torbay, it was a really fun and well-organised trip which I really enjoyed, and hope you will have me back again for something else in the future. You had gone to bed by the time Christian's car arrived on the Thursday night, but on arriving in the car park we knew we were in the right place by the gang of divers waving madly out of the apartment window. And Stuart's opening greeting was ""OK so what do you lot want, tea or gin....?"".

Emma Faid

SDCO - BSAC Eastern Region Coaching Team