

Chesil Beach, July 2010

Trip organised by Ian Gregory

Report by Steven Smith

The Divers:

- > Ian Gregory
- > Karin Muller
- > Ro Crawford
- > Emma Faid
- > Neil Taylor
- > Steven Smith
- > Colin McSwiggen
- > Kelvin (Not Diving)

Details

We stayed in the Youth Hostel in Portland which provided bunkbeds in dorms and very nice breakfast. We found out later that twin rooms in the Royal Breakwater Hotel were only slightly more expensive, and so might be a better option for light sleepers.



Diving

We arrived Friday evening, despite heavy traffic. The advance party of Colin and Neil had already found the youth hostel, somewhat confusingly signposted as a hospital, and a conveniently local pub (as mentioned above), while Karin and Kelvin had brought most of the kit. By the time the final car arrived, carrying Ian, Ro, Emma, and myself, all that remained to be done was to go to bed and fall asleep.

Saturday



The first diving was on Saturday morning, in Chesil Cove. The first wave went in at about ten-ish, and didn't include me, so I fell asleep on the beach helped with marshalling. Which wasn't, in truth, a great hardship, because the sky was blue, the sun was warm, and there was just enough breeze that sitting around in a dry suit didn't automatically imply getting heat stroke. Ian and Ro were the first out, grinning widely, and reported warm water, good vis, and generally all the things one might reasonably hope for; Colin and Neil came out a few minutes later equally enthusiastic. And, indeed, they were right: the visibility wasn't far off ten meters; the seabed was sufficiently full of life that almost every time I got my buoyancy wrong I annoyed a crab; and there were enough fish around that they were more of a hazard to visibility than the tiny amounts of chalk dust suspended in the water[1]. Also, cuttlefish.

The remains of the SS Preveza lie about fifteen meters from the beach in about eight meters of water, having sunk there in January 1920, and was helpfully shotted by Ian on his first dive. There's not a great deal of the ship left now, beyond a few beams and sheets, but it's still an interesting change of scenery, and a handy marker to start from. So a pretty good morning. Getting out was somewhat challenging than getting in, but everyone managed it in the end.

The first part of the afternoon went on refilling cylinders with air and divers with chips and pop, before embarking on the good ship Sabre for the Countess of Erne, a paddle steamer sunk in the harbour in 1935. Despite the site's reputation, visibility remained good, at about five meters (except for a big cloud of silt which seemed to be mysteriously following me around). As in the morning, there was plenty of life to look at, with the added bonus of a largely-intact wreck to explore. Once again, everyone who went down came up again, and nobody fell in on the way back, avoiding an awkward "was there someone else here at the start of the weekend?" conversation in the pub afterwards.

Sunday



By Sunday morning the wind had picked up slightly, although otherwise the weather remained fine. Neil and Colin wimped out at this point and headed back to Cambridge, while the rest of us went to investigate other potential dive sites. The first of these, slightly further north along Chesil bank, was just a little bit too rough (at least for me; the more experienced divers might have managed it), and so we went round to the other side of the promontory to Newton's



Cove. This was much calmer, so we kitted up and entered the water. Once again, the water was remarkably clear, and what suspended crud there was was a surprisingly pretty opalescent blue colour. The bottom was, for the most part, covered in a thick bed of seaweed.

Wikipedia claims that this was a particularly rare species; alas, I'm an ignorant landlubber, and to me it just looked like seaweed. On the plus side, it was full of crabs, fish, and other things which wriggle and wiggle, which more than made up for the lack of depth. Also, it turns out that I can't navigate for toffee, even under the best possible conditions, and that Karin is very tolerant of going round in circles in little more than standing depth. After the dive, we went into Weymouth proper for a fish and chip lunch before heading back to Cambridge tired, happy, and just a little bit sunburnt.



[1] Possibly a slight exaggeration.