

# NDAC Chepstow, March 2011

Trip organised by Neil Taylor

Report by Meic and Jing

## The Instructors:

- > Neil Taylor
- > Jackie Dixon
- > Stuart Moore
- > Christian Ashby

## The Trainees:

- > Alexey Bannykh
- > Stephan Bielsen
- > Meic Williams
- > Sarah Hale
- > Sarah Bennett
- > Sarah Gales (yes, it did get confusing)
- > Yvonne Silber
- > Jing Qui

## Details

We stayed at the Hampton by Hilton, Newport, as the accommodation on site was not finished.

## Impressions of the trip from two trainees.

*Meic* "My first CUUEG trip, we set off to wales to visit the National Diving & Activity Centre (<http://www.ndac.co.uk/>). The drive from Cambridge took around 3 hours for most, 4 for us, partly due to my bad call to persevere with standstill traffic. As the onsite accommodation was still unfinished we were staying in a nearby (20mins drive) Hampton by Hilton. This, despite being in the middle of a building site itself, was rather luxurious. We shared queen rooms with a double bed and a "sofa bed" which was the same size of the double and, I'm informed, very comfortable. "



*Jing* "It was a great experience to go diving with the club on a weekend away from Cambridge and have a break from my PhD. The trip to Chepstow took a few hours, but it just felt like a short time because of the great music in Jackie's car and enjoyable conversations with other club members.

We arrived at the Hampton by Hilton hotel near Newport at around 9pm, which, by the way, is fantastic and good value. I was impressed by the well-furnished room and pleasant atmosphere they provided. After a brief meeting, we hung out a bit in the bar in the hotel but it was not long before we went to bed."



*Meic* "Next morning we went down to a cooked breakfast at 7am, and left the hotel around 8am (via Tesco) to the NDAC. I have very little to compare the dive site with but I was suitably impressed. The entry fee was £15 and the facilities included: changing rooms, gas refills onsite, a shop and burger van, all with incredibly friendly staff. The entry to the water was a fair distance from the car park and down a steep hill but there were a couple of minibuses running equipment and people up and down. With a friendly word to one of the bus drivers, he pulled up right next to the van and we loaded up our kit."

*Meic* "Once down at the water there is a pontoon with lots of pallets, providing a fantastic area for kitting up. We took over the north end of the

pontoon as it is towards the shallow end of the lake, at about 4m below the pontoon. Heading north from the pontoon there is a variety of interesting attraction like planes, an amphibious vertical, swim throughs and some intriguing gnomes at depths of around 7m to 12m (see map: <http://www.ndac.co.uk/attractions.htm>). Along with Training platforms at 6,7and 8m. A sloped entrance from the water, just next to the pontoon, was used as the exit point for the simulated rescue SO1 lesson, in which I managed to dunk my casualty several times!"

*Jing* "On Saturday, we met up at 8 am and went to Tesco to buy lunch and get cash for entering the dive site. The dive site was great. They provided all the facilities we needed, including a gas filling station, changing room, a small cafeteria and most importantly, regular mini-bus service from the main site to the diving site, which makes our life a lot easier. As you can imagine preparing for diving is not an easy job for a beginner; it involves great effort both mentally and physically. This means sorting out the equipment, i.e. buoyancy controller, cylinder, regulator, weight belt, etc. The most difficult part for me was putting on my dry suit. Going through the rubber neck is a similar feeling to being re-born. However, this is probably also part of the fun."



*Meic* "The visibility was good at around 6m and a temperature of 8°C the stories of cold diving in the UK felt greatly exaggerated! During my dives I encountered a couple of frogs and some rather large perch. I was told about some "bent" and deformed trout but unfortunately wasn't given to opportunity to meet them. Although we did had great fun watching Jing steal fish food to feed to the trout (some rather large beasts appeared) and under Neil's expert advice, she took a mountain of food in on the next dive, unfortunately to no avail!"



*Jing* "My first dive was a bit scary at the beginning as diving in open water is definitely not as simple as training in the swimming pool. To begin with I struggled to descend as I had the problem of having water entering my mask and both of my feet floating up - a really bad position to be in! Thanks to help from my instructor,

I calmed down and finally managed to get to the bottom at 7 meters. The visibility was really good and I saw two fish, one big trout and a smaller fish. It was fantastic to be under water and swimming around like a fish. My second dive was much smoother, I still struggled a bit with my buoyancy but other than that I was fine. We went down to 11 meters and swam around to see different under water features, such as a plane, tank, etc. My favourite part was going through a large pipe, which feels like going through a time channel. It was brilliant!"



*Meic* "Just east of the pontoon the shelf drops down to around 20-25m providing the opportunity to practice a wall dive, another dive experience for me to tick off on my sports diver training. The diving continued up to 3:55pm when the last bus to take us up the hill was departing (and took us right back to the van!) All in all a fun diving site, great for training but with some really interesting attractions to enjoy at the same time."



*Jing* "I did two dives on Sunday as well, one at 10 meters for 14 minutes and the other at around 15-16 meters for half an hour. It was a bit more adventurous and I was much better at controlling my buoyancy. We took a camera and I was really lucky to be the underwater diving model. My favourite picture is the one that was taken when I have just got through the pipe, which is great!"

*Meic* "Having sampled to hotel food on Friday night (soggy pizza and a pint of £10.99) we decided to take advantage of local knowledge and head to the pub on Saturday night. We set off in convoy with Sarah H, our local tour guide, in the lead and after a brief detour down a dead-end to the local police station we arrived at a vibrant pub (I'm afraid I can't remember the name). After a game of musical chairs as we tried to find a table for 12, we settled down in two groups, ravenous for food! An hour later (thanks to Alexey's starter) I dug into a fantastic burger, which really hit the spot."

*Meic* "Hopefully you can follow my rather disjointed trip report but to sum it up, we had a truly enjoyable trip, managing to sign off a lot of aspects of the OD and SD courses and get a taste for CUUEG diving. The bar has now been set high, with plush hotels, friendly staff giving you lifts right to the water's edge, warm water, great visibility and of course fantastic CUUEG company!"

*Jing* "One thing that I learnt from this dive experience is 'Do not panic, stay calm'. It sounds easy, but it is not the case when you are under water and new to diving. Nevertheless, I had a lot of fun during this dive trip and I really enjoyed it. Many thanks for making this trip happen and instructing me underwater. It was also a great pleasure talking and learning with the other club members. I am glad that I am part of CUUEG and looking forward to the next club trip!"

*An Instructor adds* "From an instructors point of view, the pontoon system worked well, and for SD training the site is pretty good; to the North you come to a 6m platform, followed by several different attractions in 10-12m that work quite well for compass navigation and line laying. If you're looking for deeper water for training, then the region near the west wall with the "diving bell" is about 16-17m deep, although somewhat smaller and with fewer attractions; you can swim north along the wall from here to get back to the main attractions (bottom 19-22m, or travel higher to get a rare chance of a UK wall dive). Unfortunately we found this area too late in the trip to make good use of it, but it would be ideal for practising descents/ascents on a shotline to a reasonable depth. The site isn't ideal for the diver rescue/landing a casualty, but we managed to do it; the slope is quite steep and walking there at all stirs up the silt a lot, so plan to do it late in the day. They did say they were planning to concrete this over in the near future."

