

Farne Islands, November 2012

Trip organised by Ruth Charles

Report by Ruth Charles

The Divers:

- > Steve Dunkley (AD)
- > Mark Hallworth
- > Jan Lellman (DL)
- > Stuart Moore (DL)
- > Christian Ashby
- > Adrian Carr (SD)
- > Ruth Charles (SD)
- > Max Jamilly (PADI DM)
- > Xan Jie Tay (PADI DM)
- > Sarah Hale (OD)
- > Amanda Dalby (PADI AOW)
- > Erik van Bergan (PADI AOW)
- > Douwle Kiela (PADI AOW)
- > Angela Benett (non-dvier)

Details

This was the first CUUEG trip of the 2012-13 academic year.

Seahouses is a 5-6 hour drive north from Cambridge. After comparing diaries we split into 3 groups - an advance party in Mark's car left early Friday afternoon. A group in the hire van carrying all the kit and most people's luggage left mid-afternoon and a final group in Stuart's car left in the early evening once work and labs were finished. The vehicles stopped for dinner en route.

The van, our slowest vehicle, arrived at Springhill Farm around 10.30 to find Mark and the advance party relaxing in the cottages. As we unloaded things into the different cottages Steve and later Stuart arrived. Everyone was settled in by midnight. It was a cloudless night and across dunes a floodlit Bamburgh Castle announced that we had made it safely to the North East.

We'd put together breakfast packs of coffee, tea, sugar, milk and bread for each cottage. This meant that we could get an early start with everyone down to the quayside at Seahouses for 8.00am. This also meant we got the best spots in the car park for loading and unloading kit on the boat, the only slight issue was that the public toilets were out-of-order so people had to become acquainted with the head on the boat.

We expected people to be fairly tired on the Saturday night, so instead of attempting to cook a group meal we booked ourselves into a local pub. It turns out that booking a table for 15 in a small village is not that straightforward, so if we plan to do this again a booking need to be made at least 2 weeks in advance.

Diving

This year we were on Glad Tidings VII, part of William Shiel's fleet. They supplied much welcome cups of tea and coffee after each dive and we supplied a large communal packed lunch. On both days we were joined by other diving clubs on the boat. On Saturday it was a group from Whitley Bay and on Sunday a group from York University, that included a previous CUUEG Diving Officer.

Day 1: Saturday 10th November - Blue Caps and the Hopper

A sunny and clear day. The north sea was relatively calm. Adrian & Max were our Dive Managers. Our first dive on 'Blue Caps' took us to the mandatory seals, who demonstrated a deep curiosity with fins, gloves, air hoses and absolute joy as we attempted to deploy DSMBs.

Our second dive took us to 'The Hopper' - a wall dive, potentially down to 30m, although we stayed shallow to find the seals. My buddy and I submerged too early and swam on a bearing towards to wall, but in hindsight were swimming obliquely along it keeping it just out of sight (how can you miss something that big?) and instead spent our time investigating a pinnacle very closely. A curious seal tentatively investigated us, although it spent much of it's time hovering just out of sight.

This proved a tougher than expected dive for our two dive leaders in training, whose group headed through a fissure in the wall and came out on a

reef on the other side. The skipper was unable to collect them, and so they had to make their way back across the reef in quite difficult conditions returning safely to the boat tired and cold. It's a good thing that this happened to our more experienced divers who knew how to handle such situation.

We later discovered why this site is called 'The Hopper' - head too far along either side of the wall and you get caught in strong currents. This is one that needs to be treated with respect.

Then it was time to head back to Seahouses, which took longer than expected as we were escorted by a pod of dolphins. The skipper was happy to encourage them to play so we took the scenic route, thrilled by the sight of them.

Day 2: Sunday 11th November - St Andre (Wreck) and Harcar

Another early start at Seahouses harbour with Max and Adrian acting as Dive Manager again. If truth be told there is not much to see of the St Andre. What's left is at the base of a 17m cliff, following the bottom off towards 24m. Heading back towards the wall gave us the chance to spend more time playing with the seals, so this is what we did.

At this point tragedy struck; realisation dawned that part of our packed lunch had been left in the van at Seahouses. Still, Mark's efforts were not in vain and there was still plenty to go around.

The afternoon took us to the seal colony at Harcar, although the skipper would not be drawn on whether we were at big Harcar or Little Harcar. This can best be described as "OMG its full of seals" and CUUEG came up buzzing with seal related tales.

Reluctantly we returned to Seahouses, loaded the van, said our farewells and thanks to the Skipper and set off on our long journey home. No trip to the north would be complete without a visit to the Wetherby Whaler, so our cars converged there for a celebratory dinner before getting back to Cambridge late on the Sunday night.
