

# Exploration closer to home: A morning in Milton Country Park, 13 October 2013

Trip report by Greg Steele. With kind thanks to Mick Woolhouse, Milton Country Park Ranger. Please note that this site is *not* open for further diving!

Download maps of the Deep Pool: [version1 \(/images/filedownloads/MiltonDeep1.pdf\)](/images/filedownloads/MiltonDeep1.pdf) or [version2 \(/images/filedownloads/MiltonDeep2.pdf\)](/images/filedownloads/MiltonDeep2.pdf).

## Divers:

- > Greg Steele (organiser and dive manager)
- > Mark Hallworth
- > Karin Muller
- > Jan Lellman
- > Adrian Carr
- > Adam Hickin
- > Stuart Moore
- > (with support from Matt Watson)



Milton Country Park (founded 1990-1993) possesses a number of old gravel pits, which were closed by the 1960s and have since flooded and become fertile fishing and water sport locations. One of these, the Deep Pool, is surrounded by rumours that old machinery and structures were left in and still remain. Thanks must go to Mark, who raised the possibility that this might be an interesting dive site and got in touch with the park rangers a few years ago. Greg took an interest more recently and met with Mick, one of the rangers, a few weeks before the dives. A number of the lakes are well suited to diving, and this represents an excellent link to the local community for the club.

The lake is primarily used for fishing, and now has a number of well built up fishing platforms made of railway sleepers. These sit a foot or so above the water and a wide one in particular (number 37) made a good entry and exit point for us. Divers could put kit on the side and then walk forward into the deepening water on a reasonably solid gravel floor. Transfer of kit from the car park (£2 all day charge) is a fair walk (5-10mins), but heavier kit (cylinders) were brought in using the Emergency Access at the north end of the park from Fen Road. We were actually able to drive right up to our site – all we had to ensure was not to block the path.

In terms of safety, the rangers completed a standard risk assessment for the park, which was checked by Matt before the dive. Since we were not diving for reward, we did not have to meet HSE standards but due care and attention was ensured. All buddy teams took an SMB, torch and line cutter of some description. The principal risks were entanglement in line, or entrapment in any underwater hazards. In the end, we had no problems with either of these – there was not a lot of fishing kit in the water. We always had at least one diver kitted and ready to go on the surface, just in case of emergency. Greg was optimistic about good visibility, since the gravel floor did not seem to silt up too much when disturbed.

In terms of lake history, topography and points of interest, Greg was a bit short on information. He was lucky enough to meet with the Head of the fishing interests in Milton Country Park, who was able to give us some really useful pointers on shelf locations and areas where kit had been lost. The divers met in the pub the Thursday before, and decided on a number of possible methods of data collection.

One was to use GPS data, but this equipment is expensive and in a fairly small area (one quarter of the size of Gildenburgh, roughly), the accuracy may be a problem.

· We did not have time for extensive line laying and mapping, but each dive pair took a slate and were able to note down any points of interest. From topside, the surface cover team were able to note down the actual route they took by tracking the SMB.

· The intention was to send the first group on a North-South bearing (from our platform), and the second on an East-West bearing (following a surface swim). Using the time, actual location and depth profile from their computers, we could then get a reasonable profile of the lake floor along this bearing. The third and fourth groups were then intended for following up any points of interest, and attempting to follow any shelves or contours we found in the lake.

On the actual morning, we were unfortunately greeted by some spectacularly poor weather, but wind and rain were not able to dampen spirits. The café area provided somewhere dry to get into drysuits, and we had all kit at the site and a site briefing done by 10:15am.

## Dive One: Mark and Karin. 24mins, 6m. Started 10:21am.

Mark and Karin were first in, and set off heading south. They surfaced having travelled about halfway and slightly west, reporting very poor visibility as they descended down. They found a surface layer with visibility of around 0.5m down to a depth of perhaps 5m, but below this a thick, black, almost soup-like suspension of organic silt. The lower shelves of the pit appeared to have been filled in over the years with plant matter and unfortunately this was completely impenetrable – we could not get down into it safely without knowing what was in it! Visibility was zero, and even torch light was lost in the murk. Since we had not yet seen the east side of the lake, they dropped back down and attempted the West-East bearing, based on their new location, but were unable to get much further.

## Dive Two: Jan and Adam. 21mins, 9m. Started 10:31am

Jan and Adam attempted the North-South bearing again, and had no more luck than Karin and Mark. They were able to locate the bottom in the middle of the quarry, at a max depth of 9m. On their return, they did locate what appeared to be the remains of an old car axle in the north bank, but no machinery. There were also a number of other items found – see map.

## Dive Three: Greg and Adrian. 36mins, 6m. Started 11:14am

Swapping over the surface cover with Mark, Greg and Adrian set out for the east side of the lake. They found that the poor visibility layer began roughly as the gravel shelved down past 5m, and so followed this depth contour all the way round the lake. Adrian had used an old phone attached to the SMB to give us GPS data for this swim, and so provided us with a 5m contour of the lake. On their travels, the buddy team found an old truck tyre, but little else. On their journey back, they investigated one area that fishermen had reported losing line in. The likely suspect was a rough area of stone or concrete, covered in weed and many fishing line sections, roughly where they had identified.

## Dive Four: Stuart and Jan. 34mins, 6m. Started 11:14am

Stuart and Jan had arguably the most successful dive of the day. Heading west on a 4m deep contour (slightly higher up in the gravel bowl), they located a tank with pipes running down into the depths (machinery!), the old car and an old bike, and other debris. They also found a huge freshwater mussel shell, evidence of healthy life in the pool! Jan again used his phone in an Otterbox to obtain GPS data on this route.

From the data we obtained, we have produced a rough contour map of the Deep Pool. Many images and videos were also obtained, but unfortunately points of interest and even fish (so abundant jumping on the surface!) were elusive! This information we can pass on to the rangers and fishermen of Milton Country Park. A more detailed mapping project may follow in the future, but for now we can submit a contour map of the lake, fishing platforms and a few of the objects of interest we located. We were also able to hand the rangers the freshwater mussel shell; more evidence of healthy and abundant life in these pools.

It is hoped that, following the positive experiences of the day on both sides, CUUEG will be able to return to Milton Country Park for further work, in the other lakes on the site. There is also the possibility of using the watersports lake for early diver training, if conditions are found to be suitable, which would be a very useful option for the training officer. This would also allow us to continue a healthy collaboration with the park and help contribute to the wider community around Cambridge.

Mark Hallworth kindly created two maps of the site (download) which were given to the team at Milton.

Many thanks to everyone who made the Milton Country Park work possible!

Greg Steele

24/10/13

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