

# Farne Islands - 22nd to 24th of November

Trip report by Harry Braviner

Divers:

- > Ruth Charles
- > Harry Braviner
- > Matt Watson
- > Mareike Wiedmann
- > Amanda Dalby
- > Jan Lellmann
- > Stuart Moore
- > Mark Hallworth
- > Lars Dolken
- > Christopher Rafaluk
- > William Thom
- > Karin Muller

Last weekend the club headed to the Farne Islands, off the coast of Northumberland, to go diving with seals. Ruth has organised such a trip for several years in a row now, many thanks to her for putting in the time to make this happen.

The club made their way down from Cambridge (Leicester in the case of Chris) on Friday evening and stayed in the Springhill Farm bunkhouse near Seahouses. Bright and early on Saturday morning we assembled on the harbour with our kit and waited for Sovereign Diving to show up with the boat and cylinders. Loading the boat went smoothly and we were soon on our way, assembling our dive kit en route to the islands. At this point some traditional CUUEG faff occurred, with my regulator leaking, being swapped for another regulator. The high pressure hose on this looked close to burst, so some brief cannibalising took place before I had a working set of kit. Always remember to bring spares!

On dive number 1, at Big Harcar, divers dropped down to about 8m initially and followed the wall and various gulleys. Mark and Jan reported some seals, but not a huge amount of interaction. While at about 6m depth I saw a seal emerge from below and swim straight up, passing about 4 feet in front of me. Myself and Chris surfaced briefly to check our location and were investigated by a seal that swam around us for a bit, but kept its distance. Mareike lost her GoRpo on descent, but found it again. Mareike and Ruth ended up in current and poor visibility, and launched their DSMB and surfaced. My attempt at a DSMB launch was not my finest hour - I failed to check that the line was free to run, and discovered that it would not unreel only after inflating it. Chris and I located and recovered it after surfacing. Matt and Lars saw mostly kelp and rocks for the first half-hour, before encountering a dozing seal and being buzzed and nibbled by several others.

After a surface interval of just under two hours we re-entered the water at Blue Caps. I joined Jan and Mark for this dive, since Chris's drysuit had sprung a leak. The visibility was just as poor, at about 3 meters. We encountered a few seals on this dive, mainly swimming past us. Mareike found a seal nibbling on her fins, and Ruth was repeatedly buffeted and pushed by what she suspects was a seal. In general divers reported a few more swim pasts on this dive. There also seemed to be a bit more life at this site, with small corals and urchins covering the walls. Matt and Lars had a much more successful dive this time. After about 20 min at depth they ascended and headed into a small bay, where seal after seal turned up to investigate them, and much nibbling of fins occurred.

The evening was spent in the Olde Ship, a lovely pub next to the harbour with wonderful food and even more wonderful ale. After retreating back to the bunkhouse, Ruth discovered that the wifi was insufficient to stream Doctor Who, to the disappointment of many of us. After briefly watching I'm A Celebrity Get Me Out Of Here, someone brought out a DVD about Jacques Cousteau, a pioneering diver and biologist from the 60s. This may well have to feature in a CUUEG movie night, possibly under the heading of "how not to treat the marine wildlife"...

Arriving at the harbour on Sunday, we found the weather had deteriorated. The wind was considerably stronger than Saturday, and the waves much bigger. The second day of diving was called off and we collected out kit from the boat. Not wanting to waste the day, we went for a walk on the beach near Bamburgh Castle, and then headed to Alnwick to Barter Books. It's an enormous second hand bookshop, with a model railway running along the top of the bookshelves.

Overall, one good day of diving (with a very helpful boat skipper who had tea and coffee waiting when we surfaced) and one blown out day that we made the most of.

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