

The Hyperbaric Times

A Message From The Editor

Welcome to new issue of the Hyperbaric Times.

We have a full packed edition with stories and dive reports.

On page 11 you will find the social events that have so far been arranged for the rest of this year. If there is anything that you would like to see happen that doesn't appear on the list then let Irina know and she'll see what she can do about arranging it.

Finally, the Diving Schedule has recently been updated so take a look at it to see what's on offer. You'll find it on page 12. If you're interested in joining one of the dives then contact either Mike Wade (Orientation Dives) or Bryan Johnston (Club Dives) to check availability. Even if the dive is full it's still worth contacting them as spaces often become available nearer the time and a reserve list is always held.

Happy diving.

Caroline



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The views expressed in the articles in this newsletter are personal and should not be taken as representative of The Diving Club or its Committee, unless specifically stipulated to do so.

Chairman's Bulletins

The new Committee has met a few times since the AGM. To discuss many ongoing and some new topics. Not surprisingly, being a diving club, one of the topics was Diving. Bryan, who is the new Club Dive Organiser, went through some of the dives that he has scheduled in for next year. It looks like it will be another exciting year for diving, with trips scheduled to some new places and some of our traditional haunts. Some are now on the website, more will be added when we have full confirmation from the different skippers. For more information, go the [Diving Schedule](#) or email [Bryan](#). Please remember that the calendar has guidelines as to the level of qualification and experience needed. For those members who are new to diving, the Experience and Orientation schedule will be released soon.

The Experience programme that was developed last year is to continue, but will only succeed with the support of more experienced members. Anyone who is Rescue qualified and would like to assist with the programme, which is designed to help newly qualified divers make the leap into the UK seas, please get in touch with [me](#), or Mike. Similarly, if you are a newly qualified diver, returning diver, or a diver new to diving in the UK and feel you would benefit from some simple shore and boat dives, to a maximum depth of 8-12m, please contact one of us. These dives are run to demand, so may not always appear on the schedule.

The Club also has a good Social calendar. Details of upcoming events can be found [here](#).

On more administrative matters, please take time to read the '[Guidelines for Club Dives](#)' and the '[Children and Young People policy](#)'. They are both on the website and it is in the interests of safety and consideration of other people that the two documents have been produced.

The website also has a forum section, which is a great way of communicating with other members, for information, to organise dives or ask questions on kit or any other subject. When you are on the website looking at the dives and social events, why not drop in to the forum and have a look at some of the topics that have been discussed recently.

I am looking forward to seeing you over the coming months, either on dives, social events or club nights. I am also a regular visitor in the shop – so please say hi.

Best wishes and safe diving

[Morag Ward](#)

[Chairman](#)

[The Diving Club](#)

About the Committee

Rosie Darbyshire—Club Secretary

Rosie learnt to dive in Thailand about 18 months ago and then managed not to do any for a year, as she was in the process of moving back to Reading. So really, she has only actually been diving for about 6 months.

Once Rosie decided to get going again she went all out and signed up for a tune up, an Experience dive at Stoney Cove and the Christmas Party part 2 within the first week. Rosie did find UK diving a bit of a shock to the system, and was very grateful that Matt and the rest of the group were there for support.

Since then Rosie has been on some more of the Experience dives and even ventured into the sea on a couple of occasions. On all of these dives it was great to have the benefit of Matt, Andrew, Bryan and Nigel's support and guidance and to be able to share the excitement and nerves with other new divers. She is definitely still getting used to it and, is still finding she is enjoying the diving a lot more. Rosie has found the club really helpful and supportive, with people happy to share their good and their not so good experiences with you. The Experience dives have been invaluable for her, as she has been able to gradually build up her confidence and managed drop a third of the weight that she had been carrying due to excess flapping. Next year she plan to do a couple more Experience sea dives and then may even progress onto some of the Orientation diving!

Tim Lowe—Club Treasurer

My first diving experience was on holiday in Cuba back in 2000 when we had a 'free Scuba Lesson' in the pool of our hotel. For someone who didn't learn to swim until in his 30's and for whom a lifelong fear of drowning had to be overcome, my first impression of Scuba was of the complete freedom it offered – how fantastic to be able to potter about under water and not have to hold your breath!!

We signed up for an experience dive as a result of the pool session and, ironically, it was my wife, who swims like a fish, can dive down to the bottom when she's snorkelling and who water ski'd for years, was apprehensive and wanted to dive from the beach.

The Dive shop, who just wanted the business and who probably weren't regulated in any way said 'sure' and so when we were taken on a pretty impressive boat and told to kit up some way off the shore, she started to get suspicious.....the upshot was that I got two dives and she snorkelled. My first dive experience – with no formal training, was a backward roll off the boat (just like the movies!)

And a descent to 15m. The second dive was (allegedly) 25m – not bad for an experience dive!!!

Roger and Clare Selwyn

Clare and I came to diving in 2003 after she finally organised me into booking onto a open water course via DiveStyle. Previous to taking up diving, we had both been involved in English Civil War re-enactment, myself having 'joined up' in late 1982 whilst at university. In 2003 it was really time for a change. We has previously done a try dive with my brother, and had already decided that this was something wanted to get into. Since our initial OW course, we have both followed a very similar route, with AOW and Rescue in 2003. Deep/wreck/nitrox in 2004 in the lead up to our first 'big' trip to Scapa Flow in summer 2004. We have then gone on to become Dive Master, and then venture into the 'Technical' world through TDI training. We have both done about 250 dives, and have to mix our desire for diving regularly, around our son (Benjamin) who was eight years old when we started, and who has now joined us as a Junior AOW diver but feels the cold of UK waters. On the website front, I come from a computer programming background, but have now moved into the business of selling 'IT' to various government and commercial companies around Europe, hence my time away in Italy. 10 years ago I set up a website for my re-enactment group, which I have now passed on, as I have moved out of that hobby. In 2004, I took on the webmaster role for the diving club when the club website was looking ancient. I believe we now have a website which enables communication across the club, and gives a good image to the outside world, of what we have to offer. The site also gives me the chance to use my old programming skills, and allows me a break from the paperwork of my day to day job.

Different perspectives

Portland. 8th and 9th of September

After a very disappointing summer, the weather finally clears and the visibility improves and the technical diving weekend in Portland is on!

This weekend has several factors in its favour. Firstly, the ropes-off time for both days is 1.30pm, so no stupidly early starts. When we arrive for a leisurely lunch in the sun, we find that the sea really is like a mill pond. We are a little short on divers, as some have had to pull out at the last minute, but with seven people on the boat there is plenty of room for all the twinsets and stage cylinders we have between us. So, at 1.30, a group of happy divers heads out for the first dive. This is to be the *Buccaneer*. She sits at about 46metres and, according to my computer, stands 7 metres high in places. For a wreck of this depth, we are all diving to pre-prepared plans and therefore, in theory, we know what our expected dive time is going to be. My buddy and I have planned a 30 minute bottom time and expect to be out of the water after 69 minutes. We write 75 minutes as our maximum time to allow for unexpected messing about. Since we are the only two on the boat using Trimix, we have the longest dive time and therefore have the honour of being the first in and the last out. The dive is stunning. This is the kind of visibility you brag about in the pub for years afterwards. The planned 30 minutes goes far too fast and before you know it, we are all back on the boat, smiling again and drinking hot chocolate in the sun. We depart to our hotels, B&Bs and tents for the evening and go to sleep hoping that tomorrow will be just as good.

As we all amble down to the Cafe in the Hotel Aqua for a healthy divers lunch (mostly chips and bacon) the weather is just as good and if anything, the sea is even flatter than the day before. Today we are to dive the *Empress of India*. The depth is the same as the day before, so not much difference in the dive plans. However, the *Empress* is a battleship, and these have a habit of landing upside down with all the interesting bits on the sea bed, so almost all of the dive will be at the maximum depth. For the purposes of planning and to give us a safety margin, we decide this will be 48 metres. Having had such a great dive the day before, my buddy and I re-plan using the dive planner on my PDA to try and get as much time on the bottom as possible. We discover that we can only extend our bottom time by 2 minutes at this depth without having to do a silly amount of deco stops. With our revised 32 minute bottom time, we record our maximum dive time as 85 minutes. The visibility is a disappointment compared to the previous day, but still fairly good for the UK. As we descend the shot line, the hull finally comes into view at about 35 metres. With at least 10 metres left to go to the sea bed, we get a good feel for the sheer size of the wreck. As we swim along the sea bed looking at the wreck, we find portholes that still have glass in them. Eventually we find what we are looking for. The large hole the salvage team have made in the side of the wreck. We tie a line to something major and start exploring. We run out of line disappointingly quickly and have to turn around and make our way out again, but even without seeing my buddy I can tell we are both grinning. Once again, the 32 minutes is up far too quickly and we start to make our ascent.

The combination of trimix, 48 metres and a 32 minute bottom time means we have lots of deco stops we need to go through starting at 30 metres. We pause for a minute at 30, 27 and 24 metres. Once at 21 metres, we stop for 5 minutes, switch to our first cylinder of EAN50 deco gas and put up an SMB. At this point, we have what is best described as a comedy moment. The day before, I had been on SMB duty and my buddy had been responsible for timing the deco stops. He has obviously done this a few times before and everything went perfectly. Today it was my turn to manage the plan. Normally, I write my dive plan on a slate and store it on my pocket. Because we re-planned on the boat, this time I had written my dive plan in my wet-notes book (a sort of waterproof note book).

Different perspectives cont

I tried to open the book and discovered that the pages tend to stick together and are a real bugger to get apart when you are wearing 5mm gloves.

Something that is so simple on the surface turns into something very hard at 21 metres while trying to maintain a constant depth. We tried for a while to get the thing apart, but eventually we decided it was a battle we were never going to win so we switch to using my computer. This is not a problem since the computer understands trimix and was happily keeping time for us all the while we were messing about.

We re-start the ascent, but by now we are behind schedule. I decide to have another go at getting the pages apart at the 15 metre stop and this just delays us further so I give up. My computer is still smiling and because we planned properly, we have plenty of gas between us, so we just do what the computer says.

We get to the 6 metre stop, which is where most of our deco time needs to happen. Twenty minutes of it according to my computer.

We both realise at about the same time that at the current rate, we will be in the water for longer than the 80 minutes we wrote on the sheet back on the boat.

At this point in the story, there are two perspectives to what happened next.

Divers

We know from listening to boat briefings that some skippers will automatically assume something has gone wrong if you don't surface within the time you write on the sheet. I remember being told by one skipper in Weymouth that if I was more than three minutes late, he would call the coast-guard. According to my computer, we will be 12 minutes late. Not wishing to cause any panic, my buddy takes my note-pad and writes "Will be late – No Problems" on one of the sheets of paper, ties it to his yellow backup SMB, clips it to the line of our main SMB and sends it up to the surface.

We relax, safe in the knowledge that everyone is back on the boat drinking hot chocolate and we prepare ourselves for all the "late" jokes we will get later.

Skipper

The skipper spots the yellow SMB. Technical divers normally use yellow SMB's to indicate that there is a problem and it's fairly common to attach a note to say what the problem is.

He cannot see the note as it is clipped to the bottom and is below the surface, so he assumes we are in trouble and decides to follow the correct procedure and radios for a helicopter.

Divers

We continue our planned deco completely unaware of the drama unfolding above.

Skipper

All the other divers are now at the surface, but the skipper won't pick them up because he has to stay close to us and wait for the helicopter to arrive. They are left to fend for themselves and face a long swim back to the boat.

Seven minutes after the radio call, the helicopter arrives.

Divers

We can hear the boat circling above but just assume it is picking up the others.

It is at about this time that I learn what a helicopter sounds like when you are underwater. It makes a very distinctive noise and sounds very different to a boat.

I cannot describe just how guilty I felt at that moment. The exact thing we were trying to avoid has happened. We still have another five minutes of deco left at this point and have no choice but to sit it out.

Different perspectives cont

The divers are all now back on the boat and have been joined by one of the helicopter crew. One of the divers gets back in the water with a spare deco cylinder and brings it down to us.

Divers

He meets us just as we start to head for the surface and we all signal that we are ok and begin our ascent.

By now we know what to expect but it is still a very impressive sight to surface and see a helicopter hovering off to one side. It is also impressive to see just how quickly the looks of concern turn to ridicule once we have told everyone we are ok.

After some apologising to the skipper and general piss-taking from the rest of the divers we head back to port and retire to the bar for a de-brief.

Although this turned out to be just an embarrassing incident, there are a number of things that we can learn from this.

Have agreed procedures in place.

We thought we were doing the right thing by attaching the note to the SMB and clipping it to the same line. To the divers, both SMB's on the same line with a note attached did not mean there was an Emergency.

However, the skipper didn't know that and interpreted the signal differently.

He was following his standard procedure, not ours, and he did exactly the right thing.

After the event the skipper said he knew we were ok because he could see us at the last deco stop. If we had not sent up the note or the SMB he would have just kept an eye on us and waited. However, this is completely at odds with what other skippers have said. With others the rule was very clear. If you are late, I will call the coastguard. As divers, we had to make a choice.

Talk to the skipper and tell him what your agreed procedure is and ask if he is happy with that as a plan. If he isn't, then adopt his procedures.

If you do clip a slate or a note to an SMB, clip it to the top.

The skipper didn't see the note because it was below the water line. If it had been attached to the top of the SMB, it would have been spotted and read and the whole situation would have been avoided.

This is also a matter of communication. If we had told the skipper that we normally attach a slate or a note to the yellow SMB, he would have gone looking for it.

Carry your plan somewhere that is easily accessible, or better still memorise it.

The whole fiasco with the notebook pages could have been avoided if the plan was on a wrist slate or if we had not re-planned on the boat.

Sometimes, re-planning on the boat can't be avoided. Have a plan for re-planning.

Buy the skipper beer afterwards.

The skipper is your friend and needs to stay that way. He's the one that has to fill in all the paperwork and justify why he called out the helicopter.

At the end of the day, we all took what we thought was the correct action. I would much prefer the embarrassment of a false alarm than the prospect of being in trouble and no one taking the situation seriously.. By Tim Burge & Dan Cocks

Portland 8/9 September

Saturday: Buccaneer 45m

Seven ruffy tufty divers managed to make it to Portland, with all the others booked on the weekend wimping out for one reason or another. The sun was shining and the sea was flat calm as we trekked out to the Buccaneer, a few miles out of Portland Harbour. We were on Goose, which is plenty big enough for those on board.

The Buccaneer is a 165foot tug that was towing a target and became a target itself. It lies in 45ish meters of water. The group got in in pairs depending on anticipated run times, so Tim and Dan went in first. Trimix has potentially hefty deco penalties, so they had the longest projected run time. Nigel, Matt and I went in second followed by Clare and Roger.

Our plan was to drop onto the wreck, turn left and sort of spiral our way round and up. It is small enough to do a complete circuit and then a bit more in the 30 minutes bottom time we had limited ourselves to. The visibility was excellent – around 10 or so meters. It was dark – well you would expect it to be at that depth – but we saw lots of the wreck. It is certainly one I would like to do again. The three of us stuck together and called it at 28 minutes, giving a couple of minutes leeway to send up the DSMB – vital for the skipper to be able to mark our position, we would be doing an ascent and decompression for over half an hour and with the currents turning, we could drift a long way from the wreck.

Back on the boat, we made our way back to Portland. The biggest mishap of the day was during the unloading process. I slipped and fell, banging my knee on some part of the boat. Luckily, no permanent damage was done to me or my twinset – but thank you Matt for getting it off the boat for me.

Sunday: Empress of India 45m

The Empress is the sister ship to the Hood, which is sunk in the entrance to Portland Harbour. Another wreck I was looking forward to diving on. Again, the sea was flat calm and the sun was shining. As we motored out to the site, we noticed the clarity of the water and we all had expectations of a fab dive.

The buddy pairings were the same as Saturday, and we went in in the same order. Planned run times were given to the skipper – they were more or less the same as the day before. The life on the Empress is abundant. Anemones, crabs, bib – allsorts. We found a very loose porthole, which, if another person had been there would probably have found its way into a pocket or bag, I expect!

Again, we called the dive and did our ascent. I finished my deco at 64 minutes. Matt had a couple more minutes, so I waited, ascending very slowly towards the surface. Nigel had a couple of minutes more than Matt, so he signalled to me to go up, whilst he waited for Nigel to finish. As I surfaced, I saw the boat some way away, and it was heading towards me very fast. I creepy feeling came over me, but I thought ‘Great – I can get on the boat quick and have a wee’. The skipper soon scuppered that plan.

The conversation went

Skipper: Are the other two OK?

Me: Yes, just finishing deco, they have a couple more minutes’

Skipper: Wait here I have a yellow DSMB up stay together, the chopper is on its way and will be here in 3 minutes.

My blood ran cold at that point. There was another orange blob close by, and as I was floating calmly worrying about other group members, I asked whose DSMB was yellow.

Skipper: The orange one has DLC on it.

Me: That is Dan. Which probably means Tim has a problem.

This was confirmed when Clare and Roger surfaced.

By now, Nigel and Matt had surfaced, and I explained what was happening. As it was Dan’s DSMB that was up, the problem was probably Tim’s.

The skipper then zoomed back to the only blob for miles. The sea was eerily calm and we floated in stunned silence for a few minutes and then thought about possible difficulties that the pair could be in. I was also thinking about the amount of paperwork, explaining to Dan's girlfriend, who was in Portland, and Tim's wife. We felt that the most likely scenario was that one of them had lost deco gas. The five of us had varying amounts of 80% nitrox. By litres, I had the most (80 bar in a 7l) and Matt came a close second.

As we were discussing this, we saw the helicopter come in. Top Gun went full speed away from us to enable the winchman to drop onto the deck. The boat returned to the site. The current was drifting us closer to the DSMB and we decided that we could make our way towards it – there was no way the boat was coming to get us – and ascertain the problem. Matt got there first. I don't know how he found out, but the sight of him doing a huge surface OK signal – none of this wimpy one hand on the head – was probably the best sight I have had for ages. The relief washed over me as I made my way to the boat. The five of us got on as quickly as we could, knowing that if the other two surfaced, they would be the priority. Whilst we knew they were OK, we didn't know just how OK they were, or whether they were just coping with a situation.

We dekked and put everything into a position that meant the chopper wouldn't blow things off the deck when it picked up whoever needed picking up. I was, by this time, frantic. What does 'OK' mean. I have signalled OK when it meant that whatever was wrong was being dealt with, or I was in the poo but nothing else could be done to help.

Finally, after what seemed like hours, Dan and Tim surfaced. The boat was so close to them that I was worried one of them wouldn't see it and bash their heads. They surfaced, apologised and explained. If you read the report – Different Perspectives – you will see how differently they saw it.

After the winchman had left and I had recovered from the shock, made sure the guys were OK, I had a bit of a chat with them... ok, we took the piss! In 4 years as dive organiser, I have never had an incident. The one incident there has been was when I wasn't there, and I was hoping to bow out of organisation with a clean bill.

Cheers guys

Morag Ward
Sept 07

Where?

When I told people about my upcoming trip to Palau, the majority simply looked at me and said “Where is that?” So, for the record, here's the answer:

Palau ([pronounced](#) /pəˈlaʊ/), officially the **Republic of Palau** ([Palauan](#): *Beluu er a Belau*), is an [island nation](#) in the [Pacific Ocean](#), some 500 miles (800 [km](#)) east of the [Philippines](#) and 2000 miles (3200 km) south of [Tokyo](#). Having emerged from [United Nations trusteeship](#) (administered by the [United States](#)) in 1994, it is one of the [world's youngest](#) and smallest nations. In 1989 Palau was ranked and listed by CEDAM International as the ranking Number 1 Underwater Wonder of the World out of the seven underwater wonders. It is sometimes referred to in English under its native name **Belau**.

[Wikipedia – Palau](#)

In late 2005, the local dive shop in Houston advertised a trip I could not pass up. They were booking an entire Aggressor live-aboard for a week of diving in the Micronesian paradise of Palau. I was the second name on the list. There was no way I was going to miss this trip.

Then, in January 2006, I got transferred to the UK.

Happily, finances, flights and dates all worked out and I was able to join the Houston group on October 12 for an 8,000 mile flight to the other side of the world. Add in the flights to and from London and I booked 26,000 miles and 55 hours of travel time. But the travel schedule wasn't the only exhausting item on the agenda. I managed to squeeze 23 dives into just 5 days. Needless to say, when the pool was open I was in it. The Aggressor motto is “Eat, sleep and dive.” I managed to get two of those. I saved the sleeping for the flight home. What can I say... It was worth it!

The hardest part of the trip is now, trying to find words to describe the events of the week. That's the problem with these things. The words used to describe them are something less than a pale shadow of what I really saw. Pictures are likewise so much less than the real thing. There are images in my memory to which I simply can't do justice. But I'll try to share it as best I can.

We landed in Koror on Saturday evening after flying from Houston to Honolulu to Guam. About 17 hours of air time and maybe 22 hours of clock time. We checked into the hotel and relaxed at the bar, draining their remaining stock of two quite palatable ales, all of us eager to get to the boat the next afternoon. Sunday morning was our own so we hired taxis to take us to see the island. As chance would have it, our taxi stopped at a small cafe for drinks and there it was... our home for the week docked not 100 yards away. It was hard not to just jump in and swim over but we resisted the temptation.

Finally, the bus arrived to take us to the boat and the week got started for real. As soon as we were all on board, the boat cast off and we sailed out of the harbour to our first night's resting place. That evening we met the most important man on the boat ... the cook. Scott was a genius in the kitchen and he made sure that there was no chance to lose weight during the week. Captain Mike introduced the crew and everyone settled in for the evening. We went to bed early, knowing we would be up for a 7:30 dive, only to be woken at 3:00 AM for a magical sight. Feeding on the plankton drawn to the lights of the boat were 5 or 6 huge manta rays. By the time we got to breakfast there was no doubt that this was going to be a great week.

The diving ran from Monday to Friday. My body clock is a fickle and uncertain thing and for this week it decided that 5:00 AM was more than late enough to start the day. So Monday morning (ok, every morning) found me on the top deck trying to get the perfect sunrise picture. My schedule looked something like this: wake, sunrise, breakfast, dive, dive, lunch, dive, dive, dinner, dive, beer, bed. I usually average 6 hours sleep at home so getting 5 or 6 a night was fine for me. But I'm still glad someone smarter than me invented Nitrox to keep my body working normally. Of the 16 divers on board, I think I was one of 3 that made every dive. I don't remember much chit chat during the days. I was far too busy logging the last dive and prepping for the next. More than enough time after the last dive to talk about what we'd seen during the day.



So, what was the diving like? Ok, that's a hard one. Imagine hooking yourself to bare rock at the edge of a drop into the very deep deep (the walls in Palau generally run about 900 feet). A powerful current blows up the wall and over the top pushing you against the hook line. The water sounds like a rushing wind in your ears, like driving fast with the window open. You relax and float and try not to turn your head too much in case the current tries to snatch the mask off your face. Now add an untold number of fish of a myriad of species, all swimming peacefully with the dozens of sharks that stroll through the water as if there was no current at all. That's hook diving in Palau.



Photo by Paul Schmeider (with permission)

Or maybe you jump in and drop down a vertical shaft 20 feet across. Far below you see the blue light shining in through your exit point. When you reach the bottom you find a cave filled with coral fans and a variety of other hard and soft corals along with thousands tiny fish in rainbow colours. You swim out to the wall and find an immense tapestry of even more colours, covered with nudibranchs and fish and turtles and more sharks. The colours are simply overwhelming and everywhere you look is indescribable beauty. And after 60 minutes you just want to stay for another 60. The walls in Palau are stunning.

Or you hit the black water and turn your torch on and wander slowly across a sand flat of small coral outcrops filled with all the denizens of the night. You wake a sleeping napoleon wrasse or turtle tucked into a small (or not so small) cave. Hidden and almost invisible in the coral are crocodile fish, scorpionfish and lionfish just waiting to be found. The floor is alive with partner gobies and their shrimp house mates. And dotted around like brilliant flecks of paint are nudibranchs in blue and yellow and green and white and black and a dozen other colours. Night dives don't get any better.

Photos by Chuck Mason (with permission)



Like I said, finding words to describe the diving in Palau is difficult. How do you adequately describe watching manta rays turning somersaults above your head as they feed? Or the moray eel that swims out of the dark and through your torchlight in its quest for food or a quieter place to take a nap? Or the colourful quilt of an entire wall of hard and soft coral? The dives are all different and yet all the same. They are all magnificent.

Unfortunately, the trip had to end and before I knew it we were drying our gear in the sun and idling away the last hours at the dock. Some went into town for shopping or more sightseeing. I was exhausted and spent the day relaxing and reading and trying to get just one picture that really showed what I was seeing. It didn't work. They just don't make a camera for that. After a last day on land we were packed back into the bus and taken to the airport to start the long flight home. And just like that the holiday was over.

In his talk at the club night, Monty Halls said Palau was his favourite blue water diving. I guess I just found out why. I'd be happy to go back. Anyone else feel like making the journey?

Bryan

Whale Shark school in Djibouti

At the Horn of Africa, south of the Red Sea, Djibouti was a French colony until gaining independence 30 years ago. The French Foreign Legion is still there, as are their navy and airforce. We did hear explosions and shells being fired one day. Water visibility during November to February is around 10 metres because of suspended plankton but this is why the area is frequented by filter-feeding whale sharks, and what a lot there are.



Travelling with my buddy, Martin Moore (not a club member but has dived the Farnes with the club), we found ourselves on the plane sitting with John McIntyre, ex-BBC foreign correspondent, who would be filming our week in Djibouti for the BBC (should be broadcast around February). Arriving at the harbourside of Djibouti City around 7.30 am on the first morning we were transferred to our typical Egyptian liveaboard and set off to Maskali island for two dives that day. We had three dives on each of the next four days and then two dives the day after that. On three-day days we spent a couple or more hours between dives searching for whale sharks from our two fibre-glass outboards. A relaxing week it was not, but a fantastic opportunity to be in the water with these gentle giants it most certainly was. The water temperature varied between 28-30 °C so you never got cold waiting for the next shark to pass.

The first time we spotted a whale shark the whole pack of us slid off the boats (no jumping or screaming) and pursued our quarry. After that we became more relaxed about seeing sharks as we realised there were plenty more and that it was particularly magical to have one, or two, or three to yourself. Sometimes the sharks were in a determined mood to press on, and even though they swim with gentle waves of the tail it is quite difficult to keep up and eventually everyone resigns themselves to seeing that tail disappear. But other times the whale sharks are determined to feed and will move in circles or go up and down the same patch so that you can wait for their return. If you are lucky they will tilt on a 45 degree angle and suck the water so hard that you can see a vortex of air swirling into their huge gobs like water going down the bath plug hole.



Other fish stay with the whale sharks, presumably for protection and a free ride. You will know of pilot fish and remoras but there were also shoals of small yellow fish that would get swallowed occasionally but appear again out of the gill openings. On a couple of nights we were visited by whale sharks attracted to the lights of the boats, or rather to the plankton so attracted. There would also be numerous swimming crabs attracted by these lights but when these got swallowed by the sharks, after a 2 second delay they were belched straight back out.

Night dives were very pleasant and easy, just follow the stern or bow line to the reef shore and turn right or left. We'd dive about an hour after sunset and before dinner, which suited me but isn't the best time for a night dive. The feather stars were still getting into position and the sleeping parrot fish had not yet constructed their mucus balloons. Lionfish and Fire lionfish were common, there were some very odd sea cucumbers and a wonderful yellow banded cuttlefish, but this is not a part of the world for Spanish dancers. Of course the rich plankton meant that the bioluminescence was as good as British waters.



Djibouti is shaped like a Munchman, surrounding the funnel-like Gulf of Tadjourah. Starting at the widest part of the mouth our boat made its way down the funnel, calling in on both sides of it. Reaching the enclosed Sea of Goubet at the end and then returning back to Djibouti City. The diving was not as challenging as shark watching in the southern Red Sea but the coral is in excellent condition and we only saw one other diving boat during the week, on one day. They were French divers and as Martin and I were returning we saw three of them with eyes closed and holding hands over rocks, presumably thanking God for seeing the whale sharks. Turtles were another relatively frequent sighting,

above and below water, others saw a guitar shark and very large rays that the French called Morbilla (sounded like that). The diving was very good but you wouldn't come here just for that, it has to be your wish to swim with whale sharks. Perhaps for this reason every diver was very experienced and had dived the Red Sea and beyond many times.

On the penultimate day we left the boat and put up in the Djibouti City Sheraton, a pleasant enough place after you've been to see what the city has to offer. On the day of departure (at midnight) most of us opted to take an organised bus tour back to the area of the Sea of Goubet to see some of the remarkable landscape of this dry, volcanic region where the tectonic plates of Africa and Asia meet. There are deep canyons, mountains and the third deepest land area in the world where an exotic salt lake, Lac Assal, reflects the brilliant sun. There were small groups of locals at each tourist viewing point who would try and sell you geodes, gypsum, salt or even a gazelles skull and horns completely covered in salt crystals. These were far better souvenirs than the merde on offer in Djibouti City. Returning on the bus we saw truck loads of camels, like you do in Egypt. Someone was wondering what the collective term for camels was, I suggested Camelot.

Photos of whale sharks and the crab were taken by Dr. Fergus Kennedy, marine biologist and superb photographer. Visit www.pbase.com/diaspora/whalesharks to see more of the photos he took on this trip.

Social Events Calendar

Here is the list of up coming events:

The Diving Club Reading Photograph Competition 2007

The 2007 Photograph competition will take place on the February Club night – Monday 4th Feb. Over the last couple of years, we have had some excellent entries. The committee has decided that the categories will be slightly different this year. We have 5 instead of the usual 3. The first 3 remain as they always have, but category D must have been taken in UK waters – coastal or inland, wreck, diver, fish – your choice. The final category, E, can have been taken on any club trip in the year. Whether it is diving, or social. Underwater or dry – either will be fine. The only rule here is that the photograph must have been taken on a club dive trip.

Please send your photos to Morag Ward (chairman@thedivingclub.co.uk) by 27 January. The photographs will be shown and judged at the club night. Judging will take place on a slightly different (and hopefully quicker and easier) format than last year.

If anyone has any questions or needs clarification, please contact any committee member.

The Rules

1. Each member is entitled to enter one photo in each of the 5 categories.
 - a. Diver
 - b. Aquatic Life
 - c. Wreck
 - d. UK Diving
 - e. Club Trip
 - f. Alterations of a minor kind are allowed (e.g colour enhancement is fine, but major changes are not).
 - g. The photographs must have been taken during 2007. For category D, the photo must have been taken on a UK dive and for Category E, the photo must have been taken on a Diving Club trip.
 - h. The competition will, as usual, be judged by those members attending the club night on 4th February 2008

Photographs should be in electronic format – eg .jpeg. Any member who is unable to produce them as such will be allowed to enter a printed photograph.

The Committee
The Diving Club, Reading
December 2007

For all social events please see the website for more details or contact Irina

Irina
social@thedivingclub.co.uk

Diving Schedule 2008

Start Date	Days	Venue	Free Spaces	Description
23/02/08	2	Cold Water Special (All cert levels)	Unlimited	Diving Club Winter Tour – Leg 2 (Cold Water Special) Location: Stoney Cove
08/03/08	2	Winter Tour - Leg 3 (All cert levels)	Unlimited	Diving Club Winter Tour – Leg 3 Location: Chepstow NDAC
05/04/08	2	Swanage (AOW)	6/7	Swanage Boat: Swanage Diver or Smooth Hound Cost: £40 per day Diving: Boat diving. Depths to 25/30m
19/04/08	2	Technical Dive - Weymouth (AOW++)	10	Weymouth Boat: Scimitar Cost: £50 per day Diving: Boat diving. Depths to 45/50m. Specific dives to be confirmed.
26/04/08	1	Brighton (AOW+)	8	Brighton Boat: Brighton Diver Cost: £40 Diving: Boat diving. Depths to 40m.
03/05/08	3	Babbacombe Bay (All cert levels)	Unlimited	Babbacombe Bay Location: Babbacombe Bay
17/05/08	2	Technical Dive - Brighton (AOW++)	9	Brighton Boat: Brighton Diver Cost: £50 per day
24/05/08	3	Manacles (AOW)	4	Manacles, Cornwall Boat: Celtic Cat Cost: £219 per person (3 days diving + B&B accommodation)
31/05/08	2	Portsmouth (AOW+)	9/10	Portsmouth Boat: Wight Diver Cost: £40 per day
07/06/08	8	Scapa Flow (AOW+)	FULL	Location: Scapa Flow Boat: MV Valkyrie
27/06/08	1	Portsmouth - Moldavia (AOW++)	3	Portsmouth Boat: Wightdiver Cost: £50 per day
12/07/08	2	Plymouth (AOW+)	10	Plymouth Boat: Cee King Cost: £118 (diving & accommodation)
26/07/08	3	Farnes (AOW)	12	Farnes Boat: Glad Tidings VII Cost: £35 per day (must book all three days)
23/08/08	3	Plymouth (Tech dive) (AOW++)	12	Plymouth Boat: Seeker Cost: £45 per day

Membership Matters!

Membership Matters!

Members who have joined since the last HBT are: Ian Gosling, Tim Filtness, Cheeragi Patel, Steve Heneghan, Michael Jackson, Steven Skelton, Hugh King, Trevor Skeates, Christine Gonzalez, Anne Luneburg, Gareth Carroll, Helen Stacey, Rachel Kirby and Matthew Kirby.

If you see any of these folks in the pub or on a dive, please make them feel welcome.

We are now at a total of **143** members.

If you have not received an email notification of this newsletter, please let either myself or Caroline Kennedy (Publicity Officer) know – there may be a mistake with your e-mail address.

If your contact details have changed in anyway, don't forget to let us know. You can also change your email address via the website.

E-mail: membership@thedivingclub.co.uk
Your Club Website is: <http://www.thedivingclub.co.uk>

THE DIVING CLUB

**We're on the web:
www.thedivingclub.co.uk**

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Mike's Waterfront Warehouse
Maiden Lane Shopping Centre
Lower Earley
Reading
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Fax: 0118 926 9616
Website: www.divestyle.co.uk**

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