

Croydon BS-AC 23

The Muddy Puddle

Sept 1999

Plymouth '99

August '99 will be remembered for two things in BSAC 0023 history, abysmal and a terrific August Bank Holiday weekend in Plymouth. While parts of Britain experienced the wettest August on record, the skies cleared above the South Devon port of Plymouth to deliver a cracker of a weekend.

The weekend began with several die-hard divers entering the town early Friday evening, in an attempt to establish a recon party to find suitable evening entertainment. However as usual the group was waylaid within a hostelry or two.

The main guard of Croydon BSAC arrived latter in the evening and generally failed to capitalise on the misfortunes of those buying drinks at the bar.

With a large percentage of the club interested partaking the underwater activities in Plymouth, 2 hard boats were required, Storm and Excalibur. Excalibur was known to the club from a previous venture to Plymouth, both it and Storm are small in comparison to the hard boats usually used by the club in the Brighton area, thus restricted in the use of dive boxes. Nor was Excalibur known for it's speed, as both canoes and yachts speed past her. With a cramped and slow boat diving can become uncomfortable, however with a light hearted crew, excellent skipper and perfect weather the ordeal was far from torture.

Storm was a faster, and slightly larger vessel, but with an equally good crew and skipper, and made the most of it's superior speed in reaching dive sites first.

As this was the first time much of the club had come together since Weymouth, tongues began to loosen and tales were told of anyone foolish enough to listen. Tales of far away shores, wrecks encrusted with brass, congers so large as to be able to encircle an aircraft carrier. All absolute hogwash, the worst were tales of diving in Malta told aboard Storm, and I have it on good authority that the word Nitrox was mentioned on more than one occasion aboard Excalibur.

Most divers behaved themselves, although some did step over the mark as regards to diving activities and acts of blatant stupidity, but will be dealt with in the Diver of the Month section.

The diving was probably the best most members experienced all year, especially as the first site was the legendary Eddystone. The viz was around 15m in places, with the depths varying from 6m to over 40. The boulders and reef are covered in a forest of kelp in the upper reaches whilst become less abundant deeper down. Wrasse all types careered around unbothered by the alien invasion, Dogfish too, carried on about their business.

After such an excellent start many believed things couldn't get any better. But for those luck souls aboard Storm, heaven came to earth for an hour or two when hot drinks were complemented by freshly cooked steak pie and a mountain of sandwiches, crisps sweets and fruit. The only interruption was the sound on rumbling stomachs from the starving Excalibur.

The second dive of the day was upon the legendary James Egan Lyan, a mecca for divers, with excellent marine life (including John Dorys), fantastic condition of the superstructure, lack of depth and excellent light.

That evening many happy souls were to be found in the bars and hotels of Plymouth, but happiest of all were the members of Croydon Bsac, however the drinking was curtailed as not to adversely effect the diving (which must have

been a first for this club).

Over the final two days the pair of boats went their separate ways although both boats visited, The Mewstones, the wreck of the Pershia and another excellent site Hand Deeps, a large pinnacle of rocks and boulders rising from the deep. It was here in excellent 15+m of viz that many divers went further than they had before, with some exceeding their qualified depth ratings, although to no adverse effect. Depths of over 45m were reached and I can confirm there was no need for a torch at these depths unlike if the same depths were to be achieved earlier in the year further east.

At all site the marine life was superb, and the viz never less than excellent. As the weekend drew to a close all of the instructors, boat handlers, skippers and most importantly organisers, were thank for the great weekend.

Further it was suggested that the club visit Plymouth for the Easter weekend rather than Weymouth next year. This was agreed at the recent committee meeting, providing the hard boats can be book and accommodation found.

Diver of the Month.

Diver of the Month has been a joy as I'm not in the running, a their have been so many contenders, all announcing their presence in Plymouth with one exception as the gearbox of the RIB's engine tried to make a late entry.

First there was the case of a Chris Sailes, when he was asked for the dive sheets, how much air he had, replied "A full tank". (Not a wise thing to say to the editor).

Then there was Pete Goldarce who rolled over the side of the boat whilst attaching his octopus to the gunnels, that could have been costly.

However there was really only two people in the running this month the fist was Gary Eason, who started by rolling off the boat so much that his head struck the hull. Then came his masterpiece, last month he watch Andy 'Pinky' Perront jump overboard for a swim only to realise that the water is not as warm as it when wearing a drysuit. At Plymouth, Gary leapt into the clear freezing waters of the channel, maybe he believed the earth had shifted upon its axis and the channel had suddenly been heated into a tropical ocean. When he surface, much to the cheers of his eager audience, the truth told upon his face, gasping for breath he realise there was no way back aboard Storm without the aid of his friends, after allowing him to swim around the boat they helped him back in.

But the DOM has to be Tom Maguire, former DO, Air God and role model to novice divers everywhere. Not the fact that he led a club diver to 42m, but for a small incident which rose the spirits of all aboard Storm. Picture the scene, early on a calm summer's morning on a quayside in Plymouth. Two boats moored side by side. The first, Excalibur, slips quietly away whilst those on the other, Storm, busy themselves loading diving kit. Excalibur fades from view, whilst still kit is loaded upon Storm. Ten minutes pass then across the gulf of the Sound comes Excalibur, her engines groaning under the strain of progressing at full steam. Sullenly she slipped back into port. All movement stopped aboard Storm.

Then a lone figure stepped aboard the quay, from Excalibur, his head held high, a smile upon his lips. Questioning looks from Storm ignored. Boldly he walked off to the car park. Then moments latter to reappear, with a dive box in his arms, his dive box. He calmly walk back to Excalibur, stowed his kit amongst howls of laughter from Excalibur.

Ladies and gentlemen I give you Tom Maguire DOM.

Hardboat Diving ? What? s it all about??

In order to avoid the many pitfalls scattered along the way, there are many guidelines that the seasoned campaigner must follow for successful Hardboat diving.

A successful dive starts from home. Let? s take a typical day for a BSAC 23 diver.

The first thing to do is get up. This is a stumbling block that many fall foul of. The next job is retrieving your kit from various corners of your house, shed or garage, where it has been lovingly stored. At this point it is to take the necessary medication ? seasickness tablets and Hangover cures ? that may be required, and get on the road.

After about 10 miles, go home and pick up your weight belt and restart the journey.

The next important thing is timekeeping. Arriving late is particularly important for our type of diving and it's fair to say that BSAC 23 members have got this down to a fine art. If it looks like you may arrive on time, stop for petrol, get a packed lunch, and buy a paper, anything to get behind schedule again. This will enable you to miss the dreaded 'Chain'. For the uninitiated, this involves helping to lug everyone else's kit onto the boat. The latecomer will skillfully avoid this.

Once aboard, it won't be long before the Dive Marshall collars you to dive with someone in particular. The correct response is to say "No problem? you'll dive with anyone on the boat". However don't forget to moan about it later? how it is always you blah blah blah?

The Dive Marshal will also be looking for a Dive Monitor. Avoid this job at all costs. Always be kneeling down, kiting up at the stern while the job is still available or better still suggest a suitable candidate at the earliest opportunity.

When the DM reveals the choice of destination, always look pleased and nod approvingly. However, once of earshot of the DM, moan about the dive site to the others. Repeat this for the second dive.

The all-important kiting up rituals should be learnt by all new members. Despite the differing people on the boat, some common strands of behavior can always be identified.

For example, when talcum powder is used, reference should always be made to Class A drugs, snorting etc. Should KY Jelly come out? and it always does? there is a rich vein of jokes to be exhausted.

If an unfortunate male diver bends over to innocently get something from his kit box, another male diver should creep up behind him and "goose" him in a homosexual fashion? all for a "laugh". This is a club rule.

At some stage SMB will be required. This provides for a stream of genital related gags? both visual and verbal? that cannot be missed. BSAC 23 members are particularly good at this and many have been caught on camera "in the act". It almost goes without saying that the ability to snigger at the smallest sexual innuendo is a skill that should be learnt as early as possible? probably at the mask clearing stage.

As responsible divers we should all know there are rules to be followed, both prior, during and after the dive. These can be summarised as follows.

Firstly the buddy check. Are there two of you? If there are you may proceed.

Secondly: depth. Always try to stop at the bottom, it is bad practice to try to go any deeper.

On a wreck, try to stay within 10metres of one another, especially when the viz is below 5metres.

Always check your buddy's air. Is he/ she using some? Is he/ she using yours?

After having kicked around the wreck for half an hour or so, spoilt the viz, killed some fish and tried to pull a section of sheet metal off the side of the wreck, it is time to go up. There are also important rules to be followed here as well:

Always aim to surface within 2minutes of one another, and never more than 100yards apart. Don't forget it should take 1 minute (at least) from the surface to the top of the ladder.

Once back onboard, we have the Hardboat ritual known as the "Surface Interval". Again some common behaviors can be identified.

This normally starts with the passing wind in your dry suit and getting your buddy to unzip you.

If anybody has managed to catch any form of Crustacean (normally small) at least two divers are required to go into crab joke mode. (See Hardboat 5 Sept 1999 Channel Diver).

If donuts are on offer at least one diver should find something strangely perverse about them (also see Hardboat 5 Sept 1999 Channel Diver).

It is important to always get your packed lunch out last ? and then only after wading through everyone else? s. If possible eat yours in the wheelhouse away from hungry divers.

If a bout of seasickness should come your way, always blame it on your cooked breakfast, whether you had one or not. Should anyone question this, aim some into their kit box ? that will shut them up.

The second dive passes much as the first, so that sadly the day? s Hardboat diving must inevitably to an end. As you chug back to harbour all that remains is to go missing at unloading time and to remember to short change the DM.

Driving home (after a lengthy stay in the local harbour-side pub) it is possible for the BSAC 23 diver to reflect on another days diving successfully completed within all the guidelines set out above. Who said standards were falling?

Scallops Tarragon

2 servings

1 lb Scallops

2 Tbs Butter/ Marg

1/4 cup Sliced green onion

1/4 tsp Dried tarragon, crushed

1 Tbs Dry white wine

Hot cooked rice

1. Cut Jumbo Scallops in half.
2. Rinse and pat dry with paper towels.
3. In a skillet heat butter or margarine over medium-high heat.
4. Add the green onion and cook and stir for 1 minute. Then push the onion to one side.
5. Add Scallops and tarragon. Cook onion and scallops for 5 to 6 minutes or until scallops are opaque and most of the liquid has evaporated, stirring frequently.
6. Stir in dry white wine. Serve with hot cooked rice.

Narced, well yes?

I knew I would be narced the night before the dive, we all new we would be effected by narcosis at the planned depth, but the question was to what extent and would we recognised the symptoms.

That previous night, the four of us, David "Sharky" Solomon, Jonathon "Beluga" Grisenthwaite, Dave "DIB" Elphic and I, abstained from consuming vast quantities of alcohol and tried to get a comparatively early night, but as usual not everything went according to plan.

I was awoken the next morning from my slumber by the boat's twin caterpillar diesel engines roaring to life and us crashing our way to Elphinstone Rocks at about 6am.

Elphinstone is a large rocky outcrop, running north to south, which rises from the depths of the Red Sea, over 800m to the surface. The central area breaks the water with a large coral reef over 200m long, with two submerged plateaus, one

north and one south, each starting at around 30m down. Rich currents ensure a great mixture of life.

As we breakfasted, we laid out our plans for the dive. Safety stops were worked out, order of divers, angle of approach and bail out scenarios. It was a type dive that only one of our number had attempted before, but many years ago, still we felt confident in our planning and our guide.

At 11:39 we entered the water, most of the other guest on the Liveboard had already started their dives around the East Side of the Elphinstone to a depth of 25m. We had other plans.

Our Task was to descend along the southern plateau to what is affectionately known as Elphinstone's Arch, which we would venture through. The previous year I had visited an arch in the Northern Red Sea and passed through that one, at a depth of 45m, however this one was to be a bit different.

I buddied up with Beluga, (Jonathan) and agreed to enter the arch last, the two Daves were before us and group was to be lead by James our German dive guide, who was sketchy regarding details of this dive before hand, Ken and a gentleman known as Wiggy.

We stepped off the back of the boat, and swam at a depth of 10m towards the plateau, then a short way south along the western side. The bright Egyptian sun pierced the blue of the sea, creating dancing shadows on the plateau 30m below. James signaled that we had arrived, I hovered and gazed into the depths beside the plateau, with 10m above me and 800m below there was only one way to go. James and his team started their descent, and then the two Dave's began their descent.

The reason for the 10m swim was to relax the body, sort out breathing rates and ensure there were not problems before the descent. I glanced over at Beluga, we had agreed to give the others a 1 minute lead, but I was now champing at the bit, I wanted to go now, my excitement was increasing my breathing rates. Beluga pointed to his watch I had to wait. I turned my attentions to my breathing and calmed down. The plan was whatever happened, we start the ascent with 150bar in our 12l tanks. I glanced at my gauge I had just over 180bar left; I didn't get a good fill today. Beluga motioned to begin; I assumed the typical skydiver position, dumping air from my jacket.

I dropped quickly, descending over the edge of the Plateau, Jonathon 5m behind me. I began to spiral in the currents, below me I could see the others doing the same. The bright almost gin clear waters gave way to vivid blue aqua, below me an abyss of deep purple and blue. At around 40 metres I felt the first noticeable effects for Narcosis, the air I was breathing became "heavy", a tint of flavour to it, although I cannot remember it? s exact taste I remember it was not too pleasant. Breathing physically became no harder, but psychologically it became very noticeable.

Still I dropped, glancing over my shoulder I could see the bulbous mass of Beluga behind me. Then I saw my target, the Arch of Elphinstone, I thumbed my inflate valve, as tried to fill the jacket with air. 7 metres latter I finally slowed and stopped my decent. The descent from 10m had taken 90 seconds.

There in front of my was not an arch, but a cavern through the rock, it's entrance was 10metres wide, it's insides black and daunting, but there in it's centre was the light from the other side, the exit, it's blue radiance calling through the darkness.

Beluga joined me at the entrance, transfixed by the object guarding the Arch, for it has been said that there is an ancient Egyptian sarcophagous of a long dead pharaoh, possibly placed there by people from other worlds. Well, all I saw was, a roughly rectangular piece of rock encrusted with hard and wire corals, not hieroglyphics, not Anubis's showing the way to the other side and definitely no Boris Karloff taking a small dip. Others, however, had different ideas, thus proving there are those who know when they're narced and those that don't.

I took my time to glance around, DIB was trying to take picture with his new u/w camera, but it being a bit out of it's depth decided it didn't want to work to well, nothing new there. Sharky in particular, believed that he saw the remains of the ancient Pharaoh? s tomb, and is steadfast in his opinion that little green men placed it there. (Living proof that narcosis can happen at any depth, even while on dry land.)

The colours at this depth are drab without the aid of natural sunlight, most are but shades of blue without the aid of a torch, but a rainbow of colour appears under the torch beam. Beluga latter commented "My blues/purples became "prominent, granular and acidy". Also, things generally felt metallic past 55m" what he meant was that the blues weren't a sharp as he expected, possibly due to narcosis. Although others didn't report any such feelings, and here in the half light I felt my vision was fine.

Ahead Dib was entering the Arch, in typical BSAC style he drop his left arm down to the lip of the entrance to try to get a greater depth reading. I found myself giggling at this act, and that I wouldn't do such a thing. The giggling I realise was narcosis induced, Dave and I often have a laugh together underwater but this was different. I tried to clear my head; one mistake here would be fatal. A minute later I entered the Arch, I too dropped my arm, the narcosis struck again. I raised it a checked my depth as I entered 57.9m, that I'll do I thought, as I entered then cavern, I switch my finning to autopilot and head for the distant spot of light.

I have heard stories of divers meeting Oceanic White Tip Sharks whilst in the cavern and been bumped and investigated by them, I however could have met a 3 Mermaids having a tea party in there for all I know. As my recollection is rather vague regarding my journey through, and this is probably the most worrying aspect of my narcosis, my memory loss. I have experienced it twice in my diving career, in both cases at depths over 40m and both times without incident, in both times my training and experience have pulled me through. I had kept calm and carried out the correct action, although I cannot remember clearly what I did. I can confirm that I was within sight of my fellow divers at all times and they notice nothing untoward.

I seemed to regain full memory facilities as I approached the other side of the arch, a journey of about 20m. There the rest of the group were, waiting for Beluga and myself, my brain snapped back in, Jonathon I thought, where was he? It was now that I realised I had been working on autopilot through the Arch. To my relief old Beluga, appeared just off to my right. I turned and noticed his distress flag was about to fall from his tank, so I signaled to him to turn around so I am replace it. His eyes grew as big as saucers; he was unclear of my actions and to his mind, didn't want some narced fool playing with his tank down here. I over came his protested and spun him around and replaced his flag, whilst noticing excessive bubbles coming from his reg. Slowly I backed away from his relieved form, and check my gauge, 150bar left. Jonathon despite his panic attack had used even less air from his tank, obviously living of the air bubble trapped in his brain.

Slowly we began to ascend my computer indicating that I was running out of no stop time. We successfully chased a no stop time until we reached 34m, just short of our first stop at 30m. The narcosis was wearing off; full cognitive functions were restored. I had time to recollect.

I was glad I had attempted such a dive, it taught me a good number of lessons. I am one, as many may know, who prefers a long shallow dive to short deep dive, but am not adverse trying new experiences. In my own mind I knew I was never danger, with the level of diver around me and my own experience I would never had done the dive if I hadn't felt confident. I have confirmed some of the ways narcosis effects me, and some of the ways it doesn't. Narcosis effects people different, as can be seen from Beluga's and Sharky?' s problems. I would say that I would never attempt this depth of dive in the UK due to stress loadings etc. But would I do it again out here? That would depend on several factors.

I continued my deco spending the next 45 minutes of this 65 minute dive at less than 15m, enjoying the wonders of the reef in all there glory. This was truly my favourite part of the dive.

Date : 8th Sept 1999 Place : Elphinstone, Southern Read Sea

Water Temp : 27C min.

Air Temp : 38C

Air : 265Bar 12lt

Suit :3mm wetsuit

Max Depth : 61m

Time : 65mins

Deco Done : 2mins@12m, 3mins@15m, 3mins@12m, 7mins@9m, 26mins@6m, 5mins@3m

Max Req'd deco : 2mins@3m.

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