

# BSAC EXPEDITION GRANT SCHEME (BEGS)

2009

ARDNAMURCHAN

Edinburgh University Sub-Aqua Club  
Expedition Report

Compiled by Paul Bullen

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## Acknowledgements

Thanks to every team member who contributed the expedition, including the planning and preparation (such as cylinder filling, engine and boat repairs). The expedition would not have been such a success without them or their assistance; yet again proof of the mantra which originated after the 2008 Cape Wrath EUSAC/BEGS expedition: “the best expeditions are made of great people and great diving”.

This report would not be complete without the charts produced for most sites from raw echo sounder data. Many thanks to Max Ruffert for working so hard to produce them—they make the report very valuable to other divers.

Thanks to Helen from Sonachan hotel for providing accommodation and a huge barn for us to run the compressors in to avoid the rain (but alas not the midges!)

Davie from Ardnamurchan Lighthouse for letting us into the lighthouse tower out of hours. The expedition is making a donation to the Lighthouse Trust by way of thanks.

Chris from Edinburgh Diving Centre for his help at the last minute in testing / fixing the compressors

## Content

This report is written to be a publically available, all-inclusive account of the trip as well as providing a reference and inspiration for future expeditions to the area. A short trip report is included for those who do not need background into the area or its facilities. It is hoped that future expeditions would build upon this document to keep it up to date. Hopefully this document will also be retained by non-diving residents of Ardnamurchan to be a reference for any visiting divers and also to provide a different perspective to the area they live.

## **PART 1: PREPARATION**

### ***Inspiration***

EUSAC (Edinburgh University Sub Aqua Club) is aiming to explore and publish details of diving the extremities of the Scottish mainland. After a very successful expedition to Cape Wrath in 2008, Ardnamurchan -being the most westerly part of the UK mainland and relatively undived- was a logical choice for exploration in 2009.

Many divers have dived the Sound of Mull, possibly further out to Coll and Tiree when the weather is good, however little diving has been recorded around Ardnamurchan. Given the quality of the diving in the more popular surrounding areas, the sites of Ardnamurchan definitely deserved exploration. The British Sub Aqua Club BEGS scheme provided vital funding to help such exploration go ahead.

### ***Objectives and style of expedition***

To explore and publish details of unknown or poorly documented dive sites / facilities around Ardnamurchan. Also, to develop dive leader and above level of diving within EUSAC as well as increase confidence and capability in the entire expedition team (12 divers) with exposure to more challenging diving by running a trip in a remote location.

The expedition was planned to be truly exploratory by being entirely self-sufficient: diving, boats, air and food, and therefore would be more demanding but hopefully more rewarding than a lot of other trips. EUSAC currently runs 5.2m inflatables with 40hp tiller engines as their diving platforms due to their flexibility in launching over less than ideal slipways and beaches which are found on such expeditions. Where 'squidgies' lack in speed, they make up for in being flexible—they can be carried from sea to trailer if necessary!

### ***Dive site research***

Very little documentation of diving in the area exists-this was backed up by discussions with residents who stated that they very rarely saw divers in the area, and those who they did see had travelled from Oban or Tobermory for a day trip.

Gordon Ridley's 'Dive North West Scotland' was of limited use, which included some scant details of sites and being long out of print, is unobtainable as a reference for the vast majority of divers.

An old Scotfed document regarding diving Bo Fasdale exists on the internet – this is a good starting point (link [here](#), or search for “Bo Fasdale Scotfed”).

The sites we dived were identified by poring over the charts and looking for interesting features such as pinnacles and walls. If something looked interesting, it ended up on a list of potential sites for consideration. It is nice not to have to consult a grumpy skipper about where the next day's diving is going to be, but instead having the freedom to explore wherever you like!

Despite the number of wrecks in the sound of mull area, there are very few wreck sites around Ardnamurchan peninsula itself. There was a very recent and very tragic trawler (the Aquila) sinking on the north side of the coast, not far from Sanna, early in 2009. This vessel has been refloated and removed from the area where it ran into difficulties.

## ***Maps and charts***

Admiralty chart 2207 covers the entire North coast of Ardnamurchan (1:50,000)

Chart 2392 covers the Western Entrance to the Sound of Mull, and details part of the south coast of Ardnamurchan to just east of Kilchoan / Mingary (1:25,000)

Chart 2394 covers Loch Sunart and so the South coast from Mingary to Strontian (1:25,000)

Of course, on any such expedition, the associated OS map for the area is invaluable, and OS Explorer Map 390 (Ardnamurchan) is ideal at 1:25,000.

## ***Kit Preparation***

Besides the usual preparation as needed for any expedition, this trip required the following additional preparation:

- Repairs of engines
- Repairs to boat hulls
- Repairs to boat trailers – new bearings, new jockey wheels
- Rigging the boats for self-sufficiency (towing bridles/righting lines)
- Preparing compressors for use, repairing one which had not been used for a number of years

## ***The divers and their roles***

(in no particular order)

Paul Bullen – expedition leader

Dr Amal Al Sayegh – head chef/medic

Graeme Kirk – boat manager of Macallan

Sian Griffiths – dive manager

Steve Czuprynski – chief compressor operator/instructor

Dr Max Ruffert – charting and mapping

Peter Swann – assistant compressor operator

Nix McDonnell – van driver

Michael Holliday – boat handler

Sarah Boys – photographer / van driver

Sasha Zachegriva – boat manager of Talisker

Ant Clifford – van driver

## The Ardnamurchan area

Ardnamurchan is the most westerly part of the UK mainland, to the surprise of a lot of people who think Lands End would claim that title. Below is a map of Scotland to show exactly where the peninsula is (red star).



### Access

Ardnamurchan is very remote and accessed by small roads, from the Corran ferry and then on to Strontian. From Strontian, the road becomes largely single-track, though some road upgrades are underway. The other way to access the area is either by ferry from Oban to Mull, or by a very long boat journey from Oban or Lochaline.

Kilchoan (the main village in the west of the peninsula) is approx 170 miles from Edinburgh, 80 miles from Oban (or 40 miles via Mull) and is situated at the north end of the Sound of Mull. Because of its remoteness, the locals say that Ardnamurchan is “Almost an Island”-and it certainly feels like that sometimes.

### Map of Ardnamurchan area

The map below hopefully provides some orientation for divers and outlines some of the larger settlements in the area. The main village is Kilchoan.



Further information on launch sites and facilities is given later in the document.

## The plan

### **Logistics:**

**Expedition dates:** 2 – 6 September 2009, leaving early on the 2<sup>nd</sup> in order to launch boats and dive on the first day.

### **Vehicles:**

After some initial calculations (see appendix III) it was clear that more than one van would be required to carry diving kit given the additional weight of two 5cfm compressors. As a result, the best combination was as follows:

- 1 transit-sized van, 3 people, for 25 cylinders and 2 compressors
- 1 transit van, 3 people, for remaining dive kit / weightbelts with towbar and boat
- 1 transit minibus for remaining divers and 'dry-kit', passengers with towbar and boat

**Accommodation:** Sonachan hotel, self catering / guest house. Very flexible on type of accommodation and on-site bar. Tel 01972 510 21, website: [www.sonachan.com](http://www.sonachan.com)



**Food:** EUSAC has a very strong team spirit on expeditions and believes in self-catering wherever possible. Cooking for ourselves is very sociable, and we have the flexibility to dive (and eat) whenever suits and as can be seen from the budget, the costs are significantly reduced. All food for the expedition cost just over £4 per person per day and we ate very well!

**Gas:** There are no compressors in Ardnamurchan; therefore the expedition had to hire two portable 5cfm sets from Edinburgh Diving Centre. As a result of some intensive training on the Cape Wrath expedition in 2008, there were already a number of compressor operators. Those who had not obtained the qualification sat the BSAC Compressor Operator course whilst on the expedition.

Filling with the two compressors worked well. If the surface interval permitted it, we often ran a compressor at lunchtime to at least get some of the cylinders filled and reduce the amount of evening filling required.

Due to the remote location, finding a place to run the noisy compressors was not too difficult and hopefully we did not disturb too many people!

As part of the logistic organisation, it was decided to use one van for all cylinders and two compressors. This van was not towing a boat and so the overall weight of the van was kept to a minimum. This also allowed the 'gas van' to be self sufficient and remain filling cylinders in one location whilst other vans could leave for other purposes.

The nearest compressor is in Tobermory (Seafare), which is about 10nm south of Ardnamurchan Point. There used to be a compressor in Glen Uig (at the Inn), however this is no longer available.

**Launching:** There is very little in the way of launching facilities towards the Western end of Ardnamurchan. Part IV details more about the facilities.

The initial plan was to launch on the north coast at Portuairk, and leave the boats on a three-point mooring each evening and motor the boats between locations where either people or kit could be loaded.

Due to the fact that one of the engines was under performing, and with the very poor weather, we often loaded boats at a convenient point with a minimal (but very able) crew and then drove vans round to a location nearer the dive site where passengers could board.

**Boats :** Due to the remoteness of the location plus the challenging conditions we would be facing, the boats were prepared to be as self-sufficient as possible and to be ready for assisting the other vessel. Improvements implemented were as per our previous BEGS Cape Wrath expedition:

Permanent strong towing/mooring bridles mounted from transom through bow

Permanent 'righting' lines attached across beam to allow for quick recovery after capsize

Separate kit lines for essential equipment (VHF, flares) in the case of capsize

**Diving Equipment:** Due to the planned sites involved as well as the expectation of 'large seas', divers were encourage to bring single cylinders to keep the weight of the boats down, which would also ease loading and unloading where no jetty or pier existed as well as reducing compressor filling times.

## PART II: SHORT EXPEDITION REPORT

### Pre-trip preparation

Due to lockup moves, the EUSAC boats had not been used for a number of months and were in a sorry looking state to say the least—their tubes were leaking and they looked more like deflated inflatable skips! For a number of weekends before the expedition, various team members sacrificed their time to rejuvenate the boats back to former glory. After lots of patching, tinkering with trailers and engines, the boats were markedly improved and were expected to float!

### ***Day 1, Getting there and Ardnamurchan lighthouse point***

The journey from Edinburgh to Kilchoan started early – half past 5 – and was thankfully uneventful, taking about 6 hours in total. There was some last minute creativity required to put a temporary mudguard in place—our previous mudguard had succumbed to the elements and had sheared off.



**Improvised mudguard... or did we run over a trainee?**

Once we arrived in Kilchoan, we started surveying places already identified from maps as suitable to launch the boats. Our preferred launch site was at Portuiark, towards the north of the peninsula. We soon discovered that although access to the beach was easy from the road, there was a distinct lack of water. After a 10 minute walk over a very sand and flat riverbed we could just about see the sea and soon concluded that although we are good at launching boats, this was a step too far!

Our convoy of vans headed towards the lighthouse to a jetty shown on the map. The jetty turned out to be a private facility attached to a house. After some discussion with the owner, he very kindly agreed to let us use his jetty and beach to launch. A quick journey and we were on site - excited divers kitted up quickly for a warm-up dive in the shadow of the Ardnamurchan lighthouse-pretty much as westerly as you can get! The site was good with lots of life to be found in crevices and ridges, such as stone fish, octopus, lobsters, conger eels, large shoals of small fish. The visibility was average but still gave a good impression of the site.



**Diving next to Ardnamurchan Point**

Despite poorer weather being forecast, we decided to stay on the north side of the area and so moored the boats, giving people the chance to practice with three-point mooring. Whilst we de-kitted, most of us were eaten alive by the dreaded midges.

Once back at the accommodation, we soon settled in and found somewhere to run the compressors, in the meantime other divers cooked dinner. This was to become our regular routine: everyone on the team took turns at filling bottles or cooking dinner, with the exception of the lucky person organising the next day of diving!

Whilst dinner was being made and bottles were filled, a scouting party went to visit places along the north coast to see where boats could 'put in' to load with people: Fascaidale bay identified as ideal for this. The weather was worsening and the rain was so torrential that roads soon became rivers! After dinner we headed to the on-site bar, which had apparently run out of most beers (they obviously hadn't heard about our reputation!), still we managed to find suitable liquids to refresh us after what had been a very long day.



**Filling cylinders and trying to avoid getting eaten by midges!**

## ***Day 2 Acarsaid Bheag and Bo Fascadale***

Thankfully, the weather had not 'turned' too much overnight and although deteriorating, we decided to aim for our intended dive sites. The boats were retrieved from their moorings and loaded with dive kit as well as a minimal crew. Remaining divers drove vans round to Fascadale Bay and with amazing timing, the boats arrived at the same time. Once everyone was in their drysuits, we motored the 5 miles through the swell to the prominent headland of Acarsaid Bheag. After some echo-sounding, we had found a fairly steep part of the wall and dropped in. The wall headed to about 20m, and some divers found a 'bowl' with ridges. Dotted around there were large shoals of fish, colourful spider crabs, ling, huge crab, octopus, cuckoo wrasse, scallops and even a trigger fish was reported!



**Diver examining spider crab**

We returned to Fascadale bay for lunch and to swap cylinders, which gave us a chance to run the compressors to refill some of the first-dive cylinders. Despite the increasing wind, we decided that Bo Fascadale was still possible as a second dive and soon were on the water heading north, everyone looking keenly for the starboard channel buoy which wards shipping away from this amazing pinnacle.

Bo Fascadale rises from 60m to 3m as confirmed by our echo-sounder. After a few minutes of sounding we placed the shotline right on the edge of the wall and the boats were buzzing with the pre-dive excitement of what was in store: everyone had seen the sounder trace and knew it promised to be a great dive. Upon entering the water no-one was disappointed, the wall was quite simply astounding—the visibility was excellent and everything was covered in life, as well a huge number of fish schooling. The wall looked like it had been formed from ‘squashed’ layers of rock and in the folds there was lots of life lurking—octopus, stonefish, ling, conger eels, flatfish, blennies, jewel anemones and various other squishy things that enjoy strong currents. Divers reported their “best ever wall dive” and “awesome afternoon of diving” amongst lots of other praise for such a memorable dive.



**Diver on Bo Fascadale wall**

On the surface, porpoise were spotted and an RAF fighter flew overhead—two of those magical moments which enhance an excellent dive in such a beautiful area.

Back at shore, the divers jumped off the boats and had the luxury of a smooth drive back to the jetty—which is more than can be said for the poor crews on the boats! The weather was definitely getting worse and it was obvious that our time on the north coast had finished.

The boats were moored safely near the jetty, and a surprise visit to the lighthouse was an excellent finish to a great day of diving. Ardnamurchan lighthouse is built in an ‘Egyptian’ style and one of the few lighthouses that still allow visitors into the light room. After climbing many steps, the view from the top



was breath-taking and provided a great orientation of the area. Definitely worth a visit! After some ‘team photos’ we headed back to the accommodation for some well-earned food and bottle-filling.



**The team inside the Ardnamurchan Lighthouse tower**

### ***Day 3 Macparlin Rock and Mingary Rock***

As the weather had turn North Westerly F7 it was time to move the boats. Four brave cox'ns took the boats from their safe anchorage round Ardnamurchan point in some huge waves—so big that a lookout headed to the point to make sure they could actually make the passage safely. Round at Kilchoan the weather was still bad but was divable so those people not on the boats started kitting up.



**Very gloomy weather**

Our first dive site was out towards the top of the Sound of Mull, north of Red Rocks – a pinnacle easily spotted on the charts which rises from 30m to 6m. A shot line was dropped in and divers explored the pinnacle which had plenty of life on it—large shoals of fish, stonefish, ling and blennies. The visibility was also very good.

Once we'd had a quick lunch we headed out for our second dive, a less pronounced pinnacle off Mingary point. The echo sounder revealed a much less obvious pinnacle than Macparlin rock but eventually we found the best spot to place a shotline. Despite being less of an impressive site, there was still plenty of interesting life to see on the slope and in crevices, cuckoo wrasse, sponges, ling, huge conger eels—as well as lots of life ideal for macro shots.

Whilst on the surface waiting for divers we were treated to some exceptional rain which could be seen advancing on us minutes before hitting us—once it arrived it was spectacular. The shotline was left in place and light-sticks attached to the buoy—as our night dive was to be at the same site.



**Amazing downpour!**

After having dinner, and managing to refrain from beer, we headed back to the moored boats and kitted up whilst the people remaining on shore started filling cylinders. The boat journey and finding the shotline was quick but it was still quite light, so we waited for darkness. The usual night-dive critters were out as well as the life from the previous dive, an enormous lobster, loads of sea hares, dogfish, a very large scorpionfish and some stunning phosphorescence. Thankfully it was easy to find the shotline thanks to the strobe attached near the bottom.

### ***Day 4 Slingneach Mor and Mingary Pier***

As the weather was still poor, we yet again decided to drive boats and people round to nearer the dive site separately. Slingneach is further East into Loch Salen and so offered a bit more protection from the weather, although the sea was still very 'lumpy'. The walk from the car park to the beach was quite a hike and certainly too far for carrying dive kit. As the wind had stirred the water up so much, the surf coming



into the beach was a disturbing brown colour! Once on the dive site, the divers started the now well rehearsed procedure of echo-sounding whilst the first wave of divers kitted up. Underwater was a sheer cliff down to 20m and beyond that, a bouldery slope to 35m. The wall was covered in life and was best explored by 'zig-zagging' across it, exploring the stunning rock formations and crevices. Definitely a site worth visiting again.

After lunch, our next dive was a scalloping mission, straight out from Mingary Pier. Having timed the dive to avoid the ferry, we jumped in off the walkway. Underneath the pier was the usual rubbish but also some slightly odd items such as a tent and a baby swing. The visibility was quite poor but still gave us a great chance to collect lots of scallops for dinner. Shore cover entertained itself by practising sumo wrestling in dry-suits.



**Sumo wrestling in drysuits...**

We headed home via the local stores, who were quite concerned about the amount of petrol we were consuming every day and who were very intrigued by what we were doing.

The scallops made a great starter for what was yet another very impressive and filling post-diving meal—we had eaten very well on the trip thanks to some excellent cooking. Post-feast, we headed to the bar to celebrate a marriage proposal made underneath the fog-horn at Ardnamurchan Point in a gale earlier that day.

## ***Day 5 Sron Bheag***

Unfortunately, the weather was still bad and the wind had turned again on the last day so our dive site-choices were limited. We headed west towards the point and sounded an area which looked quite steep on the chart. The sounding revealed that the site was not as sheer as expected, and varying reports came back from divers—some found nothing but sand, whilst some found a reef with quite a lot of life including dogfish. Not a bad dive considering the weather but not as good as the other dives on the trip.

After being on the water for five days, the boats were dragged out onto their trailers-luckily there is no ferry on Sundays so we had the slipway to ourselves. It proved the perfect place to test our life jackets which needed new gas cylinders.



**Life jacket testing**

Once our kit was safely loaded in the vans, the convoy set off. We squeezed on to the Corran ferry with a swarm of motorcyclists who had been in Kilchoan for the weekend and then we were met off the ferry by the local police who were investigating a stolen outboard but after commenting that we ‘may have a body under all that kit’ they left us to have lunch.

Back in Edinburgh, the kit was washed down and vans emptied with remarkable speed. After taking kit home, the team met in our local curry restaurant before heading to watch the end of the Edinburgh Festival fireworks, which were spectacular.

## ***Post expedition feedback***

The feedback from divers after the expedition was incredibly positive—everyone had thoroughly enjoyed the trip and were very glad to be back on the water doing some exploratory diving. Having the boats ‘back in action’ has definitely helped people’s confidence and increased the desire to get out and do more diving. The quality of diving was very high and is definitely worth further investigation, in more favourable weather! Granted, the getting to the peninsula is a long journey and it is by no means an easy expedition once there (due to the lack of compressors and slipways), however, it’s remoteness and clear waters prove that it is an area which has a lot of offer. With good weather, there are some very remote and interesting sites worthy of investigation.

## PART III: The dive sites

A summary of the dive sites. All charts are shown at chart datum. Many thanks to Max Ruffert for collating detail and producing these.

### **General points:**

Slack is calculated as follows:

2 hours after HW **Dover** (6hr 15m before HW Ullapool)

4.5 hours before HW **Dover** (50 min before HW Ullapool)

Traffic: minimal, we saw very few other vessels in the area

Lifeboat: Tobermory off-shore, ~10nm south of the point

Coastguard: Stornoway

Recompression chamber: Oban, Dunstaffnage



### **North Ardnamurchan**

#### **<1> Ardnamurchan point, off lighthouse**

This site is quite exposed as it is right at the end of Ardnamurchan Point and so subject to wind from most directions as well as swell. As this is a prominent headland, consideration needs to be paid to the tide which can be strong. Local rumours suggest a diver was lost some years ago here due to down currents. See above for slack timing.

There are a few potential dive sites around the lighthouse, try and choose one which is near a wall as the flat areas round here are very kelpy and less interesting.

We dived just north of the lighthouse and although there was plenty of life around to see, it is definitely recommended to head NW rather than N or NE.

Depths are up 20m or so, mostly around 10-15m and so kelp is quite abundant, however there is still plenty of life such as stonefish, prawns, lobster, octopus.

Unfortunately we have not produced a chart for this site. Interestingly, the lighthouse is not on the most westerly point of the UK mainland—there is another headland, Port Garbh, just to the south, which holds this title. This would possibly be a more interesting dive site as the chart shows this would be a steeper wall.

## <2> Acarsaid Bheag

This is a prominent headland on the north coast between Fasdale and Ardtoe, it's West side having converging 10m and 20m contours. The site should not be subject to any significant currents. The slope is quite steep and has plenty of life on it. The slope descends from 12m to 18m, and then after a ridge, a wall drops to 25m.

There is plenty of life at this site: ling, cuckoo wrass, octopus and trigger fish.

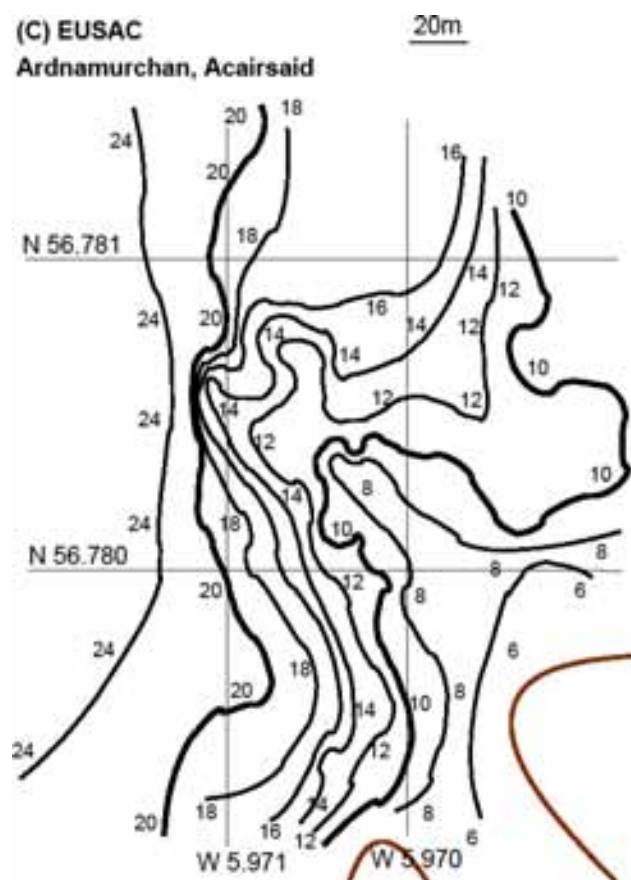


Chart derived from echo-sounding

### <3> Bo Fascadale, East side

As should be obvious with a pinnacle like this, attention must be paid to the currents which pass round such a large underwater feature. As such, it is recommended to dive close to slack, or at least understand which direction divers will be pushed. Dive boats from Lochaline generally drop divers in at most stages of the tide. When flooding, some shelter will be provided by the west side of the wall, however you should bear in mind that this will force currents over the top of the pinnacle and down the east side! Typically, on ebb, the tide will flow from North to South of the east side.

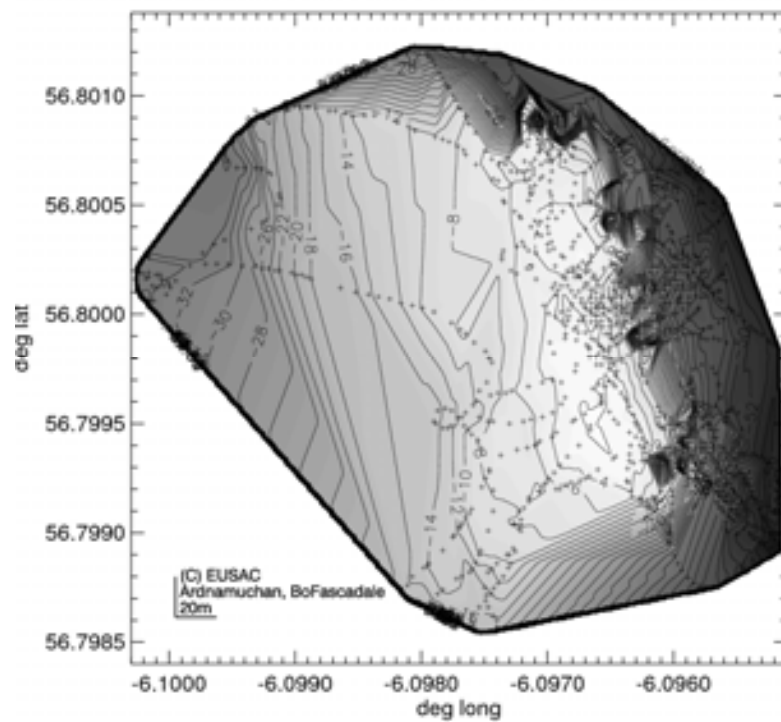
Looking at the chart, it is clear that the East side of Bo Fascadale will provide a far more interesting dive than the West side. To find the site, head out directly north from Fascadale bay, looking for the green starboard buoy. The pinnacle itself is under a mile South West of this buoy and easily located by echo sounder (it rises from 60m+ to 3m and you can see the kelp from the surface). Once the pinnacle is found, you should get a sense of where the North and South parts of the wall are, by sounding. If diving on the ebb, aim to drop divers at the North end of the wall. It is recommended that you drop a shotline just on the edge of the wall (head directly West until the wall is seen on the sounder and drop the shotline immediately. You should leave your shotline in the water until your last divers are out, to provide a reference point—there are no features on which to orientate yourself this far out!

Once on the wall, divers will be treated to an amazing wall dive—crystal clear water, a very sheer wall which often overhangs itself and full of nooks and crannies filled with life. The wall is completely covered in anemones and soft corals. Porpoise were spotted on the surface and heard underwater at this site.

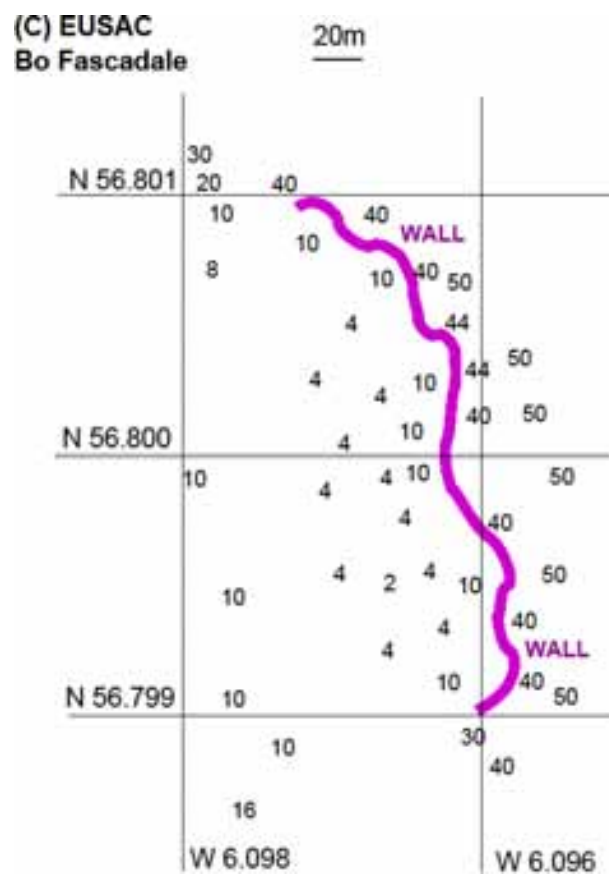
This is quite simply, a stunning dive.



**Profuse life on Bo Fascadale wall**



### Detailed data from echo sounding Bo Fascadale



### Simple view of Bo Fascadale East side

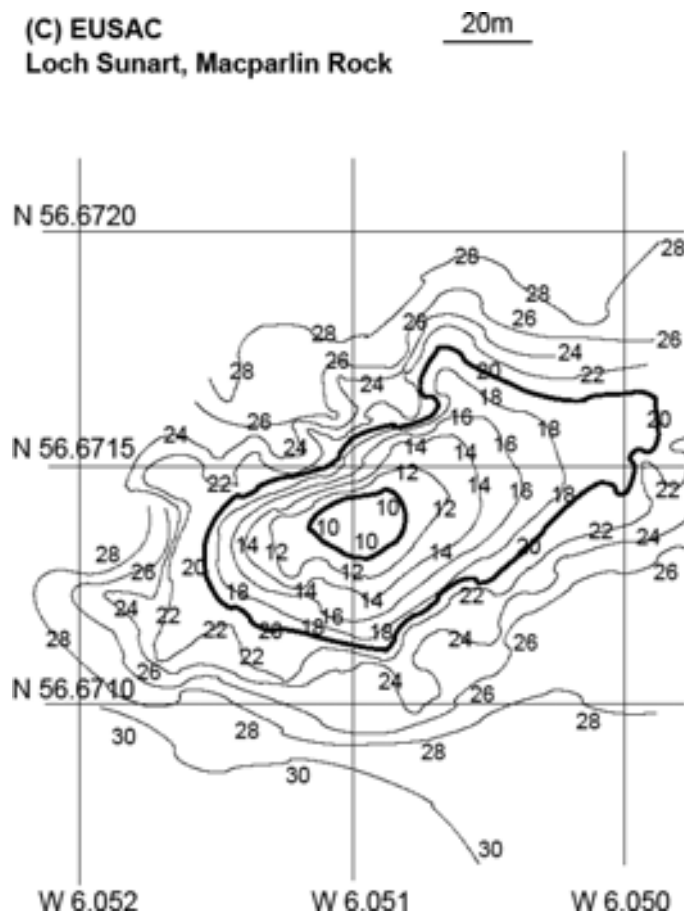


## South Ardnamurchan

### <4> Macparlin Rock, mouth of Loch Sunart

Macparlin Rock is a pinnacle approximately 1.5nm north of Red Rocks, which some divers may be familiar with from Mull trips. As Auliston point and Red Rocks are closer to Oban and Lochaline, Macparlin Rock seems to be missed and yet is still a very good dive and worth the extra journey to offer some variety to the more dived sites.

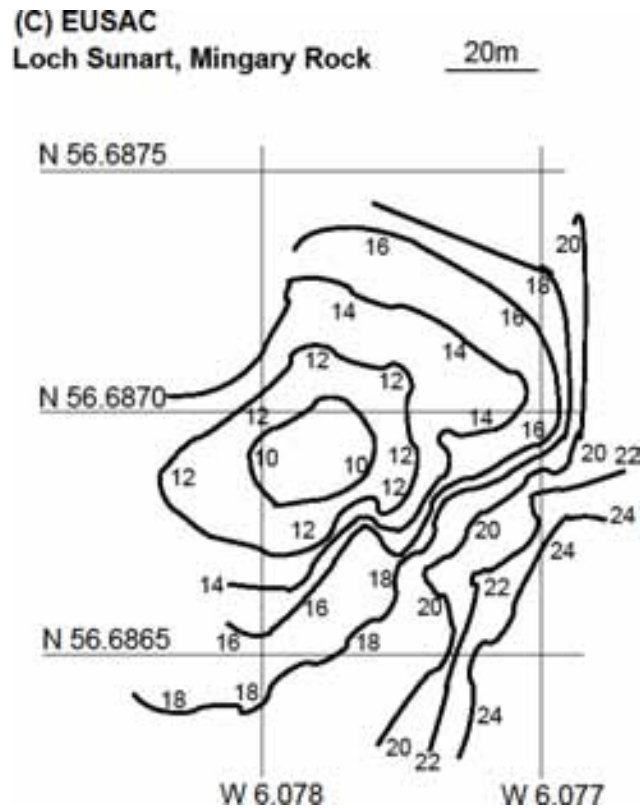
The pinnacle rises from 30m to 10m, and being in the mouth of Loch Sunart, currents should be taken into account. Being a pinnacle, a shotline is recommended. The site is quite a steep pinnacle (more so on the NW side), and had great visibility when we dived it. Octopus were spotted here as well as large shoals of fish and lots of interesting life for macro photography.



### <5> Mingary Rock

Mingary rock is a less obvious pinnacle than some of the others in the area, however it still offers a good dive not too far from the Kilchoan slipway. Currents should be negligible at this site. There are plenty of ledges for life to tuck away and a large number of conger eels and ling were seen here as well as female

cuckoo wrasse. Despite not appearing to be a very interesting site on the charts, this site actually received some very positive comments from divers afterwards.



## <6> Sligneach Mor

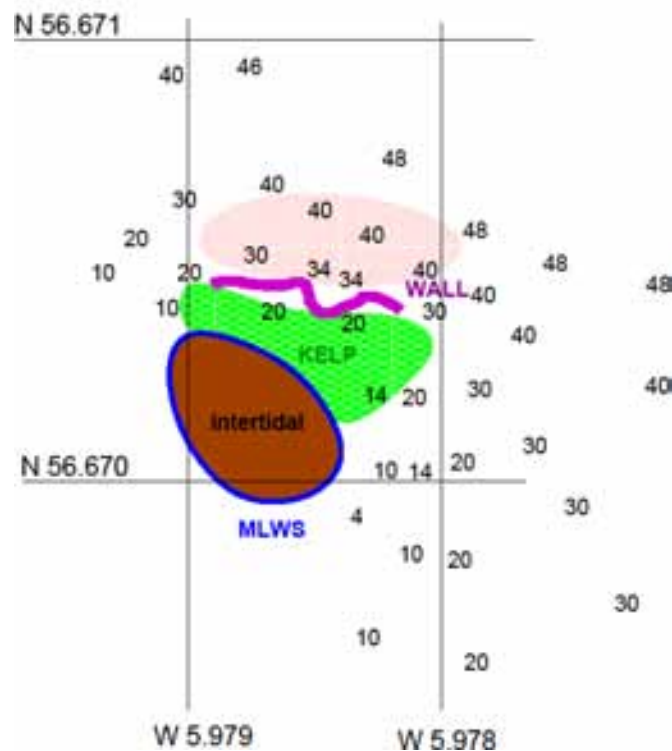
A quick look at the charts shows why this is an obvious site to explore—at the north east point of the rock the 20m, 30m and 50m contours converge. Underwater is no less disappointing—a wall which drops straight down to 35m and covered in life then descends a boulder slope down to 50m. Currents should be negligible at this site.

The wall itself is not very wide and so it is recommended that you ‘zig-zag’ up it from your maximum depth. Cracks and crevices hide a large amount of life and shoals of fish can be seen if you look up the wall. There is little to see beyond 35m.



(C) EUSAC  
Loch Sunart, Sligheach Mor

20m



## <7> Mingary Pier

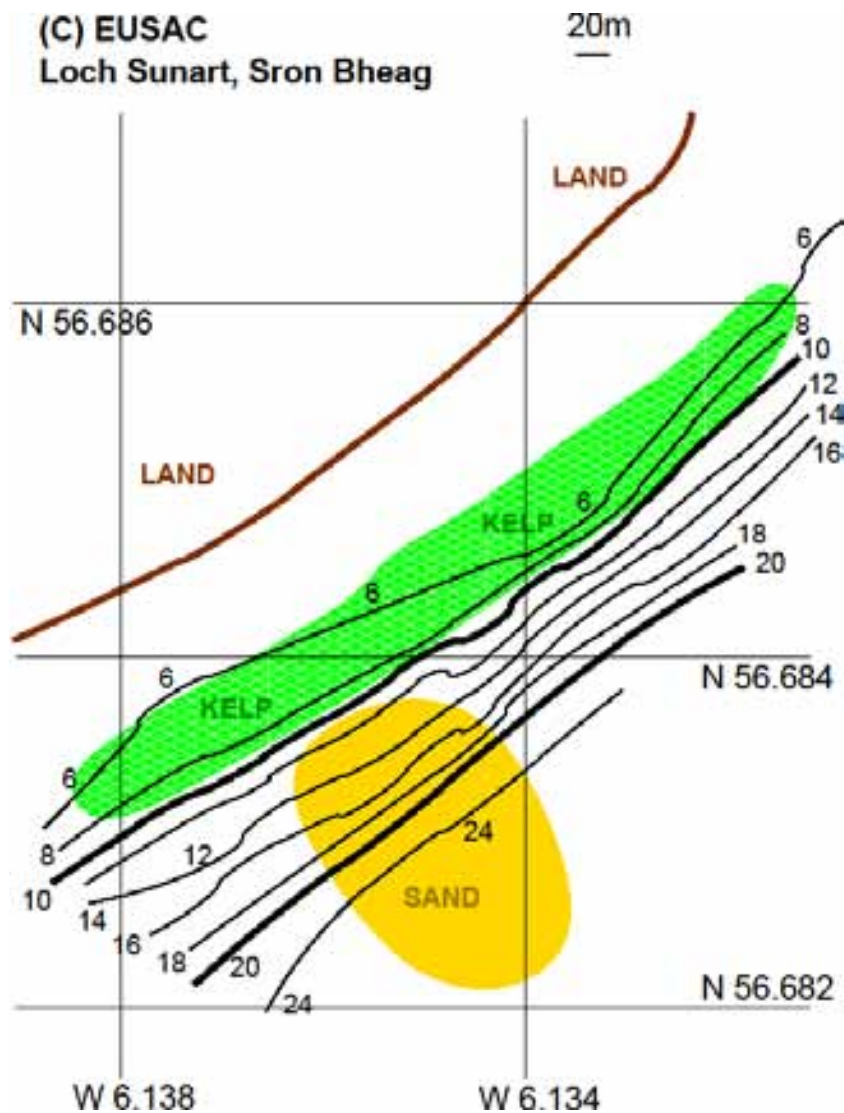
This site is accessed from the large pier at mingary, when the tide is suitably high—there is a walkway down to the left of the pier which can be used for a stride entry but bear in mind that it is slippery when fully kitted! If the tide is out, access can be gained from the ferry slipway and only adds a short swim on to the dive.

Being a ferry slipway, it should go without saying that you have to time your dive very well and you cannot risk being in the water when the ferry is around, nor should you obstruct the ferry slipway. You should refer to the ferry timetables for latest information.

Expect depths up to 15m at high water, with a sandy seabed. Once you have explored the pier and the structure, following the headland round to the west (i.e with the rock on your right) is probably the most interesting way to approach this site. Amongst the kelp-covered rocks you can find shrimp, lobsters and crabs. Small fish also hang around in the area which can be seen even from the pier. Following a bearing south or east will take you away from the rocky wall and over sand—scallops can be found in this area.

## <8> Sron Bheag

This site looks quite promising on a chart, with the 5m and 10m contours close together. We dived just east of a small cave on land. Most divers found little of interest, but plenty of sand. Some divers did find a small reef which allegedly had a lot of life on it. So there is something of interest if you are lucky enough to find it (a large rope was said to be lying over the reef as well as on the sand so if you find it, follow it!).



## PART IV: Launching and local facilities



### ***Sites not suitable for launching***

#### **Fascadale beach**

This is a beach made of large, smooth pebbles which shift easily when walked over—so a boat trailer would fail spectacularly here. The track down to the beach would be ok, but there is only the north edge of the beach which would not be too steep, however, the pebbles would make launching incredibly difficult.

#### **Ockle**

There are a number of foot paths to the shore here, but none were identified as being suitable for launching over. There is rumour of access near the caravan site but we could not confirm this.

#### **Sanna beach**

The beach at Sanna is stunning and well worth a visit whilst in the area, however there is a long distance over the beach from where vehicles should be parked and there are no obvious places to access the beach with a 4x4 and trailer.

## ***Suitable for launching***

### **<1> Portuiark**

[Link to googlemaps](#)

Portuiark is a very small village near the north west point of Ardnamurchan. There is easy access from the road down to the beach, which is compacted and solid sand. For this to be useful as a launching/recovery site the tide must be in—there is a very, very long way to the water's edge when the tide is out. Bear this in mind if you moor your boats here as well—you may find your boat sitting on sand when you return.

No facilities exist here, parking is limited.

### **<2?> Private jetty, just before the lighthouse**

[Link to googlemaps](#)

This cannot be considered as a viable launch facility without permission from the owner. There is a locked gate to stop access. This is a large pier, presumably to help with supplies sent to the lighthouse. Next to the pier is a fairly steep stone beach, which is adequate for launching boats over though it may be questionable how suitable it would be for vehicles. There is a sheltered bay for mooring here, as an added bonus.

No facilities exist here, parking is limited.

### **<3> Kilchoan slipway**

[Link to googlemaps](#)

This slipway is just before the Ferry Stores shop. There is a low water and higher water access ramp, however the low ramp does not reach the water at very low water as it is not very steep. Both ramps are quite narrow but are maintained well and perfectly usable when there is water! A better option is Mingary pier (see next).

There is a shop at the top of the slipway which sells petrol. There is quite a lot of parking at the top of the slip or in the village.

### **<4> Mingary Pier**

[Link to googlemaps](#)

The Calmac ferry slipway is a well maintained, steep slipway which is ideal for launching and recovering. As with any ferry slipway, you must ensure that you will not interfere with the ferry traffic and do not leave dive kit or boats littering the slipway.

There are toilets nearby as well as a large car park.

### **<5> Clan Morrison Hotel**

[Link to googlemaps](#)

A slipway is reported at the currently closed Morrison Hotel. It is unclear whether the owners would permit launching.

## **<6> Laga Bay**

[Link to googlemaps](#)

Ardnamurchan charters are based in Laga bay and offer accommodation, boat hire, a day boat and a slipway with moorings—however it is best to discuss this with them in advance. They can be contacted by phoning 01972 500208 or visiting [www.west-scotland-marine.com](http://www.west-scotland-marine.com)

## **<7> Salen jetty**

[Link to googlemaps](#)

Next to the now-closed fishing/marine shop in Salen, access to the water can be gained over a beach comprised of small pebbles—not a bad facility at all given the lack of slipways. There used to be a fee payable to the shop, however the shop is now closed.

## **<8> Kentra bay**

[Link to googlemaps](#)

Kentra is a very large sandy bay but there is a slipway which can be used with care for most of the tide. There is limited parking at the top of the slipway.

## **<9> Ardtoe beach**

[Link to googlemaps](#)

This is a short access to the beach from the road, and then over the beach, so launching should be possible at any state of the tide. However, as this is a sandy beach, there will be a limit to the boat and vehicles suitable to use this access. There are very few facilities in such a remote location.

## ***Further Sites for exploration***

Other sites in the area worthy of exploration:

Maxwell Bank – looks very interesting

Oberon Bank – this is meant to be a fantastic dive

Muck Wall – the east side of Muck is sheer according to charts

Pinnacle 1.5nm north of Sanna Bay – the charts show contours up to 16m here

## **APPENDIX I: Photographs**

Photographs for the expedition can be found at the following locations:

A collection of photos by Sarah Boys and Paul Bullen, [http://eusac.eusu.ed.ac.uk/?page\\_id=39](http://eusac.eusu.ed.ac.uk/?page_id=39)

Underwater photos by Sarah Boys <http://picasaweb.google.co.uk/boys.sarah/ArdnamurchanUW>

Surface photos by Sarah Boys <http://picasaweb.google.co.uk/boys.sarah/ArdnamurchanSurface>

Photos by Paul Bullen <http://picasaweb.google.co.uk/xpabux/Ardnamurchan2009#>

## APPENDIX II: Expedition costs

A comparison of forecast and actual expenditure is below, a copy of the values from the detailed calculations is also provided as an attachment.

	per day	Total pp	Budgetted total	Actual total	Notes
Accommodation			£ 622.00	£ 720.00	Original booking cancelled, alternative accommodation used
Compressor hire			£ 150.00	£ 80.00	
Transit hire 1	£ 50.00		£ 250.00	£ 388.00	Needed additional van due to payload
Boat fees (club)	£ 4.00	£ 20.00	£ 240.00	£ 184.00	Two half days of diving classed as one day
Boat 1 fuel	£ 15.00		£ 180.00	£ 104.00	boat journeys used shore access as boats struggling
Boat 2 fuel	£ 15.00		£ 180.00	£ 104.00	boat journeys used shore access as boats struggling
Food	£ 5.00	£ 25.00	£ 300.00	£ 221.00	
Car 1 fuel			£ 60.00	£ 82.00	Fuel not calculated per vehicle
Van 1 fuel			£ 70.00	£ 82.00	Fuel not calculated per vehicle
Van 2 fuel			£ 100.00	£ 82.00	Fuel not calculated per vehicle
Launching			£ 20.00	£ 5.00	Tin of biscuits!
Total			<b>£ 2,172.00</b>	<b>£ 2,052.00</b>	Actuals vs budget
				<b>£ 2,470.97</b>	Total spend inc 'minor' expenses



Microsoft Office  
Excel 97-2003 Worksl

## APPENDIX III: kit and van weights

Due to the amount of dive kit as well as compressors and boats, some figures were calculated to determine how much capacity the hired vans would actually have.

As can be seen from the below spreadsheet, the two hired vans ('AC' and 'Shorts') were necessary to carry the load between them. No guarantee is given as to the accuracy or legality of the contents of this spreadsheet – but it proves that people should not assume a hired van will have enough capacity to carry all their dive kit and boat!

compressor weight	50							
boat weight	500							
lead per person	14							
kit per person	10							
cylinder weight	15							
dry kit	4							
Van 1 (shorts)	count	Weight	Van 2 (P)	count	weight	Van 3 (AC)	count	Weight
boat	1	500	boat	1	500	compressor	2	100
bodies	3	210	bodies	5	350	cylinders	25	375
kit bags	12	120	dry kit	12	48	food		30
lead	12	168				bodies	3	210
boat boxes	1	20						
Fuel, ply		80						
Total weight		1098	Total weight		898			
Actual Payload (-trailer)		598	Actual Payload (-trailer)		398		Actual	715
Spare capacity		13	Spare capacity		213		Spare ca	295
<a href="http://www.fordtransituk.co.uk/fordtransitspecifications.htm">http://www.fordtransituk.co.uk/fordtransitspecifications.htm</a>								
	GTM	GVM						
	Train	max weigh	Towing c	Payload	260	280	300	330
SWB	3500	2600	900		901	1090	1301	1565
				Legal payload	611	1010	1221	1485