



British Sub Aqua Club Expedition Report

Severnside Branch expedition to Isles of Scilly 5th - 14th June 2008



Contents

Introduction	3
Last Minute Expedition Planning	
Personalia changes	3
Last minute confirmations	4
The go/no go decision making process	4
Thursday 5 th : the crossing	5
Expedition Diving	
Friday 6 th June 2008	7
Saturday 6 th June 2008	8
Sunday 7 th June 2008	9
Monday 8 th June 2008	10
Tuesday 9 th June 2008	11
Wednesday 10 th June 2008	12
Thursday 11 th June 2008	12
Friday 12 th June 2008	13
Saturday 13 th June 2008	14
Expedition Summary	
Diving Statistics	16
Costs	16
Performance against objectives	16
The good points and the bad points	17
Technical data	17
Expedition members	17.



"Scilly Annex 1 2008
costs & diving data

Annex 1 Detailed Diving Statistics and Cost Breakdown



"Scilly Annex 2
2008 Feedback.xl

Annex 2 Expedition feedback

Annex 3 Learning points



"Scilly Annex 3
2008 Learning Points

Annex 4 Key Contacts 2008



"Scilly Annex 4
2008 Key Contacts



"Scilly Annex 5
Technical data.xl

Annex 5 Technical data

Introduction

The expedition had three principal objectives:

- to end up with proven marks and evidence of slack water conditions
- to carry out a planned and balanced sequence of high quality dives
- to enable skill development opportunities in dive planning logistics, and in site location and position fixing skills for divers who aspire to improve themselves

Mike writes:-

Hardboat versus RIB diving – some thoughts that led to the Scilly Expedition.....

Hardboat diving certainly has a lot to commend it. You just pitch up with your personal dive kit, climb aboard, and are then whisked away to a dive site, where the skipper takes full responsibility for your means of transport, and for locating and shooting the wreck or reef you are diving. Sometimes even the ones you have asked for. What could be better, or more relaxing, than that?

Well, seemingly not RIB diving if the trends of recent years are anything to go by. Rarely do you now see car parks full of RIBs at the south coast's more popular sites. This is not so difficult to understand. Rely on hardboats and you don't need to take out a mortgage to buy a boat in the first place. Give up other treats to be able to pay for the annual service or insurance bill, spend hours or days in advance getting boats, engines and trailers fit for the purpose. You don't need to be or find some poor sucker to get up in the middle of the night to tow the boat down (and back!) to the coast. You don't need to worry about site selection or tides or finding your wreck or reef – the skipper will do it all for you and it can all be over in one wave.

But hang on a minute, diving from our own boats might just have one or two things going for it. For starters, we can actually choose when **we** want to go diving – June, July and August if we want, or perhaps make full use of a benign and crisp November day when it materialises.

You won't be treated to those wonderful and exotically named shallow reef dives between the main site and homeport. "God's Garden" off Littlehampton for example is abbreviated to "S" on the charts. (Having dived it, I know why) And if the weather is at all iffy those very nice hard boat skippers will smoothly divert you to a very sheltered and mundane "poor weather alternative" site to enable you to get yourself wet – sometimes without even consulting you.

If the weather pattern is adverse – we can simply "can it" without losing our deposit and go and do something else.

We can plan in a sensible surface interval of our own choosing, optimise our second dive potential and often dive on two slacks in the same day. On the longer expeditions we can plan to take in all the best sites and build a logical and varied sequence of dives to match our group's capabilities and aspirations.

Lead or be led? RIB diving can be costly, tiring and hard work – but the reward is to make the best diving attainable actually achievable. Its success is dependant on enough people wanting to make it happen – and someone usually has to work their socks off before, during, and after the trip just to keep the boats and the dive plan operational. But the reward is that you can actually dive to your potential and to the limit of your aspirations for (weather permitting) all of the dives undertaken.

It is not cheap, and it is not easy.....but Scilly in 2008 was a series and sequence of first class, first choice dive sites which goes to proves the point.

Personalia changes

As with most expeditions, there were changes to both numbers and faces. 9 quickly (before the end of January) became 11, increased to 13, then 14 (which was a maximum we could accommodate figure) before dropping back to 11 with 3 late withdrawals – two of whom were the late joiners anyway. There was one non-diving member of the expedition

Fiona writes:-

'Boats and planes and trains' ...or should that be boats and containers and trolleys.....?

My report back on the trip focuses on some of the organisational aspects required to ensure a successful and enjoyable expedition.....

A useful contact list and information has been prepared and can be found as an annex to this report

Team work was key to the success – I remember in my early BSAC training the instructor saying you have to get on to make expeditions work and I think we work hard at that in SSAC and that was very true of this fairly challenging expedition- that cooperation is needed across the board and not just at the point of diving.

Diving planning was led by Mike assisted by some of the more experienced divers - tides and charts were carefully studied for the identified dive sites beforehand and during the trip- those with less experience gained enormous experience by participating in a complete week of finding our own sites and making the judgements about suitability of tides and other conditions.

The private boat owners Mike, Andy, Tony, Chris, and Tim, SSAC equipment officer, made sure the boats were fit to go – this wasn't a trip for poorly maintained boats and there is little equipment available at short notice out on the Islands for maintenance and repair – the trip across was likely to be demanding. Darren designed and made an 'air trolley' for carrying the cylinders from the shoreline to the filling station – probably the most demanding aspect of the trip (apart from Big Thursday on the Runnelstone!) I organised the social side – with a group of twelve eating out, it needed to be planned. People were free to make their own plans but evening outings are an opportunity to de-brief, make plans for the next day and get to know each other better. I made contact with the local dive operator we have dived with every year for the last few years to have a discussion about protocol should we all have the same dive site in mind – 23 divers on a dive site isn't the ideal situation and we wanted to maintain positive relationships – in fact it never happened.

Three of us Carol, Paul and Fiona had to pack the container on the quay as the others had gone across the water – all equipment carefully packed into 3 cars left in the car parks ready to go

The older dive dogs seem to have tents, bags and boats full of useful pots and toolkits to mend any mishaps with dive equipment gone wrong - again no obvious supplier on the Island

Careful and detailed forward planning, the capacity to think laterally and creatively when faced with problems and the best use of the skill mix of the group are the vital ingredients for a trip such as this

Last Minute confirmations

Moorings were reserved in early May with a call to the Harbour Master. The camp site was also booked in May, and a confirmatory phone call was made the week before departure to Jim Heslin to confirm that he was still expecting us, which he was. The only slight hiccup was the container hire – having been advised by the Shipping Company in February that it was "not urgent" to book early, we were told in early May that we could not have one on the Saturday for the outward journey. But by that time, with the 3 withdrawals already known, we were down to just 3 travelling on the Saturday anyway – and luckily (in that they were the key "container loaders") all were quite happy and flexible enough to advance their sailing to the Friday.

The "go / no-go" decision making process

The first check on weather forecasting was on the BBC Sunday Countryfile programme. That did raise initial alarm bells, suggesting 20 mph winds, which was above my own generally acceptable threshold of 15mph on ordinary forecast maps. Subsequent looking at BBC 5 day forecasts for Penzance though suggested inconsequential winds for the Thursday – provided what appeared to be a 20/25 mph blow forecast for the Tuesday actually blew through on time. There was therefore quiet satisfaction at the likely situation at Club night on the Monday. The first alarm bells started to ring with an E Mail from Andy on the Tuesday inquiring whether I was still planning to travel down on the Thursday....

Andy had by that stage developed a cold, and was also pressing to be released from the Thursday commitment due to business pressures. And the Tuesday night blow was already in delay. But I was in no mood to give in that early. On the Wednesday afternoon Andy sent through some quite alarming "5 occasionally 6" forecasts for the next 24 hours.

That evening, whilst travelling back from my final business commitment of the week in London, I asked my son Phil to check out the Seven Stones Lightship wind readings and forecast, as it had appeared to

be very accurate and reliable during the Easter gales. That news was more encouraging – 15 to 20 knots from the north east and dropping. So the decision was “all systems go”.

Thursday morning saw Darren and I driving down from Bristol to Penzance in absolute still conditions. Not a flutter in the trees anywhere on route. At 7 am we received a telephone call from Tony, who had travelled down the previous evening, advising that conditions off Penzance were flat calm, and that it was “110% do-able”. I did not question the meaning of “110% do-able”, but given that Penzance bay was sheltered from any north-easterly, and only that week back page newspaper reports had been carrying the story that a Milan football coach was “150%” staying at Milan (i.e. rather than moving to Chelsea), 110% could have meant anything..... and more alarmingly reaching Marazion, and our first real look at the sea, coincided with the tops of the trees moving around somewhat alarmingly....

As agreed we took the Seven Stones reading at just after 9 o'clock – 20 knots from the north east, but forecast to drop to 15 at 1000. And more to the point, Scilly was currently recording just 14 knots. So, as we were planning to leave with the tide at 1400 hours anyway, “go” was confirmed. (It was subsequently ascertained that the wind remained at 20 knots at Seven Stones throughout the day!)



Loading up the boats, launching them, loading the cars with baggage for the Friday Container, and then parking up, went like clockwork. Andy, with his boat “Galathea”, (a Jeaneau 6.35m cabin cruiser, the slowest boat, with a maximum speed of 12.5 knots) and Tony (5.2m Tornado RIB “RIBRAB”), had unilaterally taken the decision to set off together at 1230, leaving the Club RIB (5.5m Tornado “Sea Biscuit”) and my own 5.3m Tornado “Severn Raider” ready and able to leave 30 minutes ahead of the planned departure time of 1400 hours.

Thursday 5th : the crossing

The 9 mile passage down to our first principal waypoint (Runnelstone) was uneventful. The calm waters of the bay continuing all along the Penwith peninsular.

I had expected Andy and Tony to be awaiting us for the open water element of the crossing, but no sign of them. That was both alarming and comforting. Alarming in that the plan to cross together had already fallen apart – but comforting that Andy and Tony had clearly taken the decision that sea conditions were OK to press on.

The next half hour those thoughts were played over and over in my mind as we hit some really difficult seas and it required 100% concentration to safely manoeuvre through what a clear 20 knot north easterly was throwing at us, compounded by both the shallow water effect thrown up by the Runnelstone reef complex, swiftly followed by the wind-against-tide effect of the full St George’s channel tidal stream passing Lands End. It was unwise to actually stop moving, as that was when the waves would start to slurp over the side. Best to just keep going.

After about half an hour, conditions did materially improve and good progress was then made i.e. we were able to be just about on the plane between crests, and therefore maintain good forward momentum and watch the GPS distance off start to reduce.

And just to corroborate what the GPS was telling us, Wolf Rock lighthouse was steadily moving down our port side.

Rick writes:-

Waking at 6 on Thursday with the sun blazing through the camper window – blinking, bleary-eyed at a silk-smooth and sparkling Mount's Bay, with the Mount silhouetted in the distance – thinking "It's on!"

"Hmm, that horizon looks a bit crinkly" – as we approach the Runnelstone, Tim at the helm, me hanging onto the bottle rack. No sign of the other two boats – they went off 3/4 hour earlier – so it must be alright. Am reminded of that film "The Perfect Storm", the offshore sloppy chop having morphed into smooth, long rollers, building into a breaking crest. Mike starting to veer off to the east. Next minute we're climbing a massive tilting plane, that ominous curl starting to form – the horizon just a few feet away now, but above us. "Ohh shit!" Seabiscuit lurches and falls away to port. White water crashes over us. I nearly lose my hat. But we're through and running, down in to the trough – the next one about 30m away. I lean forward and shout "Perhaps we ought to go round the outside of the Runnelstone marker". Tim nods – and grinning sheepishly we turn east, towards Mike and Darren and ever so slightly calmer water.

Half way across we also received our first radio contact from Andy (Galathea) – he was barely 2 miles in front of us now, and himself making good progress with Tony still in close contact. The Scilly Islands themselves were also by now plainly in view, and joining up with Andy at the three-quarters- of-the-way-across point meant we had just about cracked it. We reached the calm waters inside Crow Sound at exactly 4 o'clock – 2 and a half hours after leaving Penzance (3 and a half in Andy's case). We had made it!

We were greeted in St Mary's Harbour by the Harbour Master, who allocated us use of the floating pontoon – which was to be an absolute boon for the rest of the trip, as we were able to use it as a storage point for dead cylinders. We inflated the tender which we had brought across with us, and went ashore.

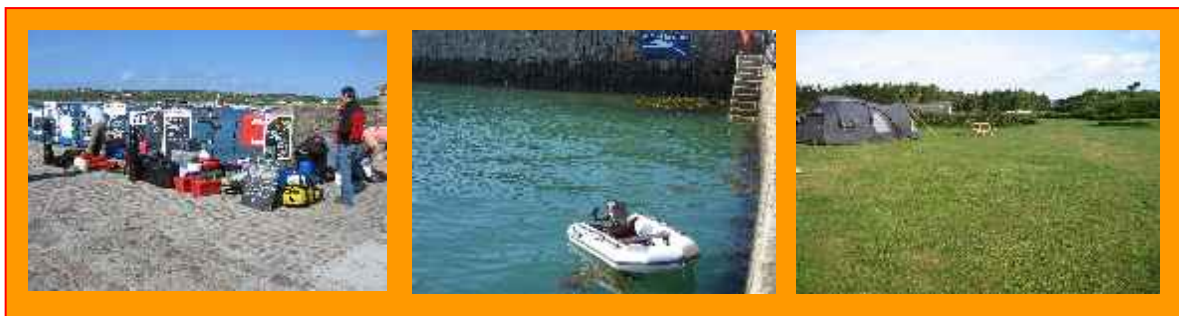
Andy writes:-

We had launched smoothly and were bobbing about in the millpond calm of Penzance's outer harbour. However Tony was concerned about what might be waiting for us out of the lee.

In the end we took the decision to push out in two groups safe in the knowledge that very shortly the two other RIB's would either tuck in behind us or sail past.

The first six miles was plain sailing with the 1.5 ton of boat making light of the short short messy chop. However as we approached the Runnelstone so the seas got more interesting and whilst we maintained the same speed give or take half a knot we were running almost blind as the constant spray coming over the bow meant that we could see ahead only once in seven waves or so, but we still managed to spot a sunfish as it ambled past us unconcerned.

least warm and dry. Tony and Chris were having a wet and lumpy crossing, not able to go any faster than us. Occasionally they would tuck into the relatively calm of our wake, but most of the time were taking the seas head on. We were now well past the Runnelstone and were starting to get concerned that we had not been caught by the others. We had regularly called them over the radio, but without success. Then contact was made, and very shortly after that the other boats drew alongside. But we were now beyond halfway, and the RIB's, clearly enticed by the scent of the Islands now clearly visible, left us in their wake to plod on...



The rest of Thursday afternoon was dedicated to setting up camp and generally unwinding, but we still had enough energy to re-assemble in the Mermaid for a meal and a beverage at 2000 hours. We met up there with a group of divers from up north who had been out on the Cita that afternoon, and it was a bit

disconcerting when they said they had had black water at depth... Unheard of on Scilly in all my experience. What would be would be – but it was a salutary warning that we were not yet over the plankton bloom perhaps – or the month of solid easterlies just ended may have had some sort of negative impact on what was an east facing site. All would be revealed in the fullness of time.

Friday 6th

Friday morning was a bit of a reality check on how long things took, and how difficult it was going to be to hit time deadlines (aka slack water windows!!). There were no plans to dive on Friday morning, but we thought we might reasonably be able to do some searching and still be able to greet Scillonian and the remaining three party members and our container upon arrival at lunchtime.

But by the time we had fuelled up and travelled north to St Martins (we wanted to see if we could find the charted rock pinnacles Flat Ledges and Deep Ledge) we could already see the approaching Scillonian – and she was quite clearly using the south of St Mary's approach route – so we were in the wrong place anyway to wave her in.

We still managed half an hour of searching: long enough to realise that nothing was straightforward. We found evidence of shallower water, but could not find the "0.9m" LAT high spot, or the hoped for drop-off. Shallowest point found was 10 m.

But we had a deadline to meet and a task to do (unload the container) so we had to abort the search and make tracks back to the Harbour. Scillonian had docked and our 3 companions (Fiona, Carol and Paul) were on the quayside to greet us. They had achieved the impossible – recovered all our remaining kit from disparately parked cars in Penzance, and loaded the container themselves. Well done. And it had all gone like clockwork.

By 3 o'clock the entire contents of the container had been moved up to the campsite, remaining tents pitched, and we were ready to do the first "bonus" dive. Sensibly, the new arrivals declined the opportunity as they had had a long and tiring day.

We decided to look at the Plympton & Hathor wreck site – it was close and should be relatively straightforward to locate. My hope was to find one or other of the reef high spots which were the Lethagus rocks, through which gully in between lies the Hathor prop shaft, and which leads inextricably to both the main body of the wrecks if you go south-east or to the isolated stern section of the Hathor if you follow it north-west. The BSAC wreck register transits were used to achieve this, and both high spots were quickly located – enabling us to put the shot in and know exactly which way we needed to swim. We were able to "shoot" the eastern Lethagus and drape the shot line down the rock into the wreckage itself - a perfect start to the trip in fact.

The dive was encouraging. There was certainly plankton in the water, but visibility was not "black" – it was at least 15 metres at depth, if a little gloomy. No complaints there. We got down to the propeller of the Plympton at 38m, before making our way back to the Lethagus and ascending the delightful plumose anemone encrusted vertical face to do our stops amongst the kelp on its 10m top.

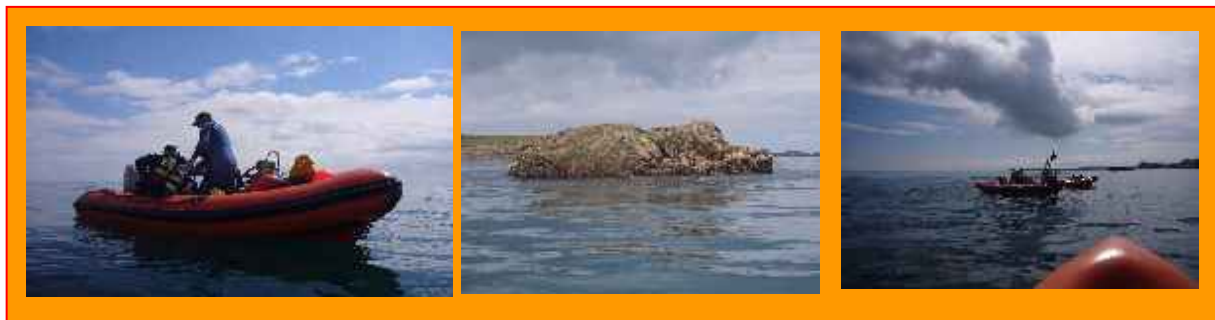


Saturday 7th

An early start was planned, in order to make full use of the unusually fine weather (for 2008). Saturday was very much another “bonus” day, in the sense that because we had been able to make the crossing on the very first of the three days set aside, it would be a full additional diving day before the core Sunday-Friday period. And our choice was meant to be from essentially non-tidal sites so that full advantage could be taken of lunchtime and an extended surface interval.

The Italia, off Great Wingletang on St Agnes, was to be the first dive, and I immediately realised I had lost an opportunity the previous afternoon at low water to position fix the Wingletang ledges, at the base of which we knew the Italia lay. So it was a reliance on transits which saw the anchor dropped in, in what should have been the right place. It proved to be too close to Great Wingletang, and it was a lengthy swim across deepish water (30m plus) before a gentle shelving up to the main body of the wreck at about 22 metres (boilers). The first divers in, techies Paul and Chris, made it, and put up their SMB to indicate this fact. Too late for Darren and I – we were already in the water. We had set off in the right direction, but had baulked at the unexpected deep water channel and had turned back. Everyone else got on the wreck though.

The Gilstone was the choice for the second dive. This site enjoys a sheer wall which drops from 20 to 40 metres and runs along the entire seaward face of the rock. But it is a high energy site for a reason, and slack water it was not. Manageable but uncomfortable in a high spring tidal flow. But a superb dive nonetheless.



For the evening meal we decided to visit the Turk's Head on St Agnes, on the grounds that as Saturday was “change-over day”, it would not be too crowded. We took the two boats with navigation lights, and, with the tender also in tow, were able to moor up comfortably in the bay.



Sunday 8th

Sunday dawned bright and sunny, and it was to be one of those idyllic summer days with flat seas. We decided to look for another of Scilly's classic wreck sites, the Isabo on the Westward Ledges, off the imposing but bleak Scilly Rock west of Bryer.



We quickly located Westward Ledges – that was the easy bit. Disconcerting though was the sudden surf breaking over the rock without any real warning! We kept our distance after that. The shot was in at 9.20 and all the surplus line was on the surface – dead slack. All we had to do was find the wreck. Paul and Chris were first in and they reported two large areas of wreckage, including boilers. So the wreck was there – but where exactly? All the divers hit wreckage at one point or another, but I was unconvinced that the main section had been found. My recollection was that the main wreckage was in the 40 – 50 metre depth range. Darren and I went deeper than the others – but found no wreckage, and by that time (1100) the current was awkward.



We had decided to stay out for lunch and anchored up off Bryer itself in order to go ashore. Whilst half the group decided to just chill out on the rocks, the remainder walked around the lake and over the island to the “town” area. The shop was actually closed, but the tea room was open...



...a bit of scavenging never
did anyone any harm...

Expedition Report

SSAC Scilly 2008

With such good sea conditions I decided we would head out to Trenemene for the afternoon. Trenemene is a classic and majestic wall dive, and a “must” to be included in any Scilly trip. So we motored the 5 miles out to the Western Rocks. Unfortunately the tide was still racing along the east face and diving would not have been possible. But the west face was sheltered from the still outgoing tide, and was equally sheer – so we decided to do that. Whilst not as colourful as the east face (absence of plumose anemones) it was well populated with flora and received rave reviews from the rest of the group. It was also in the full afternoon sun, so it was a very bright dive. When we had completed the diving, we popped back round to the west side and noticed that it was slack (5.20pm)

Dive planning that evening was quite interesting as we dined on the balcony of the Porthcressa Hotel. With low water late in the afternoon, and a slack not until Monday’s equivalent of Sunday’s 1720 slack, we realised that it had to be Monday or not until much later in the week if we were to hit the Schiller. So it was that Tony was despatched to see ex-Severnside diver and now Scilly resident Terry Parsons in order to facilitate a permission from salver in possession (and son-in-law) David McBride. Half an hour later Tony returned, and in his enigmatic way announced, eventually, that we were “on” to dive it.

Monday 9th - the Foggy Day

But nothing is straightforward. Monday dawned bright and clear – initially – but even before we had left the campsite Andy got the weather forecast for the day – sea fog.



Dive planning was therefore made for us – we would stick to a known and close in site, so decided on the Plympton/Hathor again. The wreck location was quick and diving straightforward and uneventful. It is a classic wreck dive, with all levels of experience catered for, and can be visited several times in one holiday if necessary without any boredom setting in.

Whilst Tony and Chris collected the spent cylinders and returned to St Mary’s for the “bottle run”, the rest of us anchored up close to the Gugh bar and went ashore. The more energetic of us walked around Gugh, experiencing the eerie and disconcerting coming and going of the patchy sea fog, before joining up with the returning Tony and Chris for lunch and a pot of tea on St Agnes itself.



At the appointed hour we decided to “give it a go” and push on out to the Retarrier ledges and seek our prime target, the Schiller. I had not dived the wreck since 1975, and remember a crystal clear site and tremendous anticipation at simply the thought of what might be lying half buried in the sand between the rocks or concreted in. That memory alone had long driven me to one day return – and despite the fog, that day was now.

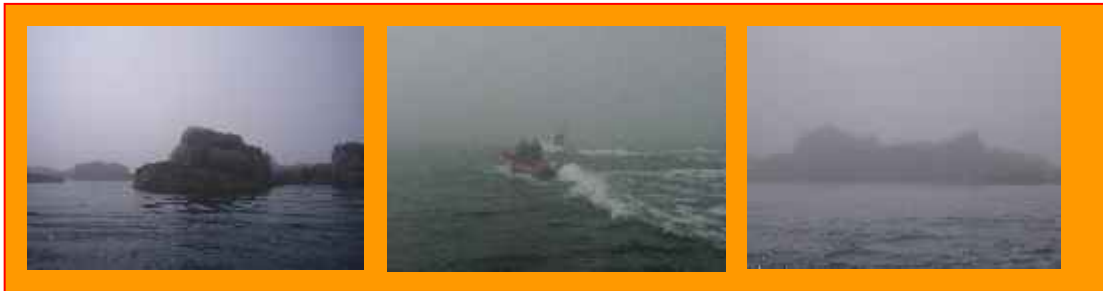
We knew that the direct route from our starting point to the Schiller would take in rocks – not least Trenemene, and it was an eerie trip as rock after rock emerged from the gloom in front of us. Eventually

Expedition Report

SSAC Scilly 2008

the 4 Retarrier peaks broke ominously in a magnificent but alarming Atlantic swell, and surface visibility was no more than a hundred metres. A reliable source had told us to dive east side of the ledges, so without further ado Darren and I went in to look. Huge boulders, long kelp, and isolated sand patches in relatively shallow water was what we found – but no wreck.

After 10 minutes – more than was strictly safe in the surface conditions, I inflated the delayed SMB. But the current was already strong, and there was no chance of staying down, so I had to abort. Darren did the same when he realised I had gone, and for one brief moment we were alone in a very small dome of visibility. But we were still in sight of the breaking ledges. I bellowed “over here” as loud as I was able – and almost immediately there was Paul in our RIB emerging from the fog. Tony and Rick had better luck and hit wreckage almost immediately. We had re-located the Schiller.



Rick writes:-

I'm with Tony, looking for the Schiller (steamer wrecked in 1875 with the loss of 300 lives). Down we go and into the shelter of a big ledge to deploy an SMB (viz up top down to 30m in places). Up and down the gullies, struggling occasionally to yank the line clear of overhanging kelp fronds. Then, after about 20 minutes, some bits of rust-stained stuff, some T sections of iron, virtually blended into the natural surroundings, some bits of pipe and the unmistakable shape of an anchor stock and the stubs of two flukes. This has to be it – or something of a similar age but with less notoriety. Then something, a curved edge, about a metre long and tapering, with a broad base that could be a section through a propeller blade. Did the Schiller have one of those early props with separately cast blades fixed to a hub? An intriguing find – the kind of thing that makes a grovel worthwhile.

Andy writes:-

With barely 50 metres of surface visibility on the return trip it was today above all days that the worth of my chart plotter has come into its own. We were able to steer a safe and stress free course. I was also impressed that the RIB's, armed with their pre-prepared safe waypoint listings and laminated chartlets, were also able to successfully navigate, thanks to the wonder of the GPS. Though whilst we will not name names, one boat's return trip should not go unrecorded. Out of the gloom on our starboard quarter raced a RIB across our bows, and disappeared into the mist.. Which was a little disconcerting as we were just 500 metres off Trenemene. When advised by radio of this fact the cox was heard to reply “what is Trenemene?” Whereupon being advised that it was the great big rock we had dived yesterday, there was a pregnant pause, followed by a mumbled “thank you”. Followed some 30 seconds later by the said same RIB crossing our bows at a slightly slower speed in the opposite direction. As we rounded St Agnes, out of the gloom behind us appeared the other two RIB's, with Sea Biscuit closely tucked in behind Severn Raider. Chris came over the radio at that point to announce, matter of factly, that they had just gone alongside the pontoon on St Mary's. So ended a challenging afternoon's excursion

Tuesday 10th

Tuesday dawned bright and clear, so the opportunity was taken to make another prompt start and get out to the Western Rocks whilst the tide was still flooding and show the group the East face of Trenemene. There was a swell around the site, but the sun was out and there was absolutely no current, so everything was in place for a good dive. So it proved. The water was still “bitty” – but it is all relative, and it hardly detracted from a wonderful experience on what must be Britain's most densely colourful wall dive.



We were even back in St Mary's Harbour for lunch at lunchtime – an unusual feat for Severnside. After the problems with the Italia on Saturday, I took the opportunity to travel light up to St Martin's and the Hard Lewis ledges in order to just be sure that the King Cadwallan could be located on the high water – probably the following morning. This was achieved – though the fierceness of the rough seas encountered as soon as I put my nose out of the shelter afforded by the islands themselves did surprise me. Reminiscent of the crossing over, and with the Hard Lewis ledges breaking dangerously, it would not have been a comfortable dive if we had been diving there today.

So a sheltered site was the order of the day for the afternoon dive, and as I was favouring a wreck dive to maintain the balance, the Italia was again selected. This time the Wingletang ledges were of course showing, so it was plain sailing to insert the shot in exactly the right place this time. The Italia is at its most dramatic beyond 30 metres in my opinion, and despite the late afternoon gloom and loss of the high sun, the visibility was still fairly good as Darren and I explored the picturesque bow sections before scrambling up the side of the ledge to decompress.



Wednesday 11th

Dive Planning for the day suggested to us that we would be OK to dive the King Cadwallan from half tide upwards, as the Hard Lewis ledges would provide shelter from any north going current. This proved to be the case, though there was plenty of plankton in the water and some awkward swell in the shallows decompressing after the actual dive.

After what was generally agreed to have been an excellent dive, numbers thinned a little for the second dive, as some of the group decided to give further diving that day a miss to catch up on some well deserved R&R. Those that remained motored straight on round to join Galathea, who had spent the lunch interval on site over the Cita.

Paul and Chris were already in the water on the buoyed bow section, and as the tide was now increasing, Darren and I got kitted up straight away to have a look at "the stern" which had been "located" out in the bay. The "stern" proved to be an isolated rock with a smooth top standing some 5 metres proud of the prevailing seabed. Yes we should have brought across the magnetometer! An enjoyable scenic none the less.

The others all dived the bow section, and the techies later confirmed that by following steel cables from the bow, the stern could actually be reached directly underwater. Ah well, next time perhaps.

Thursday 12th - A Windy Day

The overnight plan had been to visit one of the northern scenic targets – Flat or Deep Ledges north of St Martin's. In truth we had not even looked at the wind forecast, so complacent with the fine weather conditions had we become. But Friday's dawn proved that forecast, when we did look, (up to 18 knots

from the north) entirely accurate, so we had to find a Plan B. We decided to stick with scenic and hit Gilstone again, which would be in the shelter behind St Mary's. The tide tables suggested we would be beyond peak flow, and anyway it was now verging on neaps, so any current should be manageable. At the second attempt the wall was perfectly "shot" and the diving commenced. Jo Alsop's dive charter boat "Moonshadow" arrived on site just as we were clearing up, and in time for the real slack water. And as I bounced my stuck fast anchor in now tranquil conditions, it became apparent that perhaps after all we had done the right thing, because many of the plumose anemones had in fact now retracted into their fleshy bodies.

Rick writes:

An excellent wall dive with Carol. A pull down the line and over the edge into the lee of the wall, to about 35m, then along, illuminating the colourful patches of jewel anemones and other soft corals. On the corner we stick our heads round and it's a bit breezy, so we head gently back along the wall, climbing all the while. By turning this way and that we manage to get back up to 15m without having to swim against the current. Then along a ledge, sheltered by another 3m wall, and finally up onto another flat area thick with kelp at 10m. In the distance we just make out the bare rock of the top of the Gilstone surrounded by aerated water, so head towards it to do our safety stop. At this point Carol shows me her forearm – conspicuously lacking computer – and shrugs her shoulders to say "don't know when it came off". We make our ascent on mine.

Isabo had been the choice for the afternoon dive, but with the wind still up, we decided to stay in the shelter of the islands and hit the Plympton and Hathor again, which we did - this time enjoying dead slack conditions throughout our time on site.

Andy meanwhile had split from the rest of us at lunchtime in order to do some searching.

Andy writes:-

With my two crew members/gas monkeys having completed their long morning dive and not wanting to dive again that day, we set off for the remainder of the afternoon to do some searching for the Toledo and the Ardenraig near Steeple Rock. We had been given some up-to-date WGS 84 positions from a very helpful Hydrographic Department, and these had been loaded into the GPS. We started with the Toledo, but with a very rocky seabed it was just impossible to pick up a wreck form on the echo sounder alone. The Ardenraig was a flat seabed – but nothing appeared to stand proud more than a metre. It was only when back home that further research revealed that the Ardenraig only stood up a metre anyway! Next time we will take a magnetometer with us for sure.

The day ended with a Bar-B-Q and fun was had by all well into the darkness



Friday 13th - the last "core" day

Friday was to be a "by popular request" diving day. The group had by now seen what was on offer and they could choose their most enjoyable dive or site for a repeat dose. That choice proved to be Trenemene. With ever improving visibility as the neap tide approached, that dive was to be quite awesome, with seals joining us in the shallows for our decompression stops and playfully mimicking our fin strokes at close quarters.

Rick writes:-

on the Gilstone again – it happens to be between our first dive site and our second, and I have resolved to at least have a go at locating the missing computer, assuming it to have been lost sometime between the ledge at 15m and the kelpy plateau at 8 – 12m. The orientation of our last few minutes of the dive are still fresh in my mind, so it's just a case of retracing our route from close to the Gilstone. It all looks reasonably familiar to me, so with Carol and Chris C ferreting away in various directions, I head straight for the edge of the plateau with my head down, pulling myself through the forest by its stalks, scanning to right and left, trying to convince myself I recognise this particular fish (notoriously territorial) or that prominent cleft. Then, on a scan to the left, glimpse of a non-natural shape amidst the waving fronds – I pull myself over to it – Carol's computer! Chuckling to myself, I strap it on next to mine and compare. Mine says 13m – 5 minutes. Hers says Err – as one would, having spent over 20 hours at 13m. I swim over to Carol, still head-down in the kelp, and pull her up. As I raise my arm, she's expecting me to say "ok, that'll do, it was worth a try". The look of delight on her face when she realises I'm wearing two computers – it was definitely worth a try!

It was back to the Isabo for the second dive. Tony volunteered to dive on his own and reckoned he could find his way to and then "mark" the boiler and wreckage in 24 metres. True to his word, this he did, allowing the rest of us to at least enjoy some wreckage. But we did better than that. By following the rock on round I came to the second boiler in a gap between the rocks at 42 metres and the main body of the wreck then opened out in front of me in one vast mass of plate in 44 metres and beyond. This was the Isabo I remembered from years back.

**Saturday 14th – packing up, one last bonus dive, then home to Penzance**

The wind was again true to prediction – non existent for the last day. Though an hours rain at 7 am was a sharp reminder that with weather, nothing is guaranteed, certainly not the certainty of being able to pack away dry tents. But despite soaking tents and no drying wind, we did just about achieve the impossible and pack them away in a good state as camp was struck by 10 o'clock in time for the trip down in the camp site trailer for container loading.

I had optimistically targeted 1300 hours for completion of the container loading process, but we were all done by 1245. Andy decided to set off for Penzance, as his maximum speed was less than the three RIB's, but we were ready to conduct one last bonus dive before final departure. That was always going to be Plympton/Hathor, regardless of current. And current we got. The shot was in the right place but the drag on the upper sections of the downline was appreciable and we actually approached the Lethagus pinnacle from below the horizontal. And the plankton seemed to have returned with a vengeance, though that may only have been perception because it was moving so fast. The conditions did not detract from a good dive though – I managed to not only push a video camera against the current, but I also managed to reach the bow section of the Hathor and sit on her anchor stem at just over 40 metres, jutting out serenely over the depths below. For various reasons all 4 divers became separated, and there was one anxious moment for me after a lengthy decompression stop hanging below my bag. "We've got a problem – no sign of Rick" said Darren, our boat handler, in genuine concern, as he took my kit. But as quick as the issue had arisen (for me anyway), it disappeared, as Darren spotted, some way back now, Rick's head. Rick had made his way back to the original shot line and simply not bothered to deploy his SMB. So all was well that ended well and we made our way back, for the last time, to the pontoon, which had become our second home.



Tony writes:-

Enduring Scilly magic...My first Diving Expedition to the Isles of Scilly was in August 1973, my latest June 2008. In that ensuing quarter of a century I have visited the islands many times and logged about 200 dives in the Islands. The first trip was conceived, like all good ideas, in the pub. Various older established members of the club had talked about it for some time but I converted it from pub talk to an actual expedition. We used home-made wet suits and a home-made inflatable and took our own mobile compressor, which seemed to take forever to pump one set, let alone enough air for say 10 divers. We camped on St Agnes, which had no facilities and on high spring tides the drinking/cooking water had a strong brackish taste to it. The whole self-contained experience had the feel of an expedition into the unknown and that we were at the frontier of sports diving in the islands.

The latest trip was carried out by crossing from Penzance to St Marys using our own Rigid Inflatable Boats (RIBs) – an adventure in itself. Although we relied on a commercial supplier on St Marys for our air, we organised our own diving and dive sites. Accommodation was split in self-catering apartments or camping on the Garrison on St Marys.

Although the two adventures are over a quarter of a century apart, they and indeed the intervening diving trips all shared the same enduring Scilly Magic of diving the islands. The underwater visibility is arguably the best in the UK. The cobalt blue water direct from the open Atlantic and the exposed and isolated nature of the islands results in visibility sometimes in excess of 25m. The variety of underwater scenery of sheer drop-offs, walls, gullies and boulders the size of double decker buses provide the setting for the whole range of North European marine life. This can range from brightly coloured tiny nudibranch to dolphins; from whole 'carpets' of jewel anemones to huge gorgonian fans and superb heads of cold water rose coral. To this is added the huge variety of ship wrecks, which have ended their days on waiting sinister rocks. The wrecks range from Dutch East India Company ships, 18th century and 19th century naval vessels and modern casualties such as the Cita. The latest 2008 expedition did not disappoint with a combination of majestic scenic dives with visual surveys of many of the wreck sites.

The 2008 Scillies expedition provided me with an irresistible opportunity to meet a legend of British Diving and Shipwrecks – RICHARD LARN. Richard is a respected diver and author of over 40 books on British Shipwrecks. He started diving in the Merchant Navy in 1947, before joining the Royal Navy in 1950 and serving until 1971; he then established a professional divers training centre at Falmouth. For the last 25 years he has been a full-time author and historic wreck researcher. When I first went to Scillies in 1973 it was armed with some of his early books on the Scillies Wrecks.

He is a tall, imposing man, say 6ft 3ins, but he told me as he is approaching his eighties that he is shrinking! Although Norfolk born, he is really an adopted Cornishman, having worked on mainland Cornwall for many years and having lived on St Marys for the last 11 years. His passion for the sea and sea-faring matters is not shrinking and his enthusiasm for the ships that sail upon the sea is undiminished after 60 years close association. Richard also has an encyclopaedic knowledge of the history and development of the Isles of Scilly from pre-history through the Civil War and up to the present day and now leads guided walks on these topics around St Marys, which is where I met up with him, even though I had to forego half a day's diving.

It was a real pleasure to walk and talk with him and I was hugely impressed with his knowledge and the freedom with which he shared it with enthusiastic amateurs such as me.

Just time for some very last minute gift shopping before we set off on the dot of 4 pm for the Runnelstone waypoint, 26 miles distant as the crow would fly, and thence Penzance a further 9 miles on.

One hour thirty eight minutes later, which even included some posing against the Runnelstone buoy backcloth, we were alongside the quay in Penzance harbour – the efficient and uneventful crossing behind us. We had disciplined ourselves to 22 knots for the dual purpose of fuel economy and the advantages of sticking closely together. Pity, someone must have forgotten to inform Chris

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The Diving Statistics

There were a total of 122 dives carried out – which, discounting the paltry 2 undertaken by a flu-stricken Andy, equates to an average of 12 per diver. There were 69 wreck dives and 53 scenic dives undertaken.

25% of the dives were at depths greater than 40 metres; 57% between 30 and 40 metres; 11% between 20 and 30 metres; and 7% shallower than 20 metres.

Average depth was 33.7 metres and average duration was 36.8 minutes.

Full diving records are recorded in a Worksheet at **Annex 1**

The Cost

Average cost per individual turned out to be as follows:-

	Forecast	Actual	Comments
	£	£	
Miscellaneous	5	26	Searching costs; levy; Bar-B-Q supplies
Ferry	95	69	Less fuel used than allowed for; more people in boats
Container hire	23	20	
Trailer Parking	17	5	Arranged on the cheap
Towing	12	37	Fully allocated costs paid out, rather than marginal costs
Mooring	24	26	More boats
Compressor hire	12	0	Gratis (Paul Morris)
Outboard Fuel/oil	125	93	Less fuel used (only one tank per day – but significantly higher costs (up to £1.49 per litre)
Air	35	33	Discounted due to volume. More diving than anticipated
Evening Trips	12	7	
Camping	60	51	
Total	419	368	

The grant gratefully received from BSAC further reduces the individuals' liabilities

The detailed cost breakdown is also on an **Annex 1** Worksheet

The above excludes eating out costs and the costs associated with getting from home to Penzance and the car parking at Penzance.

Performance against Objectives

Of the total number of 89 scored dives, the average marking was 4.16 (where 2 is poor, 3 is good; 4 equates to "very good" and 5 to "outstanding")

The intention at the outset had been to combine one of the classic wreck dives with one of the dramatic scenic's on every "core" day.

This was more or less achieved. Plympton/Hathor, Italia, King Cadwallan, Isabo, and Schiller were all located and dived. As was the Cita. Trenemene and Gilstone however were the only classic scenic's to be dived – though each was done twice.

The disappointments were that we failed to locate and dive the Arden Craig; and the brisk northerlies ruled out the three scenic dives we had targeted around the northern extremities of St Martin's (Deep Ledge, Deep Ledges, and Flat Ledge).

However although there was repetition, every single dive was a top quality site – in the sense that the second dives of the day would have qualified as the main dive anywhere else in the United Kingdom. And the diving was all enjoyable. It may not have been challenging in its own right. What **was** challenging was the logistics and planning required to put together that particular sequence of enjoyable 30 – 40 metre plus dives in one short week, and the scores demonstrate unqualified success on that front.

Whilst the number of “guaranteed” GPS WGS 84 fixes was not as great as we would have hoped, the major popular wrecks were all achieved and the scenic dives at Trenemene and Gilstone are straightforward to locate anyway.

So far as skill development was concerned, there was a general reluctance to take on responsibility for logistics planning or site location, and this was left to the 4 first class divers on the trip to organize. Encouragingly though, the feedback comments do seem to suggest that awareness of what is involved was raised to a new level, and therefore hopefully the individuals concerned will want to get more involved with future trips of this nature

5 of the 9 issued feedback forms were returned and these are at **Annex 2**

The Good points and the Bad points (see also **Annex 3** for learning points and **Annex 4** for key contacts)

Good points-: Weather, tender, trolley, pontoon, successful logistics, friendliness and assistance of island contacts (camp site owner, the Harbour Master's team, the Sibleys crew, and Jim Heslin).
Things we could have done without-: residual plankton, Andy's cold

Technical data

Information gleaned (WGS 84 GPS positions and tidal flow information) is recorded at **Annex 5**

Safety Note: by its nature, anyone proposing to use this information should cross-check by other means its likely validity for their purposes.

Expedition Members

Mike Shean	First Class Diver and Expedition Leader
Fiona Castle	Dive Leader and Joint Expedition Leader
Tony Reed	First Class Diver
Darren Andrews	Advanced Diver
Tim Fell	Advanced Diver
Richard Holden	Advanced Diver
Carol Walker	Dive Leader
Paul Morris	Advanced Diver
Andy Moll	First Class Diver
Chris Dalton	Dive Leader
Chris Chopping	First Class Diver

Sevenside Sub Aqua Club
BSAC Branch No 364
June 2008