



# Adventure to Hell

First Class Diver candidate **Duncan Read**, mentored by Ron Evans, took Darwen BSAC on a wild adventure in Scottish seas



At Darwen BSAC we think a good expedition is something to treasure for years, combining new experiences, new sites and new skills. What could be better than a week's wild camping and diving on the secret shores of West Scotland, hopefully discovering cracking new dive sites while making new friends? We always need more boat handlers so Diver Cox'n Assessments were sprinkled into the mix.

Camping is fun, and diving is even more fun – yes? BSAC's Expeditions Grant Scheme BEGS thought so, and approved Duncan Read's plan as an application for a grant. Duncan's First Class Expedition Plan was going into action.

The 10 participants signed up to dive the sea loch of Loch Hourn, which lies to the east of Skye. The trip required that we took everything. There would be no water, electricity or toilets in our wild camping site, which was reached only by a 20 minute RIB ride from road at the head of the loch.

In addition to 29 bags of firewood, we had to take gallons of fresh water, tents, food to sustain hungry divers for a week, as well as tents, dive gear, two compressors, chocolate bars, and I believe some alcohol. Fortunately, Diving Officer Ian Dearden has access to a lorry as our packing skills weren't good enough to get all this into cars.

## Day One

We met at Fort William, set up our vehicle convoy and had a sunny journey along 17 miles of small Scottish roads to our launch site where the road ended at the head of Loch Hourn. We remembered that balmy day for the rest of the trip. The weather forecast for the week said that there might be some rain and wind mid-week, but nothing special.

Having loaded, transported and unloaded four boats worth of gear and supplies we confirmed that the dive kit was all present and working. Then our camp was set up in flat, soft earth and grass.

The day ended with good campfire food and camaraderie around a roaring fire set by William Bradley, who can dive as well as being a semi-professional arsonist. This is the life!

Ⓜ Above: (l-r) Xxx  
xxx xxx xxx xxx  
xxx xxx xxx xxx  
xxx xxx xxx xxx  
Ⓜ Far left: Xxx xxx  
xxx xxx xxx xxx  
xxx xxx xxx



⬇ Below: Xxx xxx xxx xxx  
xxx xxx xxx xxx xxx xxx  
➡ Right: Xxx xxx xxx xxx  
xxx xxx xxx xxx xxx xxx  
➡ Far right: Xxx xxx xxx  
xxx xxx xxx xxx xxx xxx  
xxx



## » Day Two

We saw the sun in the early morning (and met the midges that night). We carried out two shakedown dives, one on a wall covered in dead men's fingers, and one on a pinnacle that turned into a scallop dive, at 22 and 26 metres respectively. All went well. The underwater visibility was a magnificent 10 metres, with a good variety of life, edible and otherwise in easy sight. We were planning a seafood night later in the week. That evening we said goodbye to blue skies: as it turned out this was to be our last drying day.

## Day Three

We woke to rain and a bit of wind, just enough to remind us that the diving was in the UK. We weren't put off and dived a wall where you could choose your depths, and then a three-knot drift in the afternoon at 20+m to build up the appetite. That night the midges ate us alive.

## Day Four

As the trip went on, we got into our diving stride, both under and 'above' water – I say above advisedly because it rained, and rained, sometimes with wind, and more wind. With marginal conditions, our two planned Diver Cox'n assessments were put to one side, for later in the week.

On the good side we were getting about 10-15m viz: on the top this was a tea-coloured dive, but below 15m we passed through the 'run-off-o-cline' into the dark and clear waters, where there was profuse life. As a confirmed wreck diver, that was of no interest to me, so to stop my grumbling we dived the Port Napier at 20m.

The boat ride to the wreck, which is near to the Kyle of Lochalsh, was a bumpy hour's passage, in what felt like a force six wind. Ian and Martin were the boat handlers that day, and they had a good opportunity to show off their skills in rough water, but both were excellent skippers in the conditions, so I was not sick.

On arrival at the site, finding the wreck could have been a problem, as the marks had been forgotten, but our second RIB's crew saw the mast sticking 7m out of the water – a useful clue.

The Port Napier is a minelayer that sank with following an explosion during the Second World War, but she had the sense to sink upright. This »

## The good, the bad and the ugly

**WHAT WAS GOOD?** The diving was in cool clear water, giving everyone the opportunity to choose a comfortable depth, while being able to see healthy life. We enjoyed diving what looked good on the chart, and finding out if our predictions were correct. Some were right, some were wrong, but that's the fun of it.

**WHAT WE LEARNT (WASN'T ALL BAD)** No toilet tent can have too many guy ropes. Washing in the sea is a theory concept, not a viable practical exercise. It only works for plates, pans and the foolhardy. Loch Hourn means 'sea loch of hell' for a reason. Camping is an adventure, but diving is more fun.

**THE TEAM (NOT ALL UGLY)** Duncan Read, Ron Evans, Pat Booth, Jill Dearden, Ian Dearden, Paul Targett, Mike Coar, Judith Dearden, William Bradley





① Above: Xxx xxx  
xxx xxx xxx xxx xxx  
xxx xxx xxx

② Above right: Xxx  
xxx xxx xxx xxx xxx  
xxx xxx xxx xxx

② was a fantastic dive with many swim-throughs for the adventurous, into deep dark holds for the bold, and a nice bumble across the deck for the inexperienced, all before the deck uncovered at low water. There is really too much to see in the one dive available. I thought this would make an excellent site for a wreck appreciation course.

Handily for us, just across the loch at the Kyle of Lochalsh was a quay with a coffee shop.

## Day Five

Oh dear, it was rainy and windy again. The excitement of the wreck dive had buoyed me up, so we did some more seafood diving, collecting ingredients for the evening meal. Jill and Judith had been doing a fantastic job preparing food for us all week, and I was sure tonight would be no different. It was still too windy and bouncy for the assessments.

Our dive on Ellice Shoal Pinnacle, about a mile from camp, that afternoon became known as the Forty-Nine Steps. The chart shows the top of the pinnacle at just 1.5m below chart datum. The contour lines compressed so that within 30m the charted depth was 50m below chart datum. This should be at least a great wall dive. With the tip of the pinnacle just lurking below the surface, there surely should be some wreckage at this dive site.

Our hopes were high, Ian put the shot efficiently at the base of the wall, so we could spend our time working up it. Down at 34m, it was black as night, possibly because Ron had got there before me. We

swam on a bearing against the current for two or three minutes in the assumption we would hit the wall. Two minutes at 34 meters with nothing but black above and pitch black below seems much longer.

We eventually hit the wall. It was covered in life; the most prominent and by far the most aggressive creatures were the squat lobsters. When the squatties sensed our presence they came out snapping their claws at us; just looking for a fight. What a great dive.

At the surface, Ron's computer registered his dive depth of 48.7meters. I'm not sure there were quite 49 steps up from the bottom. Ron had a big smile on his face, despite the lack of rust on his suit, but do you think the squatties knew it was Wednesday and therefore seafood night?

## Day Six

For a change it was windy and wet. Most of my clothes were damp or wet, as were my undersuits (one to wear, one to dry had been the plan). One dive "just around the corner" for 42 minutes at 22 metres, was devoid of interesting life, and no wreckage either, unless you count a stainless steel wok. I felt a bit worn out so I sat out the second dive of the day.

After four days of just wind and rain, with intermittent rain and continual rain, the wind arrived on day six with a vengeance. We went to bed at about 8.30pm because of the severity of

③ Below: Xxx xxx  
xxx xxx xxx xxx xxx  
xxx xxx xxx

④ Below right: Xxx  
xxx xxx xxx xxx xxx  
xxx xxx xxx xxx







Ⓜ Above: Xxx xxx xxx xxx



Ⓜ Above: Xxx xxx xxx xxx



Ⓜ Above: Xxx xxx xxx xxx

the rain, despite making efforts to have a really good bonfire. The wind and the rain increased, so that by 2am all of my three tent poles had broken.

Of more importance was the moment our toilet lost its tent, the mess tent was threatening to take off, and two sleeping tents tore apart. The wind was about 80mph. For an hour or two, I was squashed flat by my tent, unable to move, but more wretched souls had to move to stronger tents. I thought I was off to see the Wizard of Oz.

Early the next morning, our camp was a scene of devastation. The toilet tent had been destroyed, and many personal tents damaged, everything was cold and wet. The decision was made to cut the week short by a day. So, after breakfast, we started the exodus, taking some seven hours to decamp back to the mainland shore. ●

## Wild diving essentials

Here is some information about the practicalities of remote camping as we see them. The land belongs to Scotland, so there is no special permission needed to camp, although we followed the Mountaineering Council of Scotland's guidelines, essentially to leave no evidence of your presence behind, with special mention of toilet materials. When we left, all you could see of our village was some modestly flattened grass.

**ACCOMMODATION:** Our campsite was based on a spit of land sticking out into the loch itself. Above the rocky shore line the ground was thick grass and earth, good for holding tent pegs, and providing a soft under-tent floor. At high water, the water's edge was only five metres or so from the camp boundaries, which made things very easy. The centre of our village was the cooking tent and eating area, with the accommodation tents in a line to both left and right. The sleeping tents were separated by a distance calculated to keep the intrusion of snoring and other noises to a minimum. This mostly worked.

**CONVENIENCES:** In isolated splendour was the toilet tent, in which there was a portable toilet. We took enough environmentally friendly toilet fluid to last the whole trip. The toilet was emptied daily, not into the sea, but into a freshly dug hole in the ground (well done, William). The toilet tent fell over three times during the week. We rigged up a signal system, so that we could tell from a distance when the facility was in use.

**DISH WASHING:** Dishes were washed with sea water: a big rinse first, followed by a soap wash, with soap formulated for use with sea water, and then a final splash of fresh water to lose the salt, before the dishes were dried to be put away immediately.

**PERSONAL WASHING:** This was another consideration. One very hardy person washed in the sea. Sensible people did not do that – it was freezing, and we are nesh. We used personal hygienic wipes, and did not get too close to each other, although we were all distinctly fragrant by the end of the week. Those on dishwashing duty, however, smelt freshest.

**EATS AND TREATS:** Some of us could cook; the others took their turn with dish and pot washing. There was no pub, or any other human habitation in the vicinity: the nearest humans were at Kyle of Lochalsh, about one hour away by RIB. We only went there once during our week, as part of our wreck diving excursion. We were entirely self-sufficient through the week, although all enjoyed the luxury of a latte after our wreck dive: well, we were passing, and it would have been rude not to.

**LAUNCHING:** The two RIBs were launched at the start of the week, and did not come out until the end. We kept them in the loch, moored to a buoy. We pulled the boats in from the mooring by hand, using a pulley system, and kept adequate water under the boats at all times. This system worked, so that even after the big storm the boats were still securely moored. When diving, we lashed the two boats together, so that one crew looked after both.

**DIVING GAS:** We did not bring kit out of the boats for fills, but instead had two compressors ashore, feeding an extensive air hose, which went out to the RIBs, so that the cylinders were filled in situ. This saved a lot of time and effort. There would usually be two persons on Fill Patrol after each dive. We came back for fills after each dive.



Ⓜ Above: Xxx xxx xxx xxx