

BSAC Malin Head 28<sup>th</sup> May – 1<sup>st</sup> June 2008



Not many days like this overlooking Malin Head

The idea for this trip came about when two of the party were diving at Rathlin Island as part of a BBC film team in June 2007. Looking at the charts one day, we asked the skipper of the boat, “Wheres Malin Head then?” He pointed out the window at a headland on the horizon, “Just over there”, he said. Both of us then said in chorus “mmmmmm!” We had seen the pictures from the magazines, heard of the visibility and the size of the wrecks and so an Expedition was hatched....

Fast forward to Christmas 2007, as part of the BSAC First Class Diver examination an expedition plan has to be submitted. I had realised that this would be a perfect time to combine the examination part with a real expedition. All of the work would not go to waste and I also looked into the application in for a BSAC BEG’s grant. This again was very similar to the expedition plan and now all I needed was a boat and a dive team! All of this was all a perfect distraction from the Christmas movie. Eventually everything was submitted for New Years Eve after some frantic festive typing and with a sigh of relief I could relax(for a short while...).

During January and February I had started contacting various BSAC Trimix Divers I knew to see if they were interested in tasking part. Some keen, others not so, led to some anxiety on my part trying to fill spaces while keeping costs down and whether I had enough to run the trip. The Skipper had suggested i plan for May, as this had consistently been the month with the best weather for the past few years. I decided to go with this advice and chose the slackest tides for available dates. Back to the trip spaces I had exhausted my address book and emails were sent to off to Area Coaches, regional lists and posts on various Forums, trying to attract suitably Qualified Divers. Once I had a core of 6 divers all further planning then had to be put on hold until we knew we had the funding in place – more stress!!!

The funding was finally confirmed in mid February, which left us 3 months to prepare! Four of us were in the Edinburgh area and two in Aberdeen, so we had to complete our Work-Up Dives separately. Both groups having to dodge the fickle East Coast weather for suitable days. Decompression stations were built and tested, rebuilt and endlessly

adjusted! During this period of testing we had some interesting experiences, ranging from a runaway deco station in the Clyde shipping lane and bungee cord so stretched the first bar was found at 18m! This certainly tested the patience of our long suffering local skippers, John Teevan of the Flying Eagle and Iain and Jim Easingwood of the North Star. However, all the Testing and Practice Days proved worthwhile, as on one of the work up Dives we managed to raise a Bell from a virgin wreck, 20 miles off Eyemouth!



Deco Station in Driveway laid out and out at sea.

Come the end of May, everything was booked up and the few days before the expedition were very hectic with all the last minute preparations and gas filling. With some exotic bottom mixes required, stage and bailout cylinders to be filled it took us around 48 hours to fill everything. Thanks to Dougie and Chris at Edinburgh Diving Centre for putting up with all our requests and analysing! The night before d-day we packed all of the gear into the one pick-up Truck, with numerous cylinders, rebreathers, weights, cameras and most of the dive shop including a J cylinder of helium. The old Hilux was well down on her leaf springs and we looked at each and thought, how much kit do four people need?

The weather wasn't far from our minds in the lead up to the trip and there were variable forecasts all week, not what you want when travelling 25 miles offshore in a RIB! However come the day of the ferry we had a great forecast with light easterly wind and a big sun shining. The crossing over the Irish Sea went well with the Group getting to know each other with all the usual tekkie questions! Where have you been diving, what mixes do you use, scrubber duration, bailout etc, etc, we certainly got some funny looks from fellow passengers – a right bunch of bores! Jer Cameron had been to Malin Head twice before so we spent a good hour picking his brains on what to expect and specific area to look for.

Once in Northern Ireland we made our way up to the Aquaholics Dive Shop which the Charter Boat was attached to and we discussed the next days timings, shotlines and safety procedures. After doing an 'Exped shop' at the Supermarket we took the North Antrim Coast road along to the Magilligan Ferry and then onto Malin Head. It was here we noticed the signs read kph and yield, we had crossed the border without noticing anything! From this point it wasn't a long drive up to Malin village where we had rented a 5 bedroom house. Once there, both pickups were emptied and obligatory team pictures were taken with all the assembled gear.



L>R, Shane Wasik, Jerermy Cameron, Paul Haynes, Ross Coventry, Stevie Adams.

The next days slack wasn't until the afternoon, so we had the Evening and Morning to go through all the gas boosting, analysing, rebreather checks, battery charging, camera prep and table cutting. Although we had lots of time, we didn't feel that we were sitting around, there was always plenty gear to be fiddled with and cups of Tea to be made. We were joined later by Warren Izzett who had made his own travel arrangements due to work commitments and flown into Belfast. The much quicker option when someone else transports your gear!

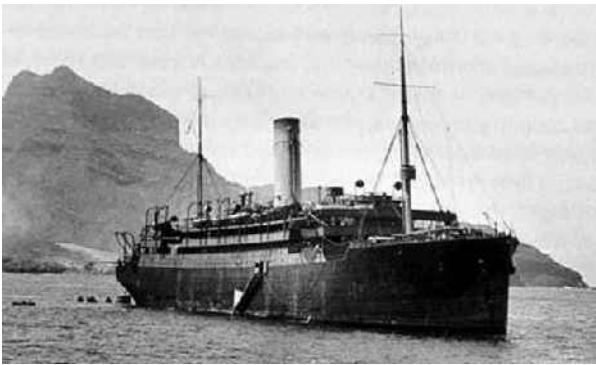
We woke up the next morning to Blue Skies, glorious sunshine, and no wind! We looked out across the bay to calm blue seas and we knew we were in for a treat. Looking at the Forecasts we were still unsure about the weekend weather but we would worry about that later. With plenty of time to spare we drove up from Malin village to Portmore Pier on the East side of Malin Head. As we came up over the hill we gazed out to calm turquoise blue seas! Still with time in hand we visited the most Northerly point in Ireland and the remains of the Wartime Lookout/Communication Posts. This area was one of the main staging points for the Atlantic convoys and we took a moment to think about the real reasons why the all the wrecks are there and imagined what it would have felt like to be on the ships all these years ago.

Loading up at Portmore was very easy with a set of steps convenient for loading up the boat. We were using the Aquaholics 11m Storm Force Cabin RIB, with its twin 250hp Yamaha engines. The boat had double electronics and radar along with first aid and oxygen, even a microwave was available but we stuck to pre-made sandwiches! Skipper Richard went through the safety brief for the boat and once everyone was ready we made our way round Malin Head toward Loch Swilly and the wreck of the Laurentic.

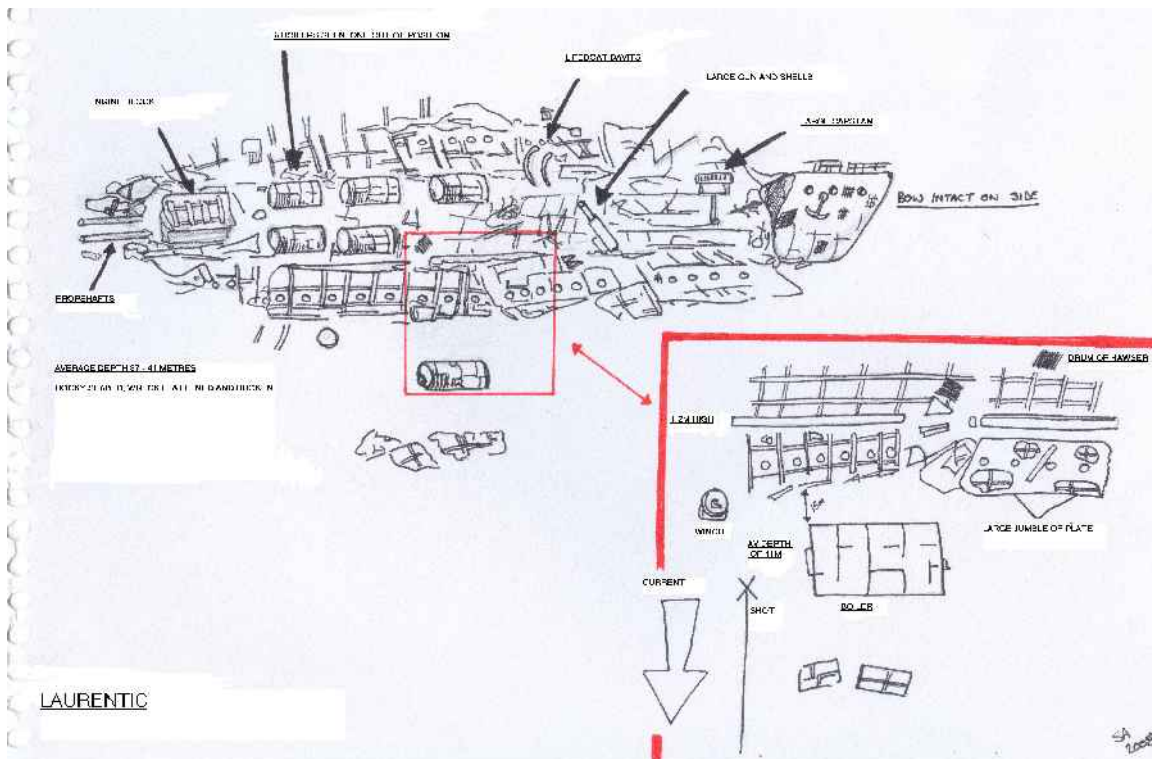


Loading the RIB Aquaholics 2 at Portmore Pier and view out to sea

29<sup>th</sup> May 2008...Expedition Day 2



RMS Laurentic 055°18'242N 007°35'464W Lying N/S Bow Northern  
 White Star Liner – 14,892 Tonnes – Built by Harland & Wolff, Belfast  
 Sunk 1917 by a mine layed by U80. Carrying 35 tonnes of Gold Ingots, not all recovered.  
 Lying North to South  
 Dived at +1hr30-+3hrs Belfast with around ½-1knt current across the wreck (W>E).  
 10 Miles from Portmore Pier



Once Richard had shotted the wreck we kitted up in waves with our specific tasks. Richard had organised a trusty deckhand in Annie who was on hand to clip stages in and pass out spare when required. She was an instructor at the dive school and had a set of kit for our emergency procedure and this defiantly gave us piece of mind. First pair in secured the shot on the bottom, second secured the deco station and third released the shot and station. The visibility wasn't great offshore as with our lovely bright sunshine also meant the phytoplankton bloom had arrived! This thick green soup was 25m deep here, the viz was down to around 3m and temperature a good 2-3 deg above the bottom. However, once underneath it the visibility improved to 10-15m and there was still plenty of ambient light. We arrived on the gravel bottom just off the boilers and had to tie into the wreck as there was a fair bit of current coming across the wreck. There were lots of large plates around with many holes where the shiny brass portholes used to be. Being inshore there was lots of life around with Ballan and Cuckoo wrasse flitting about along with the large resident shoals of Pollock and bib covering the wreck. The first thing you noticed on the bottom was the size of the boilers, easily 2 or 3 divers tall. From this area there was also a large propshaft and various machinery lying around that we couldn't identify.



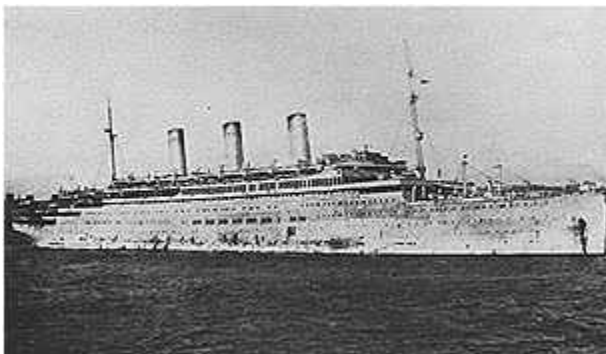


Stevie Adams on Laurentic, lined off from Shot with Boiler in the Background.

Even on the bottom at 41m we felt the long and lazy surface swell pushing us to and fro, combined with the strong current this made finning difficult and hard work. The two divers with scooters managed to see most of the wreck, and didn't notice any current or swell, and were able to give us a much bigger overview of the site, they also managed to see the more intact bow section which sounded very impressive. At the end of our bottom time the tide was really running and made ascending the shot difficult, it was a great relief when the station was released and we started our more relaxing 9 and 6m stops! Once everyone was back on board we headed back to the harbour, happy that we had the first dive in the bag and that the deco station had worked well.

Back at the ranch, there was a mass of Drysuits, Underclothes, Scrubber units drying in the evening sun. However interrupting the pleasant evening calm was the hiss of the only open circuit diver gas boosting! That evening we had one more Diver join our party, Brendan Flanagan, who had driven up from Southern Ireland to dive for the remaining three days. We all managed a couple of pints at the local hotel and an early(ish) night after the days excitement!

30<sup>th</sup> May 2008...Expedition Day 3



RMS Justicia 055°39'760N 007°43'228W

White Star Liner – 32,234 Tonnes – Built by Harland & Wolff, Belfast 1917 alongside Britannic. The liner was used as a hospital ship and used to replace Laurentic and even used crew from Britannic. Sunk 1918 by 6 Torpedos from U64 and U124.

WHITE SAND SFORD

ROCKS OF BLANK

ROW INTACT

65M

71M

PEOP LOGS

TUNNEL

WHITE SAND SFORD  
MASSIVE WRECK GENERAL DEPTHS 60 TO METRES  
LYING IN A LARGE SCOUR PIT DEPTHS IN SOME OF  
THE HOLES OF 74 METRES  
WRECKS ALL REPORTED A DIFFERENT NUMBER OF  
BOILERS EITHER 8, 9 OR 12.  
JUST TOO LARGE TO GIVE A DETAILED SKETCH

30m

63M

55M

60M

SA 1000

We had decided to do the Empire Heritage today, again we were blessed with perfect weather and flat seas, and we had a relaxing morning cutting tables and prepping kit. At the boat Richard informed us we were pushing slack a little and that he had tried to get a message through, unfortunately our mobile signal seemed to come and go where we were in Malin Village and we ended up getting the message when we were offshore! Never mind, a chain was formed and the boat was loaded in a record breaking 9 minutes! On site, as per the day before, the two scooter divers were kitted up ready to go while the others sorted the station and helped with the shotline. Richard had problems locating the wreck with the marks he had and so we were faced with a dilemma with slack fast approaching! Should we dive the Justicia, which was closer and deeper or HMS Audacious, shallower and further inshore? We opted to go with the Justicia and everyone sprang to check run times and tables. As we were carrying many variants we were able to mould the new wreck profile to our dive plans. We had hoped to dive the bow of the Justicia, however Richard was under pressure and elected to hook into wreckage rather than us get down to a seabed with no bow. I'm sure many people can sympathise having had the experience of a dive on HMS Vicinity! Once the first pair were finally in, the remaining Pairs, known as the Keystone Cops did the frantic 5min kit up and got in as quick as possible in order to get the last of the diminishing slack time! The water this far offshore should be crystal clear, but not today. Again with the big sun shining the phytoplankton was out in force down to 30m! Underneath this visibility improved to 20 or 30m and we could see the lights and yellow rebreather box's on the wreck from this mark! Wow! We had shotted midships right in the middle of the boilers. Now if we

thought the boilers from the day before large, these seemed Mega. It seemed like the ship had landed on her keel here and split open as the plating and windows were lying either side. As our eyes accustomed to the light, as far as you could see was seabed composed of Plating and Portholes, with small areas of white sand.

There were massive shoals of super size Pollock over the wreck, and again colourful Cuckoo Wrasse at 70metres. Most of the party decided to get up close and personal with the wreckage but I elected to swim up at 60m over a bottom of 70m which gave a good overview of the area. I made it as far back as what appeared to be a large service tunnel, into which a Diver could easily have fitted. In this area there was also a large bulkhead structure that sat off the bottom a good 6-8m. With 5 divers all in this area we saw a differing amount of boilers, 6, 8 and even 12! However, being unable to stray to far from the shot and with such a vast wreck it was impossible to get more than a glimpse of this wreck on fin power alone. All too soon my 25min bottom time was over, I felt it went by in a flash and that I hadn't seen that much. Ascending up the shotline the wreck could be seen laid out below you, and we all had real feelings of vertigo! The tide had really picked up by now and the station was under so much tension that it was vibrating like bow string. I realised that I had to cut the deco station off but this was disconcerting to say the least when it was vibrating under tension with a 12lb weight attached. Once cut the pressure was off and we drifted along nicely. Safely up in to the 20's, in the plankton soup the viz dropped to around 5m and the temperature increased by a couple of degree. Nice and warm for those 6m stops. It was only on the surface that the group found out that Paul and Jeremy had scootered round most of the wreck with them raving about the large bow section and also the large props. They were totally blown away and had big smiles the whole journey back. There was certainly 5 green eyed monsters eyeing up their Aquazepps. Paul announced that he had some great footage on the video and we were all eager to see his "big bow shot". However Paul realised that his moment of fame was not to be, in the excitement he hadn't turned on the video! On the way back in we pinged the Empire Heritage just to make sure things went smoothly for the next day. Back at the house the rota cook made dinner, and the peace and quiet of the Evening was shattered by the sound of the only Open Circuit Diver's twinset being boosted again! With the rebreather divers muttering about their normal silent diving, noisy bubbles and gas boosting again.





Paul ready to dive with scooter and video, tended by Stevie Adams

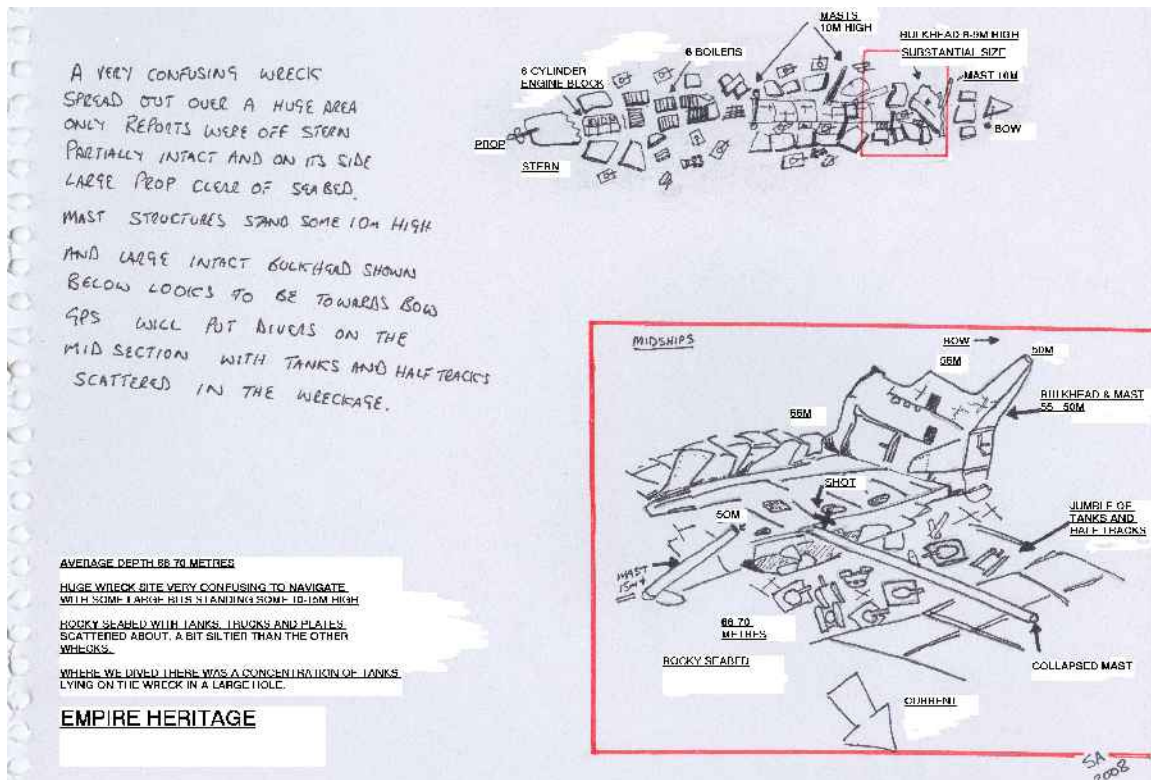
31<sup>st</sup> May 2008...Expedition Day 3



SS Empire Heritage 055°32'500N 007°43'100W NW/SE Stern Northern  
Transport Ship – 15,702 Tonnes – Built by Armstrong, Whitworth & Co, Newcastle,  
1930.

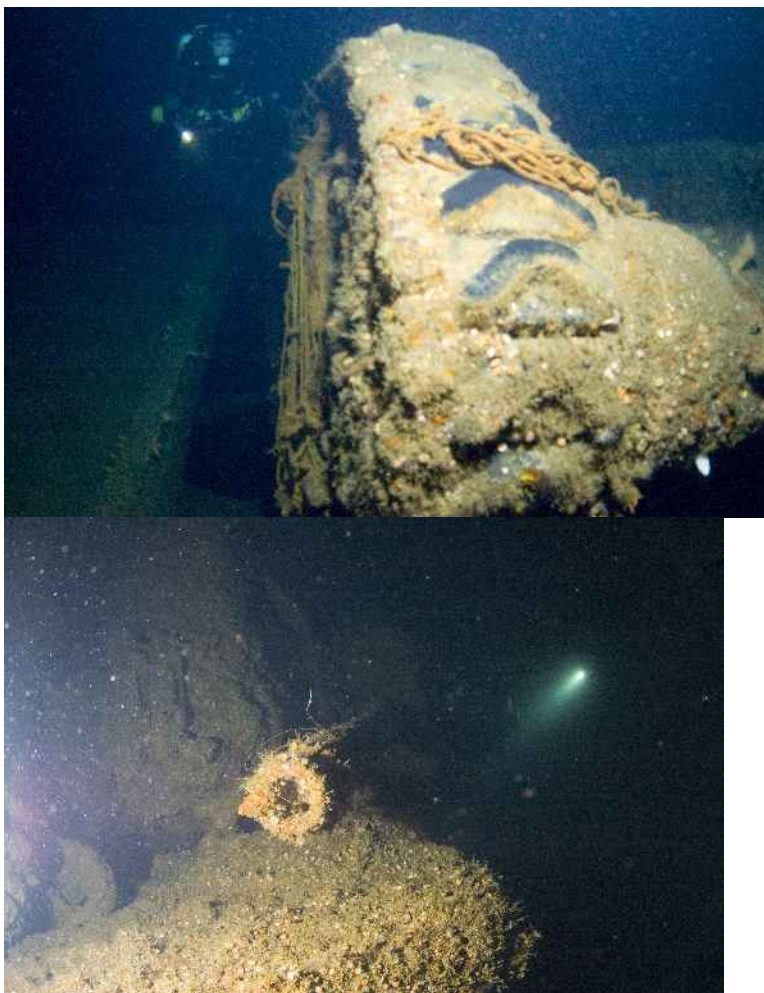
Sailing from New York bound for Liverpool as part as Convoy HXF 305, Sunk 1944 by  
U482. The u-boat then proceeded to sink a rescue ship 38min later so for some sailors they  
were sunk twice in the spaces of a few hours.

Dived at -40min - +1hr10 Belfast LW, 0.25-0.5knt across the wreck(P>S)  
18 Miles from Portmore Pier.



We woke up to yet another gorgeous day, how lucky had we been with the weather! Richard had made sure we had plenty of time by meeting again at 12.30, hopefully gaining an hour on the previous days slack water. Another day and another diver joined us, Stewart McMickan, who was in a neighbouring club to Brendan. This increased our compliment to 8 on the RIB, which was it's capacity for full Tek diving. About 5 miles out from the harbour, the shout went up, "Basking Shark!" Richard manoeuvred the boat perfectly and we all got a real close up seeing the big wide mouth hoovering up the plankton right next to the tubes. Unfortunately tides wait for no-one so we couldn't hang around. Being my first ever sighting I wasn't sure where my loyalty belonged.

We were joined by a second charter RIB on the way out, with flat clam seas and good visibility it seemed strange to be 20 odd miles offshore and have another boat beside us! Although it gave us slightly more of a comfort zone given the diving operations. With our surface procedures running smoothly we were in the water fairly quickly and on the bottom the shot was placed superbly... right on top of a pile of Sherman Tanks!



Ross Coventry next to tank tracks and gun turrets on Empire Heritage.

The tanks are sitting all jumbled up in a big pile, interestingly with rubber still on some of the tracks. We found it a lot darker on this dive, a big reduction in ambient light than on the previous days. With it only being a few miles inshore of the Justicia this confused us a little, although the seabed material appeared to be a bit siltier. We had fairly benign conditions on the bottom which made things on the shotline a bit easier. Again the scooter boys had a good run round the wreck, finding the flattened bow and big props. The rest of the team spent their 20-25 min bottom time poking around the tanks and big masts which lay across this middle section. However the bottom here was a little deeper than we had anticipated at 70m. The tanks sat up in the pile to around 64m and the masts even higher, at over 55metres. Scattered in the distance could be seen what looked like Trucks and Half-Tracks, as well as more tanks, again large chunks of machinery like Winches were hard to identify due to being super-sized. Once again the bottom time was over in a flash and it was back up the line for our obligatory hour+ of decompression. The Deco Station worked a treat, the only problem was the noisy open circuit diver with all his pesky bubbles. Apparently there was great silence (and a cheer!) when I left the station.....!

On the return to the harbour we were all still on the lookout for Basking Sharks and a couple miles from harbour the shout went up. "2 Basking Sharks, Starboard side!".

In I went with the camera and instructions from Richard to remain still and let them come to you! I ended up having four magical fly pasts, with me trying to remain still and get as many shots off as possible! At one point when I was observing the shark from the surface the dorsal fin disappeared and a few moments later it made a big splash at the surface behind me! My heartbeat quickened and I re-assured myself that they just eat plankton!

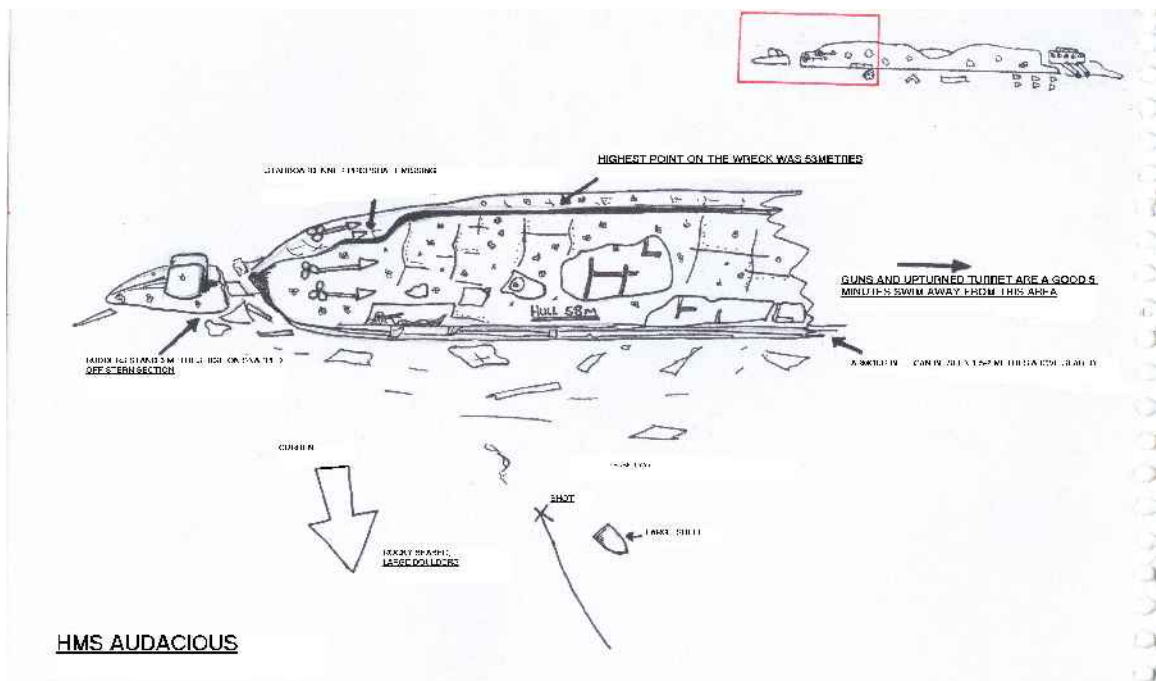


Shane Wasik and Basking Shark, with Inishtrahull lighthouse in the background.

1<sup>st</sup> June 2008...Expedition Day 4



HMS Audacious 055°28'291N 007°45'101W Bow SE Stern NW  
King George V Class Battleship 23,000 Tonnes– Built Glasgow 1913 by Cammel Laird.  
Whilst on target practice, struck a mine on port side, took in tow by Titanic sister ship Olympic but many difficulties due to high seas. Eventually took 14 hours to sink, after magazine blew up and ship capsized. Sinking was subject to an admiralty cover up due to other setbacks in the fleet.  
Seabed 61m, Keel at Stern 52m.  
Dived at -15min- +1hr55 HW Belfast. 0.5knt current across the wreck.



Divers on the Deco Station

Today was to be a quick turnaround from the leisurely afternoon dives of the previous 3 days. In order to make the 17:30 ferry we had to meet around 8 in the morning. After a marathon Gas pumping session (again) to fill the Lone Open Circuit Divers Twin Set and Stages we finally made it to the Pub for refreshment at 11pm. In the Morning I wasn't too pleased when the alarm went off, but one look through the curtains and another perfect day gave me the motivation to get up and sorted. Everyone was little quiet this morning,



after 3 days consecutive gas diving and all the prep before and after made for some tired divers. Nothing that a cup of Paul's bilge cleaner tea wouldn't sort out! We were joined by the other charter RIB today on the way out but we didn't spot any more Basking Sharks. The Audacious was the closest wreck by around 7 miles so we had less steam time on the way out. Kitting up was again slick but a little more subdued. On the bottom we had around 15-20m viz but with a reduction in depth there was more ambient light. The wreck appeared much siltier than the previous day's wrecks and reminded us of conditions in Scapa Flow. The shot was sitting at 64m on the rocky seabed and had landed next to a massive shell, it was right at the large stern section with the top of the keel sitting in around 50m, a good viewing point for the large props and double rudders which reminded us of the Margraf. There was a large hole in the hull where the thick armour could be seen, and lots of pumps cogs and shafts, this looked very like the Mine damage which sank her, none of us ventured inside here. The Hull was covered in life with Sea Cucumbers and Cuckoo Wrasse everywhere, some large Lobsters and massive shoals of Pollack.

Down to one scooter the other pair managed to get some good video footage of the large 13.5 inch guns lying on the seabed which were forward of the large stern section. They remarked on the large number of shells and Cordite seen lying around the turret, was this another case of Shells and Charges being stored in the Turret to speed up the rate of fire, this was strictly against regulations, but was disregarded to improve the rate of fire, and was the cause of several Ships being lost at Jutland.

With the shallower depth everyone felt it was an easier dive to finish off the expedition. Once we had cut away from the shotline to drift we had an interesting James Bond Thunderball moment when we seemed to scoop up the other boats shotline and divers, they were ascending on their shot only and were hanging on for dear life!

Once we were untangled (read kicked free) we drifted off with the tide, leaving our flag style friends to their shotline.

After surfacing everyone had tired but happy smiles from a good four days diving! On the way in we spotted what we thought was a minke whale but this time our large friend wasn't for sticking around. Once back at the Harbour we de kitted the boat and said our goodbyes to Richard and Annie who were then off to Islay to pick up some passengers! We made our way back to the house where we repacked everything for the ferry.

Goodbyes were said to Brendan and Stewart, and after a short 2 ½ hours drive we arrived at the Ferry Terminal. The team boilers was stoked with the chicken burger specials at the café and by this time we had a group of weary divers who were glad to get on the ferry for a rest. We had a good debrief and arrangements were made to do it again sometime, and what was next on the list.

We had completed a successful expedition, with no major incidents to speak of. The weather played a big factor in this success along with all the preparation beforehand! As expedition organiser it was a lot of work to ensure we got there and back but when we got diving like we did it was defiantly worth it. We learned a few things from the exped and from each other which I have listed below to hopefully help others.



Looking back towards Malin Head-Perfect Weather

## **Diving Points**

### **Learning Outcomes**

#### Wreck Finding

Although large wrecks, they are not exactly easy to find offshore. Would be good to pinpoint exact sections and have GPS positions for the Bow, Props, Tanks, Stern, Guns.

#### Tides

Although we dived around slack, we didn't feel that we were able to get dead on slack water. Currents were tolerable on the bottom. It is questionable whether there is true slack, or does the tide just swirl round from Flood to Ebb to Flood.

#### Deco Station

Down line needs to be deeper on the shot, and a waster/prussic tied to main line in case of a strong drag and needs to be cut.

#### Shot Weight

Too much work at end of dive to free off for the last Dive pair, better to have waster and cut the line. At these depths we should reduce the work load

#### Run Times

Carry at 10min table if not happy and want out quick

#### Strobes

Better having a number on the line and pilotage/orientation is essential. Team stayed close to shot and viz allowed us not to have to line off.

#### Exped Contact Details

##### Charter Boat

Richard Lafferty, Aquaholics Dive Centre, Port Stewart Northern Ireland, 02870-832584  
[www.aquaholics.org](http://www.aquaholics.org)

##### Accommodation

Helen Stewart, Bayview House, Malin Village, Donegal, Eire.  
<http://www.donegalcottageholidays.com/bayviewhouse/index.htm>

##### Ferry

P&O Irish Sea, Troon-Larne [www.poirishsea.com](http://www.poirishsea.com)

##### Prep Charter Boats

Iain & Jim Easingwood MV North Star, Eyemouth. [www.marinequest.co.uk](http://www.marinequest.co.uk)  
John Teevan MV Flying Eagle, Largs. [www.clyde-scuba.co.uk](http://www.clyde-scuba.co.uk)

##### Local Dive Centre

Dougie McEwan Edinburgh Diving Centre, 01312294838

##### Exped Kit

Divex, Aberdeen [www.divex.co.uk](http://www.divex.co.uk)

#### **Trips Costs**

~£350 per head before the grant excluding Gas.

Boat £1936 for 4 Days Charter

Accommodation 350E for 4 nights

Ferry £442 for 2 Pickups and 5 Passengers. (carrying 6 peoples kit)

Magilligan Ferry £20 (2 Cars)

Fuel £150 (2 pickups)

Food £20 per head for duration.

Shane Wasik, FCD, OC Trimix

Trip Report, Drawings and Pictures by Shane Wasik and Stevie Adams