

**SQSAC Sound of Jura Trip Dive Report**



**20 – 22 August 2010**



**Ally MacGregor**

## **Expedition Plan**

Using SQSAC Club RHIBS to explore and identify Dive Sites at the North end of the Sound of Jura around Crinan and the Island of Scarba, and to the South around Loch Sween and Loch Caolisport.

### **1. Aims**

To provide a weekend of Challenging and Adventurous Diving for a group of Trainee Advanced Divers, and to introduce them to Expedition Diving requiring the high level of Planning and Organisational skills needed to successfully undertake these Trips. Using Club Boats to test and practice Navigational and Boat handling Skills, and Identifying, locating and Diving various Sites using GPS and Charts and recording these sites for other Divers in the Future

### **2. Area**

Sound Of Jura

The Gaelic for Sound of Jura is *An Linne Rosach* which means Sound of Disappointment, but from a Divers point of view this area is anything but disappointing!.

This Strait of water lies between the East side of the Isle of Jura and the west side of the Peninsula known as Knapdale. The Crinan Canal exits to the North of the Sound at the Village of Crinan, this is a narrow and hazardous area for sailors, but is very interesting and exciting for Divers, with lots of Deep Walls, Skerries (small Islands), Pinnacles and strong Tidal Streams which can give some interesting, Adventurous and Exhilarating Dives.

The Famous Corrieveckan whirlpool lies further to the North of the Sound, and also the well known Grey Dogs or 'Little Corrieveckan' a popular Drift Dive site.

To the South lie the Sea Lochs of Loch Sween and Loch Caolisport, although fairly shallow and rarely dived they provide some interesting sheltered sites for second Dives, or if the weather prevents Diving in the Sound. At the South end of the Sound, in contrast to the North, it is much wider and more open; most of the small islands and reefs are close into shore. The ferries to Colonsay and Islay from the mainland skirt the Southern end of the Sound.

There are not a lot of recorded Wrecks in this area, which given the number of navigational hazards is quite surprising, the most well known being the Steam Naval Drifter Christine Rose which sank in 1941 and the Steamship Chevalier I, which has never been fully located, went down in 1854, there is also the Stormlight a Motor Vessel which went aground at the entrance to Craighouse on Jura in 1973, she lies in only 5 metres of water and is heavily broken up.

We also identified several small Wrecks North of Crinan in shallow water, mainly Fishing Boats and Yachts, and were advised of a small yacht lost by a resident at Castle Sween Caravan Site a few years ago on the East side of Eilean Nan Leac, a small rocky Island at the entrance to Loch Sween that hasn't yet been found.

### **3. Accommodation**

Castle Sween Holiday Park <http://www.ellary.com/> has a selection of Mobile Homes that can be rented it is sited on the East Shore at the Southerly end of Loch Sween, beside the Old Castle. Although quite remote it is an ideal Base to explore the Sound of Jura. Heading South Islay and Gigha are both within range. There is a good slip which is accessible at nearly all states of Tide, There is a small pontoon on the Beach which allows easy loading/unloading of Boats there are also Moorings available in the bay. There is a 'House Reef' just off the Beach which provides sheltered and safe Shore Diving.

### **4. Facilities**

The Site has all the usual facilities found on good quality Camp Sites including a Laundrette with Drying Facilities, a Shop on site and 'Rafters' a very good and friendly Bar/Restaurant

### **5. Air**

We originally planned to take our Club Compressor to allow us to be self sufficient for Fills but as we hadn't had a recent Air Quality Test, so decided to leave it until we could get a Test done. So the nearest Air Fill's are either at Quebec Marine Services, at Argyll Caravan Park, Inverary, Loch Fyne which is 30miles or an hour away and is by appointment. Or the preferred option which is Loch Fyne Dive Charters in Tarbert, 07812572681 <http://www.fyne-diving.co.uk/> this is again 30 miles away but has large Banks and can fill a Numbers of Cylinders very quickly, Nitrox and Trimix are also available here. As long as prior notice is given they will fully charge the banks allowing a quick turnaround.

### **6. Initial Plan**

To tow the Boats through and park at Crinan to launch Saturday. The rest of the party will then meet at Castle Sween later on Friday Evening.

Saturday Morning we plan to launch and set off from Crinan to Dive Ardnoe Point followed a visit to see the Corrievreckan then second Dive will be a High Energy drift at Grey Dogs. If the Tide or weather rules out Grey Dogs we have a Pinnacle to Dive .The Party will then split at Crinan with half setting off to Tarbert to get Air Fills and the rest recovering the Boats the relaunching them and mooring them up at Castle Sween overnight.

Sunday Morning we plan to dive the Christine Rose in the Morning to survey and record the Wreck site. Weather depending we then plan to Dive at the Lighthouse at Skervule to try and locate the Chevalier I Wreck, or as a backup plan do a drift dive at Dubh Sgeir/Carraig an Damh in the Sound of Jura.

If the Weather is an issue we will still be able to Dive as there are several sheltered sites close to Crinan, and on Sunday there are several Walls and Pinnacles to investigate in Loch Sween and Loch Caolisport that are sheltered from the weather.

## **7. Risk Assessment**

Standard and Generic risk assessments will not be listed here they are easily available from the BSAC Risk Assessment Pages on the Web.

<http://www.bsac.com/page.asp?section=1586&sectionTitle=Risk+Assessment>

In addition we stated that all divers carried DSMB's and a Dive Flag, Strict Dive times and Depth limits were to be adhered to, Reinforced separation Drill procedures, and agreed Emergency Signals to Surface Cover.

## **8. Useful Contacts**

Crinan Harbourmaster 01546602458 or VHF Channel 74  
Clyde Coastguard 01475729988 – MMSI002320022  
Belfast Coastguard 02802891463933 – MMSI 002320021

Hyperbaric Chamber - Aberdeen Royal Infirmary 08454086008

Police Stations  
Ardrishaig 01546602222  
Lochgilphead 01546702200

Hospitals  
Lochgilphead 01546602323  
Lorne and Islands Hospital Oban 01631567500

Met Office Weather  
Mull of Kintyre to Ardnamurchan Point  
MetCall 09014737473 – Fax 09060100463  
<http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/weather/marine/inshore>

## **9. Tides**

From the Reed's Nautical Almanac  
Craighouse, Jura + 6hrs HW Dover  
Loch Sween, Knapdale + 05:50hrs HW Dover  
It also advise that in the Sound of Jura, S of Crinan the rise of Tide occurs mainly during the 3 ½ hrs after LW, the fall during the 3 ½ hrs after HW. At other time the changes are small and irregular

Local Tide Tables for Crinan are from Carsaig Bay.\_  
<http://easytide.ukho.gov.uk/EASYTIDE/EasyTide/SelectPrediction.aspx?PortID=0387>

The Sound of Jura is notoriously difficult to be able to predict accurately due to the effect weather and water movements in this area, but using Craighouse on Jura gives a fairly accurate prediction  
<http://easytide.ukho.gov.uk/EASYTIDE/EasyTide/SelectPrediction.aspx?PortID=0383>

## **Dive Weekend Report**

At the last moment we decided to use Ally MacGregor's own RHIB as one of our boats had developed Radio issues. Ally and Debbie had towed the Club Boat up to Crinan in the Morning and on speaking to the Harbourmaster at Crinan discovered that launching at the state of Tide on Saturday Morning would be a problem. So they collected Ally's RHIB from Castle Sween and managed to launch both Boats by late Friday afternoon, and with the kind permission of the Harbour Committee, and a small donation, arranged to leave them on the pontoon at Crinan overnight.

All of the Party had arrived at Castle Sween by 21:00hrs and sat down to discuss the Weekends Plans and be briefed by the Expedition Leader. The weather forecast was not good and during the Evening the Met Office were changing the forecast almost constantly, we were forecast to have gale force 7+ with gusts of over 70mph overnight, with Saturday being F5-6 SW and Sunday the same but dropping through the day. We had worked out that the first Dive at Ardnoe Point would be sheltered and we would see what conditions were like before deciding the location for the second Dive.



Looking towards Crinan Slip



Pontoons with Club Boats on the Right

After an early Breakfast we arrived at Crinan at 08:30 and had the Boats loaded and ready to go by 09:00, the wind had dropped significantly so we decided to have a look at a site a little further along from Ardnoe point that we had identified from the Charts the night before this showed depth contours really close together suggesting a wall to 70 metres and more.

Rounding the point we found we still had some protection from the wind which was F4-5 with a sea state of 3-4, the Sounder and Plotter on our Club Boat now decided to fail so we had to depend on one Boat to mark the site, the Sounder confirmed a sheer wall from 14 metres to 70 metres so by 09:30 we had the first wave of Divers in.

We had decided on a strict 40 minute Dive Time and were surprised to see two DSMB's appear after 20 minutes but as both DSMB's then drifted on together, with no further agreed signals they were shadowed by one Boat and both Divers surfaced after 40 minutes to explain they had become separated but on deploying DSMB's they met up so carried on the Dive. This pair took over as Coxns and briefed the next wave on the site, the direction of Tidal Flow and depth information. Second wave all surfaced without incident reporting more Fish seen and better visibility on the now Flood Tide.

After returning to Crinan to change Cylinders and the weather looking reasonable we set off to the Corrievreckan, once in the Sound of Jura the wind was F4-5 gusting 6 with Sea State 4-5 so it was slow going as we encountered some large swells and confused Sea States, once in the Shelter of Jura and Scarba we were able to proceed a bit quicker and entered Corrievreckan. It was fairly calm but with some interesting up swells and some sets of large rolling waves appearing from nowhere, at the western end it was very rough with some breaking 3m+ waves and in this maelstrom we saw a large whale breaching twice and a school of porpoise that appeared to be feeding in the area around the Pinnacle. We entered the oddly named Pigs Bay and stopped for lunch to discuss the next Dive Site.

We discounted Grey Dogs as the sea conditions wouldn't allow a drift dive in safety, so we decided to investigate an undived Pinnacle, that we had pinged off Jura on a previous Trip.

After a bumpy 25 minute trip we arrived at this Site which lies about 200m from the Shore, after sounding around it we noticed it was 6m to the top, shallower on the shore side at 25 metres and seemed to stretch for over 100m, general depths of 32 metres in the area. The wind was freshening but the sea state was still not building, although there appeared to be quite a current on the surface.

We dropped the first wave of divers and unfortunately due to a misunderstanding both boats dropped their Divers in at the same time and only 3 managed to reach the shotline and get down the others being swept off the line by what appeared to be wind driven current. After recovering these exhausted Divers, the wind appeared to be picking up and with the Seas building the recovered Divers elected not to Dive.

After 35 minutes a DSMB appeared and shortly after a Diver was seen surfacing, when recovered into the Boat the Diver advised she has become disorientated due to severe head pains and had lost buoyancy missing 4 minutes of stops Oxygen was administered and the decision made to send the Boat and Casualty back to Crinan, after 5 minutes the Diver advised the pain was receding and she felt much better. We arrived at Crinan and after further checks and an hour on Oxygen the Diver advised it was the recurrence of a blocked Sinus condition experienced in the past.

With the weather deteriorating we decided to finish early and recover the Boats and launch at Castle Sween in preparation for Sundays Diving, two of the party set off to Inverary to get cylinders filled while the rest recovered the Boats.

After a wet and windy Night we awoke to strong winds and rough seas, after delaying setting off for an hour we decided to poke our noses out of Loch Sween and see if we could get round to the Christine Rose.

As we reached the entrance to the Loch the sea was far too rough to Dive safely so we headed to Eilean nan Leac, a small rocky island in the entrance to Loch Sween we had identified as a potential back-up site from the charts the previous evening.

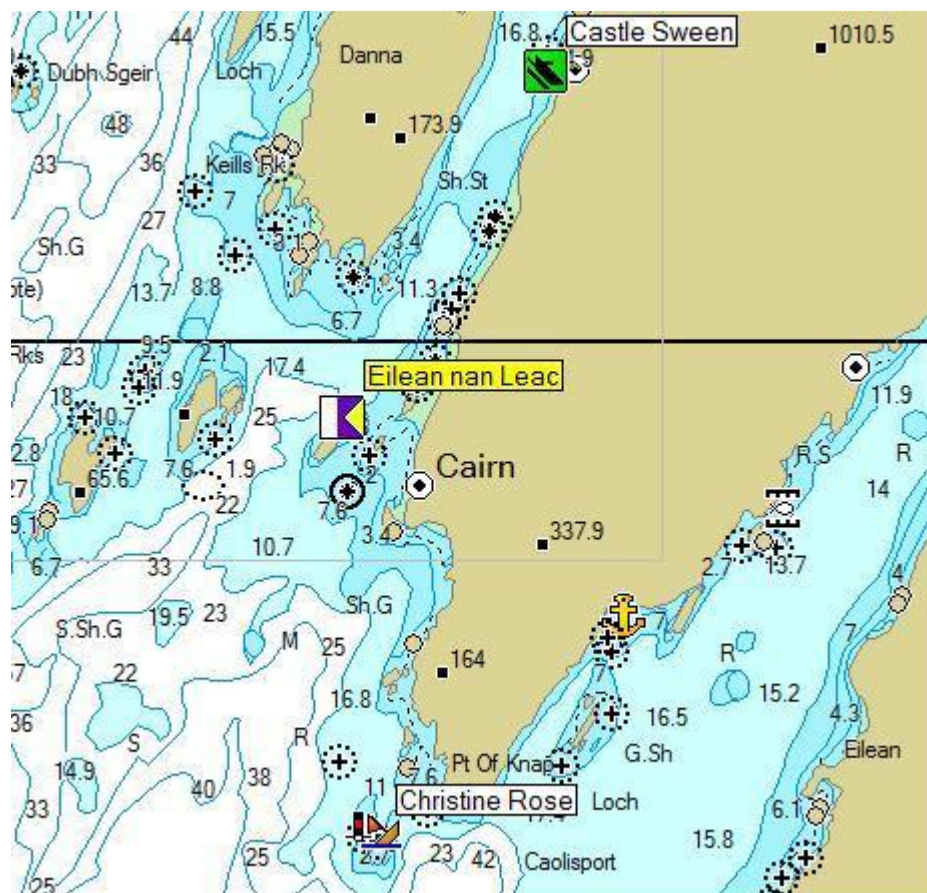
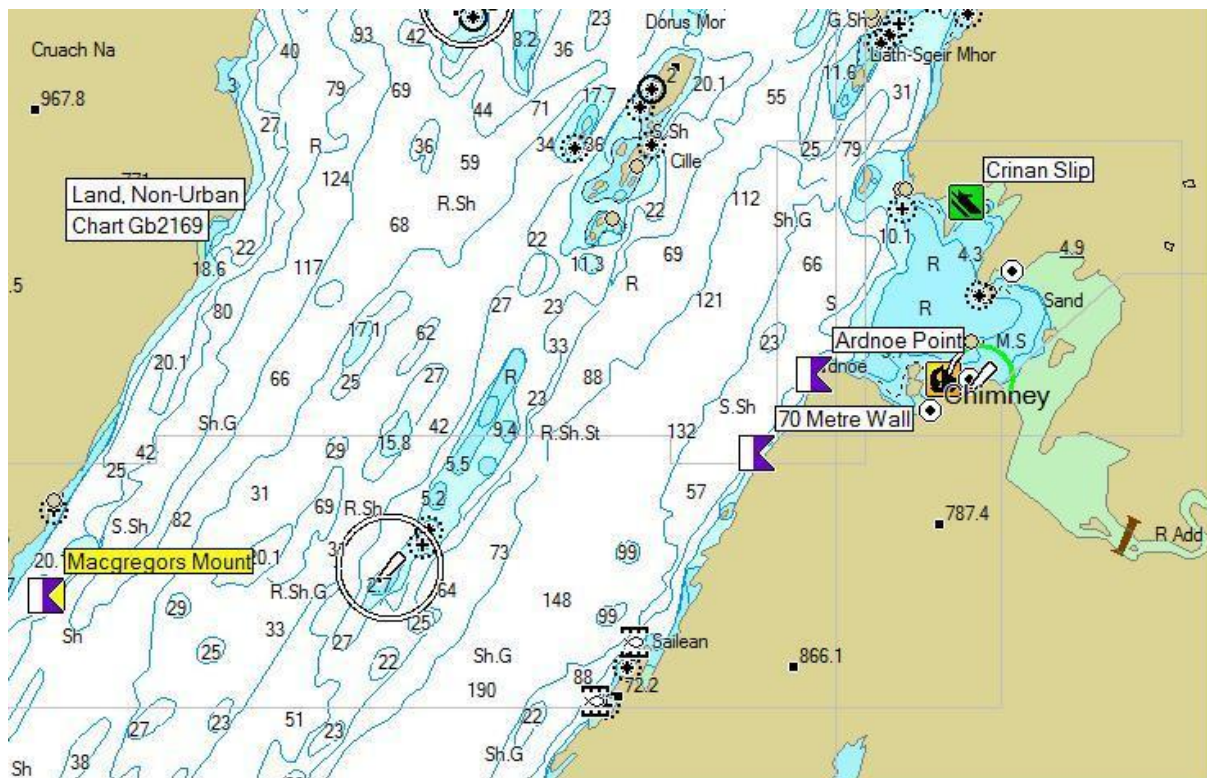
The charts appeared to show a gentle slope to 10m but on sounding along the more sheltered NW side we found an interesting steep reef dropping to 20-22 metres.

The first wave of Divers were dropped at the North end to drift with the ebb tide and after surfacing told of a really good reef system with small walls covered in life dropping to a sandy bottom, The last wave of Divers were dropped at the South end to drift with the now flood tide back into the Loch, the wind now veered to the West and freshened considerably so within minutes we were unprotected and facing 2-3 metre swells.

After recovering the last wave of Divers it was decided to head back to Castle Sween and finish the days diving early as the Weather was deteriorating. While some of the party took the opportunity to do some weight checks and practice Buoyancy skills in the shallow bay at the beach, the rest recovered the Boats, washed them down and prepared for an early departure.

Unfortunately due to several Road Accidents around Loch Lomond it took everyone 4-5 hours to get home being diverted via Tyndrum in heavy traffic so luckily the early finish helped ensure we reached home at a reasonable time.

## Charts of area showing Dive Sites



## Dive Sites

Dive 1                      '70 Metre Wall' - N56 05.019 W5 35.732 - 0.7nm SW of Ardnoe Point



The Site looking North

Where Divers were dropped

A Kelp covered boulder/sand slope 4 to 14 metres which then drops away vertically to 70 metres+, a superb wall covered in life with sandy shelves and large overhangs with forests of Peacock Worms – *Sabella pavonina*. Large clumps of Football Sea Squirt – *Diazona violacea*, Slender Sea Pens – *Virgularia mirabilis*, Northern Sea Fan – *Swiftia pallida*.

Also seen were Edible Crabs, (large) Squat Lobsters, Ballan Wrasse, Rock Wrasse, Ling, Scallops, Various Sponges and Soft Corals, shoals of fish off the wall.

Depth discipline and good buoyancy skills are essential at this site, some down currents experienced but nothing hazardous found apart from depth. Best done on the Flood tide as a drift SW to NE.

Dive 2                      'Macgregor's Mount' – N56 04.150 W5 43.500 - NE of Port Na Laogh, Jura



Tom ready to shot the site looking SW



Shot at 25 metre side of the site looking NW

A rocky outcrop 250 metres offshore in general depths of 32 metres on its Seaward side and 25 metres on its Shore side about 100 metres long running parallel to the shore, the top is at 6 -14 metres. We dived the 25 metre side to get some protection from the Tide, which in this area is very difficult to predict, after some issues on the surface the Divers got down and reported there is a wall down west side of the ridge

starting about 14m descending to 25m. The wall is very colourful, being covered in anenomes, soft corals and cup corals. The rock face had some cracks and fissures with congers and big wrasse. At the bottom of the rock slope were some boulders where we found large edible crabs, lobsters and large Crawfish - *Palinurus elephas* . This gave out to a sand/shell seabed with scallops sloping down to 30mThe viz was at least 10m -15m with lots of ambient light.  
No hazards apart from depth at the end of the dive, and strong wind driven Surface Current. Very exposed to SW winds.

### Dive 3                      West side of Eilean Nan Leac - N55 55.114 W5 41.850 – Entrance to Loch Sween



Site looking SW



North End of Eilean Nan Leac

A Small Island who's West Side offered protection from a Freshening F5 SW, this site was found in Ridley's Book, and seemed to offer only a shallow rocky uninspiring Back-up Dive Site. When the First Divers were dropped in on the Ebb tide they drifted from N to S and reported a good dive with lots of small walls and a boulder slope from 3 metres to 16- 22 metres onto a sandy Seabed. A large Lesser Octopus was seen – *Eledone cirrhosa* and a large number of Fish including Congers. Edible Crabs, Squat Lobsters and Velvet Crabs were seen in very large numbers along with Scallops on the Seabed. Visibility was found to be much better at the sheltered North End whereas the visibility at the Seaward South End into the Sound of Jura appeared to be very poor. No real hazards found, although as the wind veered West picking up Divers surfacing close in became hazardous as the West side of the Island was now a Lee Shore.

### Costs

Fuel to tow boat to Crinan 280 miles @ 7.35 mpl = 38 litres @ £1.20	£46
Launch and berthing fees at Crinan [2 boats]	£20
Fuel – 'Ferry Diver 1'      [27 nm travelled]                      72 litres @ £1.18	£85
Fuel – 'Ceilidh'                      [27 nm travelled]                      40 litres @ £1.18	£47
Levy to SQSAC for use of boats - £5 per Diver per day	£80
Air Fills	£42
Food -    Estimate £24 per person x 8	£192
Accommodation	Free

**TOTAL COSTS     £512**

**Cost per Person     £64**

**Final List of Participants**

Ally Macgregor	DL*, TI, Adv Nitrox, DO	SQSAC
Debbie Macgregor	SD*	SQSAC
Ronnie Mackenzie	DL*, OWI, Adv Nitrox	SQSAC
Tom Van Agtmael	DL*, Adv Nitrox	SQSAC
Graeme Steele	DL*, OWI,	Tec Divers/SQSAC
Gavin Wilkie	DL*, OWI, Adv Nitrox,	Tec Divers/SQSAC/GLUG
Lorna Crawford	SD*,	SQSAC/GLUG

(\* beside the Divers Grade denotes Training towards the next Qualification)

**Divers Comments**

*Dive highlight for me was the wall dive on Saturday morning of Ardnhe Point (Crinan): loads of Devonshire cup corals (brilliantly coloured pink, green and blue), also some nice nudibranchs - Yellow edged polycera. Northern Sea fan (white brittle looking fan - not seen on east coast). Overall a nice and relaxed dive drifting slowly along on the current On the water highlight was Corryvreckan - awesome ! !*

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*Apart from some adventurous diving we were also blessed with pods of dolphins, our first sighting of a proper octopus in Scotland, the seas in the Gulf of Corryvreckan, that incredible whale breach, the first time I've ever seen a crayfish (or eaten one!) and some hilarious banter from you all too - it was great to see you!*

*I've convinced myself that the whale was a humpback. I know they are rare in Scotland - but not unheard of, one was spotted near Tiree in July. I luckily saw the whole thing, as the bow just happened to be pointing towards it and I was driving the RIB at the time. It was huge, and made it a long way out the water - I thought that I could make out the massive pectoral fins. I didn't see the tail fluke so I'm not sure it made it all the way out the water but could have been the angle or hidden by the swell. The splash when it hit the water was enormous. It was a good way off and I don't think I could ever be certain... but it looked like every humpback breach video I've watched. Anyone else got any ideas on this?*

*I learned a lot from the weekend, and got some very valuable experience piloting a RIB in rough conditions (sorry about the knee Stevie). Having two RIBs with lots of space was fantastic and opens up a lot of diving to explore in the area. We were a bit unlucky with the weather this time, but hats off to Ally and Debbie for having*

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*plenty of backup plans and alternative sites to try. I thought we worked well as a group and were flexible enough to change plans quickly.*

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*I would like to thank everyone for an amazing weekend. A lot of you put a huge amount of effort into making it all run smoothly, which is greatly appreciated, and it's really great to spend a weekend with such a nice group of people. I definitely learned a lot from the weekend and I appreciate everyone taking the time to teach me and look out for me*

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### **Expedition Organisers Comments**

Firstly thanks to everybody for making it such an enjoyable weekend. It was a pleasure having your company. The weekend was made easier as everyone mucked in with the tasks - the launches and recoveries of the boats and the wash downs went well and it allowed us to get on the road at a reasonable hour on the Sunday evening [despite the diversion through Dalmally, Crianlarich etc, which incidentally is only 12 miles further than our normal route home]. Thanks to Tom and Ronnie for going to Inverary for air fills and to Stevie for taking control of a boat and towing it back to Castle Sween.

70m Wall - SW of Ardnoe Point - Having looked at the charts this lived up to my expectations in terms of the wall and the thought that it continued down to around the 100 metre mark. We were put in close to the shore where the bottom was not steep and allowed us to settle before going over the edge. As Ronnie said there was lots of life and in some of the vertical cracks in the rock face there was loads to see. My skills at identifying things is not great but I enjoyed the colours and the relaxed dive. I was surprise at the covering of fine sand or silt on everything especially as there is supposed to be a fair current in that area. We certainly did not feel much current and that made it all the more enjoyable.

MacGregors Mount, Sound of Jura - having dived this a couple of years ago not too successfully I had been looking forward to this one. However the tide was in full flood and it was always going to be difficult. I was pleased that we located it ok and the position of the shot was just about right as those who did the dive found out. From all accounts this was a really nice dive site and I intend to do it again sometime - yes, slack water would have been easier! The west side of the rock seems to be the best side to dive and there will always be shelter form any current in the lee of the rock. The combination of divers going in well upstream of the shot and others going in close to the shot lead to an interesting situation! By dropping the divers well upstream of the shot I had hoped to give them plenty time to align themselves but in retrospect I probably dropped them in too far upstream. Stevie's advice on approaching and getting down the line quickly will be noted by all in the future. Again I should have realised very quickly that there was no way the boat was going to drag Tom and Ronnie back to the line against the current without exhausting them - better to recover them immediately and send them back in. It was a valuable lesson for all of us and for me in particular. On a positive note there was another lesson for all of us in the way Stevie handled Lorna's situation - we have done the theory about this type of incident but to see how it was managed for real was an example to us all.

Eilean nan Leac - With the plan to dive the Christine Rose knocked out due to the weather there was very little sheltered water in the area but the west side of Eilean nan Leac proved to be reasonably sheltered initially but became more exposed as

the wind veered more to the south west. The highlight of this dive for us was of course the octopus, seemingly unfazed by the attention it was getting from us. As we went south along the side of the island the viz got gradually worse. The tide would have been slack when we dived but it was evident that this side is not affected by currents or there would have been less silty material over everything. However there was still lots to see with edible and aggressive velvet crabs to be seen. From reports by the second wave they indicated that the viz to the south was poor but as they went further north it got better and was really good as they came out off the northern end of the island. This is definitely the end to dive as there is around 25 meters here with only about 12 meters further south....

Corryvreckan - As always this is impressive. I just missed the whale and only saw the huge splash as it went down. This is an area of high activity as there were loads of birds feeding and dolphins swimming in the area. The sense of power in the stream was amazing. We saw it in a relatively calm state although the rollers could be seen walling up a bit further west. I don't think this is a place that we would want to take the HW boat! It was good to get into the shelter of Pigs Bay [Bagh Gleann nam Muc] for lunch.

The launching of the boats at Crinan is a good move as it gives us access to a lot of prospective dive sites without the long sea journey up from Castle Sween. Having 2 boats is again a bonus as it gives a level of comfort and allows us to react to potential situations better. Having them loaded with only 4 divers each is probably the ideal number for this type of diving. If we are more inshore in calmer waters the club boat can then take up to 6 and the HW boat up to 5 without too much trouble, but not with spare cylinders as we found out on the Clyde. There will always have to be a balance between the numbers, kit taken, sea conditions and fuel consumption. Ferry Diver 1 ended up using a total of 72 litres of fuel over the weekend, covering a distance of approx 27nm over the 2 days.

The weather made things a bit challenging particularly on the Sunday when our options were very limited regarding dive sites. It is not like this very often in August so I guess we were just unlucky. However I think we made the best of it.

### **Learning Points**

1. In a fast moving current divers should be dropped well upstream of the shot and with enough of a gap to ensure they are not all reaching the shot at the same time
2. In a stressful situation in a fast flowing current don't try to cling onto the shot – let it go and allow the boat to pick you up to drop you upstream again to have another go.
3. Despite the hassle of de-kitting, divers should be recovered back into the boat rather than trying to be hauled along hanging onto the grab ropes
4. We need to have a Separate sounder fitted on Ferry Diver 1, having 'all your eggs in one basket' with dual plotter/sounder is a hassle when the unit fails.

## Photos



Commander MacGregor



Sundays Rough Seas



Flat calm Corrievreckan



Ally and Debbie on 'Ceilidh'



Ferry Diver 1 in the Corrievreckan

Expedition Boats at Crinan