

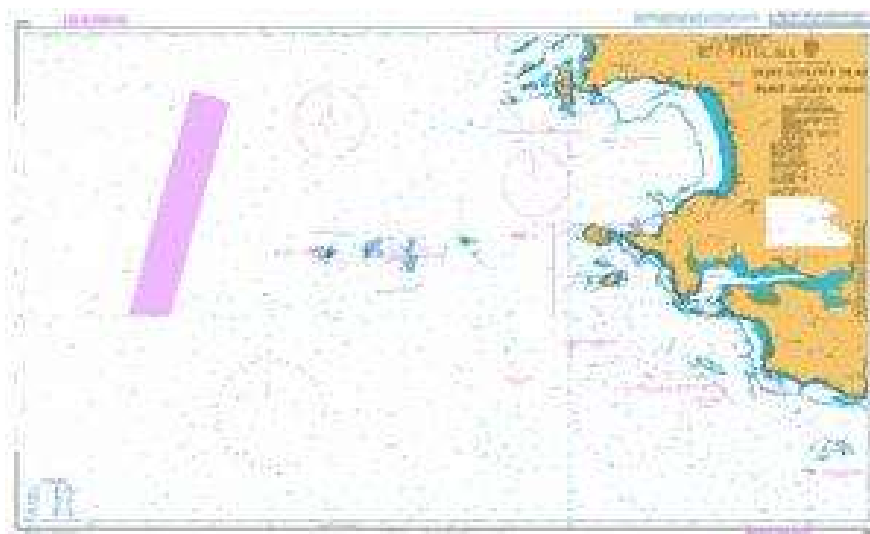


# **British Sub-Aqua Club**

## **Wales Region**

### **REDS Expeditions**

### **2008**



## **‘Barrel Rock’**

**14 June 2008**

**&**

**13 July 2008**

**Report by Hywel Dyer**

## **Expedition Overview**

The aim of the expedition was to provide a group of BSAC divers the opportunity to dive Barrel Rock together with other offshore sites including The Smalls. The diving was done on club ribs with each branch being responsible for their own craft including Dive Management, Fuel Costs, Ship Husbandry and Boat Handling. Due to the distance off shore these dives are always preferred to be undertaken with more than one boat.

The area of The Smalls is well known for the marine life, most notably seals, but is also home to a number of wrecks. The Cambro is the most well known of these, but there have been reports of other wreckage surrounding the rocks. This in itself is unremarkable since the rocks are adjacent to shipping lanes & was the site of the 1<sup>st</sup> lighthouse in the UK.

Barrel Rock on the other hand marks the Eastern most point of the area known as the Hats & Barrels. The Hats & Barrels is noted on chart 1478 as an area to avoid & covers some 6 square nautical miles. Due to the distance off-shore & the comparative proximity of The Smalls most visiting divers tend to complete the journey out to the Smalls with the guarantee of a lee shore regardless of wind or tide.

The expedition built on experiences last year from some of the team. Slack water is known to be approximately 2 to 2 & one half hours before LW or HW Milford Haven for both The Smalls & Barrel Rock. In addition to this there was a position available where wreckage was found in 2007. No name had been confirmed for this wreck & the vessel type was also under debate.

In light of this & the relative numbers of those that had dived Barrel Rock (1 out of the group) it was decided, on the first expedition, to dive the rocks surrounding The Smalls as a drift dive and on the second expedition to dive The Garland Stone on Skomer whilst saving the period of slack water for the 2<sup>nd</sup> dive on Barrel Rock.

The expeditions were advertised via the BSAC Wales Website & Forum

The first Expedition on 14 June 2008 attracted 25 divers from 6 clubs spread over 6 boats. The clubs involved were:

3AAA  
Llwrchwr  
Port Talbot Divers  
Marlins Neath Club  
Cardigan  
Kraken Divers

The second Expedition on 13 July 2008 attracted 22 divers from 6 clubs spread over 6 boats. The clubs involved were

Kraken Divers  
3AAA  
Cardigan  
Cwmtawe  
Llanraeth  
Cantre'r Gwaelod



RIBs Ready To Leave Dale



Kracken's Small RIB Launching



Port Talbot SAC



AAASAC

# The Diving

The 1<sup>st</sup> dive (first expedition) took place between East Rock & the main mass of The Smalls in position 51 degrees 43.2' N 005 degrees 40' W starting in approximately 6m of water. A number of the boats were rafted in an anchorage whilst the remaining vessels covered the divers. With the current flowing approximately North to South the tidal run channelled the divers through the gulleys between the rocks of the reef. This resulted in a drift of approximately South-South-West with the covering boats positioning themselves accordingly. All divers carried DSMB or other signalling devices including in one case an EPIRB.



**RIB Stationed for Diver Recovery**



**Diver Entry Point**



**South West Side of the Reef**

During the drift dive a number of wrecks were seen. These comprised of approximately 3 propellers on drive shafts together with a 4<sup>th</sup> spare propeller pinned to the sea bed by a boulder that had fallen onto it. In addition to this there were fire boxes, boilers & hull plating scattered across the sea bed.

All the time there were numerous seals who, intrigued by their visitors, ganged up on the divers.



The drift continued on a SSW bearing until the divers cleared the end of the gulleys. At this point divers deployed DSMB & continued until they either reached the end of their duration. Alternatively others chose to swim on a Westerly bearing to use the lee of the reef prior to ascent. There was further wreckage in this area with evidence the wreck had struck the rock showing on the South West side of the reef (See photograph) before sinking. This was in position 51 degrees 42.95' N 005 degrees 40.5' W. Maximum depth throughout these dives was 25m.

Once all divers had been recovered & accounted for the armada heading the 6 nautical miles towards Barrel Rock.



Barrel Rock is the only rock that dries on the Hats & Barrels. The team arrived approximately 2.5 hours before HW Milford Haven with the rock awash. The site of wreckage lies so 10m to the South West of Barrel Rock adjacent to a pinnacle that shows around 7m in position 51 degrees 42.8' N 005 degrees 005 degrees 33.15' W.



### **Barrel Rock Awash**

The shot line lay amongst the wreckage. There was evidence of a steamship wreck that had not been seen the year previously. In addition to a healthy amount of marine life there was also a triple expansion steam engine, boilers & propeller as well as a large amount of plate & fixtures.

The pinnacles led to a series of gulleys eventually finishing in 25m of water. There was evidence of 2 further wrecks including a iron hulled sailing ship – recognisable as such due to the iron stays & hoops remaining from the masts & a barge with no apparent machinery or propulsion.

The identity of the steam ship wreck has since been solved. On a Second Expedition Alan Thomas, the current Welsh Coach found a maker plaque which reads..... "The Blyth Shipbuilding Dry Docks Company Ltd Blyth No. 157 1910" This has been declared to the Receiver of Wreck.

Craig Rigdon of Port Talbot club has identified the wreck as that of the Ellerbeck. The Ellerbeck sank on the 15<sup>th</sup> of August 1914. She was on her way from Barry Dock to Pentland Firth carrying coal for the Admiralty. The vessels size was 74.67m long by 11.15m wide by 4.95m. She was powered by a triple-expansion, 3-cylinder steam engine making 224 HP driving a single screw.

The Ellerbeck had driven aground at night. Her distress signals were seen on the mainland & the St. Davids lifeboat, the General Ferrell was launched. The General Ferrell took off those members of the crew that had taken to the lifeboats but left the Captain & 10 others on board. The remaining crew were hoping to float the vessel off on the next spring tide but she was badly holed by the grounding & could not be saved.

The remaining crew were taken off by the Milford Trawler Avonmouth, transferred to the Milford Fishing Smack Monarch & landed at Milford Haven.

The Ellerbeck's registry number was 129757.



The return trip was uneventful with all boats making their way back with no problems.



# Thanks to.....

Leigh Batchelor for organising

Craig Rigdon for the information on the Ellerbeck

Ian Humphries, Chris Court & Craig Rigdon for use of their photos

