

GOING DOWN

THE JOURNAL OF THE DACORUM SUB-AQUA CLUB (Hemel Hempstead)



In this edition of GOING DOWN

A wet weekend in Dorset

DSAC's Thailand tales

Safety news from BSAC

Interview with a diver: Karl Dancer

Up, up and away with Debbie Harpley and Steve Hardy

Visit <http://www.dacorumsac.org.uk> for more information, training, trip bookings, social and much, much more

From the editor

Sarah Jones

A strong start to 2008

Well there have certainly been a lot of changes here at Dacorum Sub Aqua Club (DSAC) and plenty of diving activities to (drysuit) boot ☺.

We have a new committee, details of which follow, regular try dives and plenty of new members who are keen to discover the joys of scuba diving.

On the social side, Angie is looking at some fun filled activities such as the regular club BBQ at Lyme Regis, and clay pigeon shooting – but quite how you manage to shoot pigeons and keep your buoyancy is beyond me.

Outside of DSAC however (I hope) there does seem to be a common theme in the media which is lost divers. We've heard of divers drifting off in Australia and a group of divers stranded with ferocious man eating Komodo dragons.

So if you want to minimise the risk of getting swept away or savaged by dinosaurs, then always, but always, carry a Surface Marker Buoy (one per diver, if not two per diver).

I was recently diving in Portsmouth, and despite pretty good conditions, and an experienced skipper, my buddy and I were waiting for 10 minutes to get picked up - I was glad I had my sausage to wave around ☺.

Does anyone have a good reason why SMBs aren't insisted upon overseas? Should they be? Email your comments to sjscubagal@yahoo.co.uk

In this edition, Debbie Adams tells us about her weekend training in Portland, and I report the recent club trip to sunny Thailand....the things I do for Going Down ☺

Safe diving and happy reading.



From the Chairwoman/person

Michelle Pilkington

Greetings DSACIANS!

Didn't think I would ever be on the DSAC Committee but found myself considering it this year. I originally came to DSAC some eight years ago and felt that it was time for me to darn well contribute to what I feel is a thoroughly friendly, vibrant & Diverse club.

The then committee & instructors weren't too unkind to me, being a PADI Diver an' all & I was quickly orientated 'into' UK diving, only ever having previously dived abroad (softie). Roy Attfield tested my PADI skills & confirmed that I was competent & Barry Perton exposed (don't be smuttie) me to dry suit diving - possibly the weirdest diving experience I'd ever had up at Stoney Cove. That was enough to hook me!

I quickly fell in love with UK diving & soon developed a passion for underwater photography fuelled by none other than our own Tony Reavill - photographer extraordinaire & thoroughly nice bloke!

To this day, I remain a sucker for the 'traditional' UK club trips & look forward immensely to the summer months - driving up & down the length & breadth of our wonderful network of motorways, travelling with friends, experiencing the wonders of our underwater heritage & staying in some of the most beautiful parts of our country! What more can you possibly want out of life?

Anyhoo - enough of me!

In short, I am to-date, thoroughly enjoying the role of Chairman &, look forward to serving the club membership, and hope to continue the excellent work of my predecessor Barry Perton.

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An update on committee roles – to name but a few

- Lindsey Doyle – diving officer
- Barry Pluck – accounts and the compressor
- Andrew Walker – equipment officer
- Lynda Daniels - secretary

Phil Sturdy continues to look after the boat and the boat bookings. Andy Lowde, Steve Parry and others are all supporting our training programme.

Susie Ansett continues to generate new ideas for marketing and promotions, and Steve Yates and Travis are helping Andrew with the equipment.

Thanks to everyone for their contribution

The Boat

The Boat continues to make its regular jaunts to the Isle of Wight with JR and Chris Perkiss. This is a great opportunity to have a go at steering the boat, and have a social day out. JR will be announcing future dates, with a trip to London planned.

Thanks to Phil Sturdy, Colin and others for cleaning up the boat and the trailer and for those that helped with the boat shed painting.

Social

Angie Leahy is currently organising a number of activities and these include: Club BBQ at Lyme Regis and Clay pigeon shooting. And the Xmas Party which takes place on Saturday 21 December 2008.

Angie is in the process of gathering demand for these activities so she can fix the dates and prices so please go and see Angie at the club to put your name down. The Xmas party is filling up fast so you will need to be quick!

DSAC's Thailand tales

Sarah Jones

During Easter 2008, a group of intrepid DSAC explorers ventured to the sunny climes of Thailand, on a trip organised by Tony Reavill.

Squashed into various mini buses, surrounded by what looked like excess baggage, Tony Reavill, Barry Reavill, Kathy Cross, Dan Egleton, Sarah Jones, Pat Neilan, Peter Knight, Dan Greenway all set off for Heathrow.

Due to some inexplicable reason, the check in for our BA flight at Heathrow was seamless with barely an eyebrow raised at the amount of kit, particularly Tony's photographic equipment and hairdryers, that greeted the check-in staff.

Upon arrival in Phuket and check-in to the hotel, the team set about preparing for the dive trip. Several cocktails and some burnt faces the day later, we were ready to head off for our 10

day liveaboard to some of Thailand's best dive sites – the Similan Islands, Surin Island and Burma.

We chartered the Mermaid 2 liveaboard - a 33 metre, double engine steel motor yacht (www.agentliveaboard.com) which had a very impressive set up with a large kitting up area, dive platform and showers at the back, comfortable cabins, a dining room, a sun lounge area at the front and back, and a lounge with TVs, stereos and enough 'Hello' and 'OK' magazines to keep me going for weeks.

What impressed me in Thailand was the quality of the dive briefings given by our tour director, Andrea, who has worked in the region for many years. For an overseas trip, these were some of the most precise dive briefings that covered what you would expect to see and safety information. Equally impressive was the fact that the guides went out with you on each dive and did their best to ensure that they pointed out marine life that you may have missed.

We had around three to four dives a day and plenty of food, although as a veggie there is only so much tofu and cauliflower you can eat – I didn't realise until then that it was so popular out there.

In terms of marine life, I was a little surprised that given that Thailand is one of the world's top diving destinations that there was not a lot of 'big stuff' We were lucky enough to see nurse sharks and yours truly did manage to 'speed scuba dive' (not recommended, it's tiring ☹) keep up with whale shark which was, as ever a spectacular sight.

I think that the lack of macros life may be due to the dynamite fishing that continues in Burma. In fact there was one reef that we did not dive because it had been dynamited.

There was however plenty of micro life including harlequin shrimps, tomato anemonefish, ghost pipefish, durban dancing shrimps.

And there is one critter you don't want to mess with and that's the mantis shrimp that looks like some kind of bug underwater but don't let its small size fool as it's punch is enough to break an aquarium, according to the reef guide books. Although quite why you would want to take an aquarium on a dive is another matter.

I dived with Dan Egleton and we both witnessed throughout the 10 days the highs and lows of life as a cuttlefish. No we didn't dress up as cuttlefish but witnessed:

- Cuttlefish love
- Cuttlefish violence (ie winning male gets territorial over female – does that sound familiar?)
- Cuttlefish birth
- Cuttlefish eating (not us, the cuttlefish)

Amazing. We also saw a couple of seahorses which as we know, are very rare these days, plenty of octopus (maybe that's octopi) who are fascinating creatures, eels, batfish, parrotfish, moorish idols, damselfish.

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And I saw a different side to one of my favourites – the pufferfish. Well – you try coming face-to-face with a six foot tall one during a night dive !

Nine days on the boat was plenty of time to see the major dive sites, which were all reefs, which included Richlieu Rock, Western Rocky, North Twin, Black Rock and McCarthy's rock.

Thanks to Tony Reavill for organising the trip, it was a fantastic trip and part of that was the good company (and watching Dan Egleton pole dance on the first night)



Above: the lightning fast mantis shrimp.



Above: whale shark. It moves faster than you think

- Airlines: British Airways to Bangkok, Bangkok Airways to Phuket. We did have some issues with baggage allowance with Bangkok air so get something in writing before you leave about your allowance
- Tourist attractions in Phuket? Well there is the night life, Fantasia, shopping



Above: map of Thailand courtesy of bbc.co.uk

Thailand trip – fact file

- Vessel: Mermaid 11 (www.agentliveaboard.com)
- Extra costs for kit hire and Nitrox (£2.50 a day), merchandise and DVDs available to buy, plus cash bar (recommend you stop at the off licence and buy your own which the operator is okay with)
- Diving areas: Surin, Similan Islands and Burma Banks. Can be strong currents. SMBS are used on all dives
- Currency: Thai Baht (approximately £1: 64 THB)
- Temperature during Easter
- Water: typically 28 degrees C, the hottest months are April and May (approximately 30 – 32 degreesC), before the wet, humid monsoon season.
- A visa for Burma is required which will be organised by the dive charter
- Dynamite fishing prevalent in Burma/Myanmar
- English is widely spoken
- Cheaper than the UK
- Trip is 10 days, 9 nights, can be shorter. Departs Patong (Phuket)



Above: Mermaid II

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A wet weekend!

Debbie Adams

The trip to Chesil Beach and Portland, May 26th and 27th, was organised for us Trainee Ocean Divers by Neil Hassell.

Paul and I made this trip by the skin of our teeth, as we had only managed one pool lesson in our dry suits the Thursday before. Our buoyancy left a lot to be desired, so Lindsey and Andy arranged to meet us at Wraybury early on Sunday, for what was to be our first open water dives! After two dives in the lake we came out elated and exhausted, our buoyancy still not fully mastered!!!!

We left Wraybury late afternoon for the drive to

The Hotel Aqua in Portland, where we were staying.

Monday morning dawned with typically British bank holiday weather, wind and rain, from our window we could see white horses in the harbour....oh dear!!!!

We met with Neil, Barry, Steve, Lindsey, Andy, Justin, Hugh, and Stewart with his family, at the café in Hotel Aqua. Neil assured us that the sea conditions were perfect for diving on Chesil beach, even producing a photo he had taken earlier that morning. Though judging from the weather outside the window we were not sure he had taken it this year!

So the days diving was planned and the buddy pairs were sorted.....Barry was unfortunate enough to be lumbered with Paul and I!

We left Hotel Aqua in the howling gale and drove quarter of a mile to Chesil Beach to drop off our gear. We lugged our gear down to the beach in the rain, and guess what? Neil was absolutely right...the sea was perfectly calm, like a mill pond, perhaps he had taken that picture this morning.

We struggled into our 'baby grows' and dry suits, and it was decided that I would dive first with Barry. So fully kitted we did our buddy checks, and entered the sea, me with some trepidation. Still, at least the rain had stopped, which was nice!

Having spent months training in a clear pool, the sea was a fabulous experience. The dive lasted for 40 minutes, although to me it seemed like four. The vis was around four metres. I was absolutely amazed at the abundance of life such a short distance from the beach, we saw various fish, marine plants and huge spider crabs. Chesil beach has a steep incline which needs to be negotiated when the dive is over, we had discussed in the plan to fin hard up onto the beach. So having beached ourselves, we emerged – me with a huge grin.

We had a much needed rest on the shingle and then went to the beach café for lunch, by this time the weather was much improved with some sun. I sat out while Paul dived with Barry.

was fortunate enough to have a second dive that day, this time with Lindsey, again to about ten metres. This time saw cuttlefish as well! I'm sure that dry suit is out to get me... I ended up floating on the surface again, how annoying, it will take a lot of mastering.

That evening Neil had booked us all into The Pulpit for our evening meal, good choice. The company was excellent and the food was great.

DAY 2.

The weather is better today, good job because we are going on a boat! We meet at the café Aqua again, and make arrangements, while the cylinders are filled. I am to dive with Andy today and Paul is with Barry. Two dives are planned, the first on the Countess of Erne, the second in the afternoon outside the harbour wall on the dredger. Our buoyancy is still questionable so it is uncertain whether we will be allowed to do both dives. Paul seemed quite worried this morning, and admitted later he was concerned about losing buoyancy at depth.

We meet up with Smudge and the crew, and have a look around Cutlass. We load our gear onto the boat get into our dry suits and set sail!

After a treacherous sea crossing of about 5 minutes (I don't think we needed the Stugeron) we arrived at the Countess. She lies in about 14 meters of water with her deck at around 10 metres.

The buddy checks done I proceeded to launch myself off the back of the boat...I was a little apprehensive. Andy and I descended to the Countess down the shot line attached to the stern. The vis was around 3 metres. Wreck diving was not what I expected, I thought wrecks would dark and sinister but I was wrong. It was living. There is abundant marine life completely covering every part of the wreck. Not only were there spider crabs, and soft corals, but also fish that were so colourful they seemed, to me at least, out of place in Portland Harbour. (And they were – black faces Blennies from the med, presumably brought in ships ballast tanks and now resident on the Countess!)

We did 2 circuits of the Countess and surfaced on the shot line attached to the bow. After a long swim to the boat, we were hoisted up by the lift, helped off with our tanks and fins and given hot tea!



Above: another happy DSAC diver

We went back to café Aqua for a much needed lunch, and to discuss the afternoons dive plan. Both Paul and I were really pleased, we were told that we could dive the dredger, as we were now much happier with our drysuits.

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We set sail again, this time for about fifteen minutes in the treacherous seas! I was diving with Andy again, and Paul with Barry. This time it was suggested that I borrow some gaiters to help keep my feet down, and as Neil wasn't diving because of problems with his ears he kindly lent me his. The sun was still shining. Andy and I were the last to launch ourselves into the sea, and swim to the shot line. Much to Stewart's dismay I completely failed to see him below me and knocked his mask off and regs out!!!! He only bled a bit so it was quite lucky that there appeared to be no sharks about! Sorry Stewart!

The Dredger lies in about 8 metres of water and is quite broken up. The vis was not so good, about 1 metre, but the spider crabs did not seem to mind. They were in abundance and the biggest we had seen yet. Again the whole of the wreck was teeming with life, I find this fascinating as I have only seen images like this on TV. We fin around for about 25 minutes, and then come to the shot line where Andy decides we will try a safety stop at about 6 metres...well, if the shot line was not there I would not be either, it was helpful to practice though. So, on the surface, and hoisted back on to the boat, tanks and fins etc removed and ready for a hot drink!! (and could have done with a shot of brandy!)

We are very grateful to everyone who made it possible for us to do these dives.

Neil for arranging it and inviting us in the first place.

Thanks to Andy for our training so far.

Both Lindsey and Andy for taking us to Wraysbury for dry suit training so it would be possible for us to dive on the wrecks on Tuesday

Barry thanks for your calm and confident advice, in the water and out.

The whole weekend was fantastic, Paul and I can't wait for our next dive.



Above: where are the samies demanded Andy

Up, up and away – a thank you *Debbie Harpley*

A big thanks to Steve Hardy, for his fantastic Christmas Raffle Prize of a flight in a light aircraft. We went out for the day on Friday 31 August in a little yellow plane (a Piper something?), with Lindsey Doyle and Justin Yates.

We took off from a tiny airfield near Duxford (and it actually was a field!), and went sightseeing around St. Neots (to see Grandma Yates' Boat) and St. Ives (to see where I used to live).

I had a turn at the controls (when I took over we were at 2,000 feet, by the time I'd finished we were at 2,500 feet - because I wasn't keen on pointing the nose at the ground!)

We flew into Sywell Airfield at Northampton for lunch. There were lots of aerobatic planes at Sywell waiting for the cloud base to raise, for the National Aerobatic Competition, but unfortunately the cloud cover stayed too low.

It was an incredible experience, and only really terrifying when Steve turned the aircraft sharply, or took off, or landed, or...



Above: Steve Hardy's runaround



Above: Debs - the lucky winner!



Above: Wing Commander Hardy

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Above: the pilot reading instructions...where's Hemel?

Diving Officers' Conference – things you should know

Lindsey Doyle

Buoyancy standards

Currently the required standard is +/- 1m of required depth; this will change to 0.3m for the ideal (required for advanced / technical level), +/- 0.5m for DL, technical, instructor level and +/- 1m for SD level (+ / - 2m for beginners – 3m is considered unacceptable.). A buoyancy workshop is to be inserted into the diver training programme (DTP) and will be available as a standalone early in 2008.

Rescue

Basic Life Support (including oxygen assisted rescue breaths)

Skills should be refreshed / updated at least annually

Rescue First Aid SDC dropped

Lifesaver course updated, can now be taught by minimum OWI (and assessed by same person).

SDCs

Accelerated decompression will be taught on Advanced Nitrox Diver

Extended Range Diver course will be renamed (and be a different course!)

Wreck Appreciation is a new SDC, available from 1/1/08 for OD or above, counts as 6 points towards Survey module of Nautical Archaeology Society's Part 3 certificate.

New Gas Blender course to be launched (can be run in branch by approved instructors)

These initiatives all seem positive, pleasingly DSAC has always been encouraging good buoyancy control and refreshing rescue skills.

Incident Report 2007

There was a drop in the number of incidents reported (but the weather was bad a lot of the time!). Future trends will be monitored for possible causal factors. The biggest category of

incidents is now "Ascents", this has increased while "DCI" has decreased.

Typically these incidents involve a fast ascent, often with missed decompression stops. This is one reason BSAC want to focus on improving buoyancy control.

There were below the 10 yr average of fatalities (12 in the UK compared to 18 average), but the number of BSAC members remained average at 6 (alongside another fall in BSAC membership).

We are urged to continually practise ascent skills and observe "Safe Diving" principles.

DSAC dives in - plans for 2008

Highlights from our 2008 programme include:

June

- Dan Egleton goes to Orkney on Valkyrie
- Club Rib Trip on 28 June. Contact Mark Murphy

July

- Barry Pluck – mid week Plymouth trip in July 2008

August

- Plymouth trip in August 2008 organised by Chris Stenner and Tony Dempsey

September

- Saturday 6 September to 13 September – Malta trip – see Susie Ansett

To book on trips, visit www.dacorumsac.org.uk for more information, visit the [club diary](#) and contact the organiser.

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New magazine – The Sea

Sarah Jones

The Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) has launched a magazine called 'The Sea' and according to its web site:

'The Sea' magazine is now on sale, covering all things marine from news, history, oceanography and wildlife to leisure, culture and commerce.

RNLI supporters can get discounted subscriptions to the new magazine, and every subscription will help raise funds for the RNLI too. Funds raised in this way, and through donations made by the magazine's readers, will be used to buy an inshore rescue boat for RNLI lifeguards.

Visit the magazine's own website to subscribe, or call 01442 879097. Make sure to quote the reference RNLWEB1."

Useful web sites

Check out the following web sites for useful information, diving or diving related:

www.rnli.org - a voluntary organisation dedicated to saving lives at sea around the coasts of Britain and Ireland.

www.bsac.org - information for members of BSAC and for people that are thinking about starting to dive in Britain

www.yorkshiredivers.co.uk - one of the largest UK online diving communities Forums, magazine articles, dive blogs, travel advice and destination reviews.

www.divingniknaks.com - scuba diving equipment. At affordable prices.

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Interview with a diver

Karl Dancer

Q1: When did you first get in to scuba diving?

In about 1990, on the Barrier Reef

Q2: How many dives have you done?

Around 400

Q3: What is your favourite part of diving?

To be honest, I quite enjoy the whole day/experience, especially have a kip on the boat on the way back

Q4: What is your favourite dive and why?

I think it has to be one of the dives in the Galapagos Islands, where we dived into a bait ball. It was really surreal! I still watch the video from time to time

Q5: What has been your best dive find?

Hmm....I don't think I've been lucky enough to find anything...yet, but then I'm not a collector of stuff so don't look. Well that my excuse anyway.

Q6: What is the most expensive item of diving equipment that you've lost/broken?

I've never lost anything.....well at least I don't remember losing anything.....

Q7: What is your most memorable diving moment?

Most memorable has to be when my mate threw up through his regs in the red sea and fed the fish. That was in the Red Sea and he was diving with a very bad hangover after a new years part...Very bad practice and not to be copied, but it was extremely funny.

Q8: Any dive tips?

Enjoy and don't take it too seriously, it ain't rocket science, Oh and buy secondhand whenever possible

Q9: And what's next for you diving wise?

Plenty of diving this year booked up I am looking forward to Steve Parry's Norway trip, I've got a few days mid Channel diving on the way to France and Salcombe.



Above: Karl primed and ready for action



Above: Karl about to nod off on the way back from a dive

Below: success! Karl practices the 'victim' look for a rescue course.

