

MOLES MONITOR

July 2017

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Dates for your diaries

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9th - 10th September 2017 - Weymouth Dive trip
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11th November 2017 - Riverboat trip (evening)
5th - 7th May 2018 - Weymouth Dive trip
2nd - 9th June 2018 - Scilly Isles Dive trip
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Your 2016 - 2017 Committee

Chairman- Steve Pavey
Secretary - Sue Wayland/Harry Cooper
Treasurer - Eddie Fassnidge
Diving Officer - Keith James
Training Officer - Vacant
Social Secretary - Carolynn Royce
Equipment Officer - Eddie Fassnidge
Special Projects - Vacant

NOT EASTER TRIP

Harry, Adam, Sonja, Tristan, Andy, Janice, Phil, Eddie, David, Simon, Sue and Stefan all went down to Portland with the club RIB over the weekend of the 8th/9th April for the "Not Easter" trip organised as ever by Harry. This is normally the first trip of the year for many and allows people to do some relatively shallow dives.

Dives took place on the Countess of Erne, in BalACLava Bay and also over the British Inventor. A good time was had by all.



WEYMOUTH MAY WEEKEND

12 divers – Steve, Sharon, Jon, Eddie, Chris, Sonja, Tristan, Carolynn, Harry, David, Janice and Phil went down to Weymouth on the weekend of the 6th – 7th May and dived from Tango. We arrived in Weymouth on the Friday evening convinced that we would not be diving on the Saturday as it was blowing a gale. The Skipper however, (a very chilled Phil), thought that the weather didn't look too bad!. We therefore dutifully turned up on the quayside on Saturday morning – still unconvinced. Skippers do know best however and we had two good dives – our normal 2nd dive of a drift over the Lulworth Banks was actually the first due to the tides and we followed it up by a great dive on the Alex van Opstal. Doing it this way meant that we were just back in time for showers before heading off for a curry!



Sunday saw us head out to the M2 for another good dive – the deck plating has begun breaking up so there is lots more life. We then following this by a second dive on the Gertrude....or was it the Fennel?? Despite the wind, the vis wasn't too bad (thanks mainly I think to the lack of rain we had in the few weeks preceeding the trip). It was quite chilly underwater through and David made use of the boat's heating by huddling up to it after the first dive – can't say I blame him though – if I'd thought of it I would have been there first!!!!)

CHEEKY EASTBOURNE DIVING

No club weekend to Eastbourne this year but we did manage a sneaky dive on the 28th May. We took some "individual" places with Sussex Shipwrecks. Only four moles fancied this trip (Steve, Keith, Adam and Carolyn) and as it turned out we were the only four on the boat!! We therefore had loads of space to kit up - a luxury!

The first dive was on the Alaunia and the second a drift over the Oceana - tucking in along the wreck meant that we had a good dive on the Oceana as well - a bonus. Two good dives done, Steve and Keith managed to make it back to Leatherhead in time for their (independently booked but at the same restaurant) Chinese meals.



LIFE BEGINS AT EIGHTEEN METRES

Was I nervous? Oh yes. I wondered if I was actually a bit mad while listening to final instructions before the "Neutral - Go!" sounded, and I tipped myself backwards off the side of the RIB and landed in the English Channel.

Mid-life crisis perhaps? Maybe, but there are worse things to do than learn to Scuba dive at the age of fifty. A friend of mine from school has been a member of the Mole Valley Sub Aqua Club for about twelve years and when our school friends group meet up for a meal a few times a year, she has told us tales of her adventures which I've always been fascinated by and a bit envious of, if I'm honest, as I've never done anything particularly exciting having spent the last thirty years bringing up children, which is a blessing, and it's own kind of adventure! I decided now was the time to spread my fins. I mean, wings. She told me about the taster dive sessions the club hold periodically and I was very keen to go along. The first

one fell on my husband's fiftieth birthday but he wasn't interested and I felt I shouldn't go by myself on his special day, so the next year I jumped at the chance, and in March this year, I found myself at Leatherhead Leisure Centre.

I was immediately encouraged by how friendly everyone was. Medical forms were filled in for our safety and I recall standing next to my now diving buddy waiting nervously for our turn. We were fitted with a buoyancy jacket, cylinder, regulator, mask and fins, then taught a few basic hand signals. At the point of putting my head under the water and taking my first breath using the regs, I was terrified! Breathing under water is just not normal for humans and I was worried I'd freak out. But there I was in the water, hearing muffled, distant sounds, mesmerised by my bubbles, absolutely hooked.

Our training began a couple of weeks later and fortunately I was able to juggle things so I could go. Mind you, I almost drowned myself on the very first night when we were doing our fitness assessment when I breathed in through my nose just as a small wave of water slapped me in the face. That wasn't pleasant as I couldn't get the air in that I needed and couldn't get the water out. It was probably the most exciting thing the lifeguard had seen in months, and once it was established that I wasn't actually dying, he filled an accident form in and told me to be on my guard for secondary drowning. The following day I joked with my friend as we were horse riding, and said I could see my headstone - 'She was riding a horse on dry land, and fell off, having drowned'!

There were four of us trainees, paired off with an instructor per pair, and we more or less stuck to that combination throughout our training so we got to know our instructor, and he us, fairly well. How these guys managed to remain so patient, kind, and approachable, week after week, all on a voluntary basis, while we fuffed and fumbled our way around, forgetting to turn our air on, going up and down like a yo yo, asking daft questions, making fools of ourselves trying to get to grips with the disciplines we needed to learn for our own and our buddy's safety, I don't know. They all deserve medals. We did have a few laughs along the way though, and my buddy and I have formed a good friendship and trust between us so we both know we have each other's backs.

As part of the training, we had to undertake an online theory course which we had to pass before we could do our first open water dive, and that weekend in May came round very quickly indeed! We'd been training for two months and had now become confident enough to expand the boundaries a bit. Wraysbury Dive Centre is a fantastic place and my buddy and I arrived a whole hour early so we wouldn't be late, and also because we were so excited! We hired semi-dry suits there and learning to put those on is a feat in itself! This was the first time we'd been fully kitted up, and strolling around looking like an actual diver was a great confidence booster. It was a lovely day and there were dozens of divers in their different groups. Us novices remarked quietly to each other how surprised we were to hear how harshly some instructors of other groups spoke to their students which ours never did, and we again felt very lucky. By the time I'd got my equipment and fins on, and buddy check completed I was already worn out!

I have to admit that when I started to descend on the very first open water dive, I really had to force myself not to panic. The thing is, when all you've known is the security of a crystal clear dive pool where you can see all sides, bottom, and people above you, to then descend into murky water where visibility wasn't good at all, and you couldn't see or feel there were any boundaries, just acres of water and the unknown, was a completely different ball game, and one that for a moment I didn't want to play. Thankfully I held it together, mainly because I didn't want to let my buddy or instructor down or regret bailing out forevermore, so I continued. There's training platforms to land on which I was grateful for as it gave me a chance to calm down and compose myself. My buddy and I followed our instructor who was constantly making sure we were ok which I found very reassuring, as at the time I'd

convinced myself he could hear my thoughts which were somewhat unprintable! As we descended further, the water cleared and all of a sudden it was, Woa! Look at that! It's a crayfish waving at us! Instantly, I wasn't scared anymore and the reality of why I'd trained to go Scuba diving kicked in. Every other thought was to not hit the bottom as I struggled with my buoyancy, but I found that I was a lot more relaxed and successful when I had other things to think about such as looking at sunken vehicles, boats, perch, and communicating with our instructor and my buddy. I have the greatest respect for my buddy because he has helped me so much over the course of our training, kept me calm in times of stress and self doubt, and sent encouraging messages from time to time. I may well have quit on that first dive if it hadn't been for him. I owe him a great debt of gratitude, and he probably hasn't got a clue, which makes it all the more genuine. Later that afternoon our instructor told me that I wasn't as bad as I thought I was which was a real boost.

By the time we'd done our safety stop and finished that first dive, we were buzzing and our instructor probably breathed a great sigh of relief! Our counterparts had had a great time and told us that they'd seen a pike, so while we were pleased for them, we wanted to see one too and we're a little bit jealous. A couple of club members had come to Wraysbury too and were keeping our logs for us and generally being massively encouraging and helpful, so I felt like I was making even more friends as I hadn't met one before.

Wraysbury does the best loaded Nachos to share (Share? What kind of silly word is that?) and after lunch we went down again and this time we were required to perform some of the disciplines we'd learnt and practiced in the pool. All was ok so we went for another swim around through patchy visibility. We followed our instructor to an upended boat where a buoy was tied which we were going to use for our ascent. The water was very clear at this point and as we swam around to the other side of the boat's keel, there, minding his own business with perfect neutral buoyancy, was a rather large pike! It didn't move away and simply eyeballed us with an air of disdain for several minutes while we kept a respectful distance, before going about it's business, probably on the lookout for little fish that needed eating. We were thrilled and my buddy and I still occasionally tease our friends telling them that the pike we saw was so much bigger than the one they'd seen!

The following day was dives three and four but to be totally honest, the visibility had deteriorated considerably from the previous day, probably because they'd been a large number of divers in the lake, so they weren't much fun, but nevertheless, we completed the rest of the required disciplines including removing our BCD's on the surface and putting them back on again. I've never been much good at this because I end up all topsy turvey and have to fight to keep up the right way. This time I kept getting my arm stuck in the internal strapping of my jacket which was annoying, but luckily a mother duck and her very sweet ducklings came close so everyone was busily watching them instead of me clowning around. When my buddy and I had to do our compass navigation underwater, I kid you not, it was like swimming through pea soup. When he was looking down at the compass, I held on to his jacket and swam alongside him with my other arm outstretched in front of my head because you literally couldn't see a thing. We both made our targets though despite one compass thinking, 'stuff this for fun' and seizing up. The four of us passed our tests so we were very happy and already looking forward to our first sea dive planned for the next month.

The dive day dawned clear and sunny, and club members had gone to the site of the Iron Ore wreck off Littlehampton the day before to check it out and drop the shot line to save time. My buddy and I once again travelled together and excitedly waved at some people loading up a RIB who stared blankly back at us, and we realised it was the wrong vessel and we didn't actually know them! We were all beyond excited; I accidentally slopped Weetabix in a bottle over someone's kit, and my buddy broke one of the planks on the deck so had to squash it back down securely again. I'd never been in a boat on the sea before and the

lectures we'd had at the club meetings in previous weeks where we were taught about safety and what to expect on board were very helpful. This time, each novice had their own instructor so our cylinders were secured in pair order.



We were boiling in our semi-dry suits but the guys in dry suits were sweltering. We tried to pretend we were only a teensy bit thrilled when we were told to hold on so the RIB could pick up considerable speed when we were clear of the estuary, but we were secretly pretending we were James Bond on a Very Important Mission to save the world! The movement of the RIB, spray in the face, sun shining, calm water, and fantastic company all added up to major exhilaration! As conditions were so clear I managed to spot the buoy from half a mile away. I can't, however, read my dive computer on my wrist clearly without stretching my arm out as far as it'll go so have decided to buy a magnifying mask to assist me in my old age. The dry-suited instructors flopped into the sea to cool off as we had time to kill while we waited for the slack tide, and I cooled down by tipping a bottle of sea water into my suit. The nerves and excitement mounted as we waited but the atmosphere was very relaxed and jovial. The gentle rocking of the RIB made a couple feel queezy but nobody actually threw up which was handy.

When it was time, the first couple kitted up while the boat approached the dive site. My buddy was the first to go so I wished him luck and then he'd gone.



When my turn came I was all fingers and thumbs but as we're a team, others helped me and checked my equipment was fitted properly. Buddy checks done, as the RIB came round again, I was focused on listening to final instructions from my instructor buddy, my stomach was churning, while my brain casually commented that it had completely forgotten how to dive and I must be completely mad, then I heard "Neutral - Go!" and the next thing I knew was I'm bobbing about in the sea having flung myself backwards from the RIB without a

seconds thought. The coolness of the water on such a hot day was a splash of much needed refreshment, although now was not a good time to decide I needed the loo. After adding a bit more weight I descended to the deepest I'd ever been. The sea was so clear I could see loads in all directions, and the dark shapes of the wreck looming up to meet me were awe inspiring. There was a carpet of starfish and I was glad I'd got to grips with my buoyancy better as I'd have been mortified if I'd squished one if I'd landed on the sea bed with a thump. The wreck was teeming with different shoals of fish and I didn't know what to look at first! I watched great big crabs scuttle around and lobsters hiding in their wreck homes, waving their wibbly face bits about at us. My instructor shone his torch into a dark place where he'd seen a conger eel, and I heard later that one of the others had seen a cuttle fish which their photos proved. I recall kneeling on the sea bed, carefully avoiding living creatures, and taking some moments to gaze up at the wreck, watch my bubbles disappearing upwards until they vanished into the lighter water above, and to take in the totally awesome place I was in. If anyone had told me last year that when I'd just turned fifty one years old I'd be sitting almost eighteen metres at the bottom of the English Channel, collecting shells and observing wild sea life going about their business, I would never have believed it. It just goes to show that you never know what's around the next corner, and what, if you put your mind to it, with the guidance and experience of others to draw upon, what you can achieve. I felt so privileged and humbled.

The first thing I heard when we surfaced was my instructor saying for him it had been like chasing after the Energiser bunny! Moi? Not I, surely? But yes, apparently I'd been nipping about a bit too quickly because there was just so much to see and I was like a child in a sweet shop! As a result, I'd used my air supply quickly and our dive was almost ten minutes shorter than that of the pair who were down the longest. I will learn this for next time. Now came the part of getting back on board. I'd been dreading this, imagining I'd have to be hauled unceremoniously aboard by all available hands, but as it happened I managed to launch myself out of the sea and into the RIB like a beached whale, face-planting the deck. I totally meant to do that.

After lunch and the munching of delicious home made cookies very kindly provided by the wife of one of the instructors, we embarked on the second dive. It was a drift dive and this time our instructors held a Surface Marker Buoy on a reel of nylon cord which he let out as we went down, and the boat could keep tabs on where we all were. We deliberately went into a current and literally went with the flow. It was such fun and we moved pretty quickly and I had to grab at shells before they'd rapidly gone beneath us out of reach. I must get kitted up at home and practice unzipping my pockets with gloves on. Once again, visibility was very good and we saw a big plaice that would have fed two hungry people, several dogfish which are known as Rock Salmon in the local chippy, and we stopped to check out a beautiful, large Thornback ray. When I say we stopped, what I meant was we turned into the current and I had to fin with all my strength just to stay still for a short while while we admired the fish. Immediately I learned how strong this force of nature is and how treacherous it could be to get caught in a current without the proper equipment. This time we stayed down for forty minutes because as I wasn't darting about like an excited puppy and not finning much, I hadn't used my air anywhere near as quickly. The flip side of not finning as much was that despite it being a scorchingly hot day, on the sea bed I could feel the chill and was glad of my fleece under layer. We bobbed about on the surface for a few minutes while the RIB collected the divers that had gone ahead of us, another face-plant to the deck, and our first sea dives were completed!



We were all a bit quieter on the homeward journey back to the mooring. I think the awesomeness of the day was something that demanded silent contemplation, and once we'd stopped moving around the tiredness started to kick in too. After we off loaded the gear, a celebratory drink in the local pub was called for where I discovered Doombur ale and was glad I wasn't driving - Cheers!

I can't wait to dive again and would love to go back down to the Iron Ore to look at the bits I didn't see this time. This weekend, the club is going to Chepstow to dive in a flooded quarry, to check out sunken vehicles, a helicopter, aeroplane for those qualified for those depths, and an underwater gnome garden!

I know I speak not only for myself but also for the three who trained alongside me, when I say we are so very grateful to have found such a fantastic group of people who are willing to freely give up hours of their time to safely train those interested in learning to dive, and support us once we're qualified and begin our underwater adventure.

My deepest respect and thanks to:

Steve, Adam, Andy, and Harry, who were and always will be, our instructors and friends.

Russ, for keeping the RIB the right way up, making sure we all stayed safe, and not eating our lunch while we were under the sea.

Janice, for coming to every single training session to help and support us, offer advice, and guide us through our first open water dives at Wraysbury.

Sharon, for supporting us at Wraysbury, keeping our logs, and baking delicious goodies.

Carolynn, for being fabulous and supportive crew, and keeping our logs on the RIB.

Jan, for introducing me to this amazing support, and lending me her kit.

Robin and Tracey-Anne, for being great students and always enthusiastic.

MVSAC members who are incredibly friendly, and continue to train and encourage us all at the club meetings.

And Trev, my diving buddy, without whom my training and diving experiences thus far would not have been such fun.

Beth.

Many thanks Beth for your lovely account of training with MVSAC and your first (hopefully of many) dives with us.

So what do you do if you want to go diving but the club hasn't got any diving booked?

Don't worry - there are a number of options available.

There are now a number of relatively local boats that either operate shuttle services or have diving days for individuals rather than a charter (where you book the whole boat). This can be a great way to get in some diving if there are only a couple of you available. Shuttles (where you book on one dive and the boat then returns to pick up more divers) operate from Swanage (Divers Down, Swanage Boat Charters) and Portland (Skindeeper and Scimitar diving). Lots of other operators advertise individual spaces such as Dive 125 or Sussex Shipwrecks - Eastbourne, Channel Diving - Brighton or Eastbourne (although these tend to be deeper dives).

The RIB is available for any club member to book - just chat to people if you are not sure what you have to do to organise a dive.

A good shore dive is Swanage Pier. Chesil Cove in Portland is also popular - info can be found at www.underwaterexplorers.co.uk/covediveguide.

You don't have to dive in the sea - there are a number of inland sites such as Wraysbury, NDAC Chepstow and Vobster Quay.