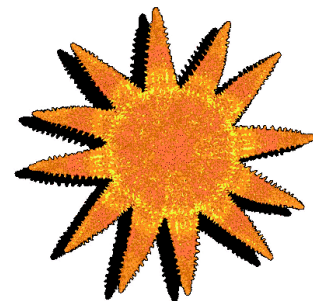


June 2009

SubScript

The Sunstar Sub Aqua Newsletter

www.sunstar.org.uk



**Sunstar
Sub Aqua**

Thankfully some people have put fingers to key boards and have written articles for this the second issue of the year.

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Your Committee

Post	Holder
<i>Chairman</i>	John Cook
<i>Diving Officer</i>	Toby Hope
<i>Training Officer</i>	Chris Bond
<i>Secretary</i>	David Parkinson
<i>Treasurer</i>	Adrian Barker
<i>Expeditions Officer</i>	Paul Mann
<i>Communications Officer</i>	Matt Yates
<i>Minibus Officer</i>	Matt Yates
<i>Boat Officer</i>	Dave Lock
<i>Equipment Officer</i>	Simon Steward
<i>Social Secretary</i>	Chris Nixon
<i>New Member's Rep</i>	Andy Keeble

DIVING OFFICER'S DOINGS

DO's Doings:

Hello! Thanks to everyone who made the Plymouth trip such a success, a gorgeous weekend of sunshine and wrecks. Visibility was so-so, and the tides were a bit springy, but everyone seemed to enjoy themselves, so another fun weekend for Sunstar.

The Gozo trip also seems to have gone well, photos and video are on the website and maybe there'll be a report in Subscript somewhere...

Training is gathering pace, we've 2 new Sport divers in our ranks: Congratulations to Adrian and Joe. The current cohort of Ocean Diver students are also coming to the end of their training, with open water sessions due to commence during June. No doubt they'll be helped along by Chris and myself who've recently completed all elements of the Open Water Instructor programme, and also by Simon who has become Sunstar's latest assistant instructor.

Thanks to Pete, Raj and Dave for making the Boat Handling course run smoothly. As a result, we now have another 4 pirates in the club (if the picture on the contact list is anything to go by :) - well done Tony, Paul, Simon and Joe for making the time to attend this fun course. Surely we'll be able to get Calypso out now????

Dive Madeira



By, Neil Parkin

A week in Madeira in March offered a refuge from the British weather and the chance of some warm(ish) water diving. Madeira is 600Km off the coast of Morocco in the Atlantic ocean, a Portuguese island with its own distinct culture. The climate is classed as being semitropical with the air temperature always in the 15 to 25 Deg C region.

The Portuguese national carrier (TAP) has extortionate excess charges for diving equipment (yet golf clubs are free...but let's not get started on that). So cutting back to five t-shirts and one pair of jeans enabled me to get my equipment under the 20Kg limit.

On landing we thought we had entered a British open air pensioner colony, but luckily other nations sent their young, so we didn't feel as if we were in a Eastbourne hotel at breakfast. The island has a very safe clean feel to it and is a stress free destination. I picked the "divepoint" diving centre based in the Pestana Carlton complex in the capital Funchal purely on its location. The staff were a mix of German and Portuguese and were efficient, knowledgeable and eager to ensure that you had a good dive. This included making you stand in the hot showers in your wetsuit prior to diving.....hmm a toasty warm dive experience I can recommend.

I completed four dives, two shore entry and two hard boat in the nature reserve. The house reef was large and critter abundant and was the best dive of the trip. The water was crystal clear over a limestone bottom,

with large spiky sea urchins looking like inspectors sent from BSAC to ensure buoyancy control was maintained. A maximum depth of 15m meant that the creatures could be watched at a leisurely pace with each crevice in the limestone investigated for the numerous colourful moray eels. The usual suspects could be seen, Barracuda, Turkish wrasse, brown puffer fish, goat fish, groupers etc., but more unusual was the red glass eye fish usually only seen on night dives, arrow crabs and the largest red and black nudibranch I have ever seen, the guide was most taken with this and spent a good 5 minutes examining and measuring it. The highlight was the resident octopus in a hole, annoyed with the guides tapping it decided to chase him across the reef before returning to rebuild its wall, very entertaining for me but possibly not the octopus.

The diving in Madeira is generally scenic with walls and limestone reefs. A couple of wrecks are available. The most notable is the Bowbelle dredger infamous for its part in the Marchioness disaster, it sits in 30m of water and is relatively intact. Madeira does not in my opinion have enough diving diversity to merit a dedicated diving trip but the island does have stunning scenery and 230Km of tracks along the finely engineered Levadas. So if you want a relaxing holiday with lots to see and do and a few cheeky dives as well, Madeira is well worth a look.

- Easyjet fly from Stansted.
- TAP fly from Heathrow
- Water temperature 17 to 26 Deg C.
- Beer 33cl @ Hotel 3.50 Euros.
- Beer 33cl @ Supermarket 0.50 Euros.
- Meal for two 20 Euros.
- 4 Dives £115 (for everything)
- www.madeiradivepoint.com

Boat Handling Course 25th & 26th April

Day 1 - by Simon Steward

9am start at Adastral Park. The students were Paul Mann, Simon Steward, Tony Field, and Joe Cullum, with the instructors being Dave Lock, Raj Mistry, and Pete Young. The first half of the day was taken up with lectures where we learnt about boat types, their construction, engines, navigation equipment found on boats, the associated equipment required on a boat, and a bit about sea navigation and marker buoys. There is quite a lot of things to learn and a lot of things to take in, so the morning was rather hectic, but nonetheless a very interesting start to the course. Lunch on the run, then down to the boat hut.

Using a checklist, we had to confirm that everything required for safe use of the boat was there, for example oxygen and boat distress equipment. The boat was taken out of the hut, and a final check made. The next activity was to produce a passage plan, for where we were going to take the boat, and how we were going to get back. So in pairs we produced the plan from software available on the pc in the boat hut - I must admit to finding this part very interesting (maybe I need to get out more), and doubly so when I was able to relate it to marker buoys off Felixstowe later on. Everything ready, off we go to Levington marina for the boat launch.

I was tasked with managing the boat launch on the first day, which requires a fair bit of co-ordination, especially as it would not take much for someone to get injured. Dave drove the boat down the launch ramp using his Land Rover, Raj was in the boat for when it launched, and I co-ordinated the winching down and un-hooking of the boat, with Tony/Paul/Joe performing various activities as we went. With the boat launched (and everyone's fingers and toes still attached), we all got in and headed out from Levington marina.

A radio check was done with Thames Coastguard, and the practical boat handling activities started in earnest. Now Calypso is a big boat and a fast one to boot, but the real art of what we were going to learn was the low speed manoeuvring of it, as that is where most of the diving related activities will occur. A high speed ride to and from a dive site whilst a lot of fun, is fairly strait forward, but manoeuvring a boat alongside a diver and not running them over is an extremely tricky task. Unfortunately I did run over my diver the first time I tried that, but luckily it was only a plastic container, and I'm now fully trained in recovering plastic containers.

The afternoon consisted of various boat manoeuvring activities done out of Levington marina, and around Harwich harbour, which

included high speed handling (top fun), general manoeuvring, precision manoeuvring, and coming alongside (a light ship no less, which was a surprisingly difficult activity).

Then back to Levington to recover the boat and head back to the boat hut. A very long day, but great fun.

Day 2 - by Tony Field

After being winch man on Saturday afternoon it was my turn today to fulfil the position of managing the Launch of Calypso. It seems hard to believe that barely 24 hours previously I was sitting in a class room learning about how this all works and now I am standing on a slipway with a ton of boat equating to £15,000 in front of me and 2 tons of minibus equating to £3.58 some distance behind me across the boat yard car park, with nothing in between but a 3/4 inch steel rusty cable. Remembering our training and the run through from the previous day made this operation not in the least bit as daunting as it might have been; a simple operation of giving signals to the man at the top of the ramp (Joe) to relay "backwards" or "stop" to Pete who was at the helm of the minibus until both the boat and trailer were far enough down the slipway to be thoroughly damp. At this point the boat was floating at the Stern (Blunt End) and all Paul and Simon and I had to do was unwind the winch, disconnect it along with the safety rope and allow the boat to float off a short way while holding on to the Painter (the bit of rope tied to the Bow or "pointy end" of the boat) to ensure that our Cox, Raj did not float off into the harbour and trash some footballer's gin palace before elevenses! Once we had given the go ahead to remove the trainer from the water, and tow it up the slip way, I pulled, jumped, climbed and flopped myself into the boat with all of the coordination and agility of a new-born giraffe in order to help our Skipper moor Calypso at one of the pontoons around the corner in readiness to pick up the rest of the team.

The weather was absolutely fantastic and Thames Coastguard had given us an optimistic appraisal of the conditions for the rest of the day, meaning calm seas, light winds and favourable tides to give us all a good experience of piloting the boat at speed and at slow speeds in limited spaces. The course was very well run, and involved mostly practicing boat skills with comparatively little classroom based theory, which for me being a pragmatist, was the ideal combination. I would definitely recommend this course for anyone who is considering any diving from small boats, as it was lots of fun and as we all learned it definitely helps if there are more than a few people who know what they are doing when using the boat, as the whole operation is much slicker.....which leaves more time for diving!! Thanks to Dave, Raj and Pete for putting on the course.

Doin' the IFC (4th/5th April)

By Simon Steward

IFC - Instructor Foundation Course

I was watching some of the guys taking in try-divers in the pool one day, and thinking that it looked like a fun thing to do, so I suggested that I'd like to do that, and was told I had to do the IFC first. So I duly signed up to go on an IFC without really thinking too much about what was involved, only that there was no exam, and I had been told that it was a very worthwhile course to do.

Saturday 4th

I arrive at the site for the IFC an hour early - bummer, this place is a lot closer than I thought it was. Make small talk with the other trainees about what is the most stupid thing you've done during a dive recently; turns out I was the winner with my drysuit moment in Lyme Regis last year. But I impressed them with my patented method for emptying my drysuit.

The instructors start to turn up, and the course 'boss', our very own Dave Lock. We get split into groups of four, and meet my group's instructor for the weekend, a guy from London called Stephen Chapman, who disappointingly only said 'sweet' twice all weekend. Into the classroom, and an introduction to the course by 'the boss', who outlines what we will be doing, and the aims of the course. The rest of the morning until a break for lunch is taken up with lectures, and re-enforcing what we are learning. A break for lunch and we sat outside in the sun in our merry band of four, chatting about... you guessed it - diving.

Lunch over and into the pool for a lesson and demonstration on teaching practical diving skills. This is where I really started to think about how to do it, and how I would put my personality into the experience of teaching students. I also realised that I would be teaching 'what I know', so 'what I know' had better be good. After the pool session, we had a debrief, and were allocated a couple of subjects for the next day that we would be teaching, in a practical and theory lesson. In my case it was the controlled buoyant lift, and the DSMB. 6pm finish and back to the hotel to plan the lessons I would be giving the next day.

Out that evening with some of the group and instructors for a curry and a few beers. I even managed to blag a free bottle of wine from the curry house, by pretending it was my birthday. Back to the hotel for a final beer with 'the boss', whom I had to leave in the bar at 11pm because I was so knackered.

Sunday 5th

9am start and into the pool for our practical lessons. Each of the four members of my group had to give a practical lesson, with the others pretending to be students, and our instructor looking on. So to my turn, some butterflies and a dry throat, but - and here's the key, I had prepared well. Brief the students, safety issues, buddy check, and into the pool. I positioned my students and started the exercise, making sure I had good control of the situation. Ten minutes into the exercise at the bottom of the pool, I had a light bulb moment - I was really enjoying myself. Now the whole exercise lasts twenty minutes, but that's for everything, and it goes very quickly, so I ran out of time and had to get my students out of the pool for a debrief. I lost control a bit on the pool exit, but this weekend was the place to do it, and I managed to get things back under control and finish the exercise.

Back to the classrooms for the theory lectures we had to give. I went first and covered the DSMB. I found this harder than the practical, and was quite nervous, but had a couple of good pictures to use, and a DSMB to show the students, which helped with my presentation. Again the key is preparation, and checking your students have understood what you are telling them. A debrief by the instructor, and feedback from the group, and then lunch and a chance to chew the fat.

After lunch we had some more lectures, and another group exercise, and a final debrief from 'the boss'. 4.30 finish of two very long and intense days. Now I know that doing presentations to willing students is a world apart from an OD student freaked out by mask clearing, but I learnt an awful lot that weekend, about myself as much as about teaching diving, and drove back to Ipswich with a very big grin on my face.

Would I recommend this course to others, without a doubt. It's hard work (harder for the instructors), but go with an open mind and be prepared to work hard, and you will have a really great experience, though I can't guarantee you'll get a free bottle of wine.

Sunstar trip to Gozo - 13th to 20th May 2009



Ten of us went to Gozo in May for a weeks self organised diving, eight divers and two non-divers, with six of us travelling to Gatwick at 2am for a 6.30am Easyjet flight to Malta - not a popular time to start. Our location in Gozo was Marsalforn, which is a very nice little bay town, where we had two self-catering apartments for the week. The dive shop used in Marsalforn was Atlantis Diving, who organised everything (bar the diving) for us, including booking the apartments, car hire, tanks, and weights. The clubs had not previously used Atlantis before, so I did not know what to expect in terms of the service we were likely to get, but they were brilliant, and happily accommodated any changes or requests we had, before and during the week. They also provided the cheapest quote for the weeks diving and accommodation.

The diving in Gozo was a mixture of shore dives and rib dives which we organised ourselves, with the exception of a day on a hardboat to Comino Island. The marine life in Gozo is not on the same scale as the Red sea, but there is enough to keep you occupied, including barracuda, Octopus, and cuttlefish.



However for me where Gozo really comes into its own, is the wonderful underwater topography, and the ease with which the dive sites can be reached. There is enough variation to suite divers from Ocean diver upwards, with a variety of more

challenging dives for the more experienced. Plenty of caves, good wall dives, offshore rocks, and the more unusual sites such as 'The Blue hole', 'Azure Window', and 'The Inland sea'. There is even a tunnel to swim through on one of the Gozo dives. Some of the sites are diveable from a rib located in the 'Inland sea', and the best part of this is that you just turn up, get on the rib, and tell the rib owner what time you want picking up. If the rib is not there, the woman running the 'Inland sea' cafe will call its owner, who will turn up at a time you agree and take you out, all for four euros a head! Gozo is also a great place for training dives, and Paul, Chris, and myself fitted in a few around the daily diving we did.

The nightlife in Marsalforn is fairly sedate, it's not a party town, however it does have some great restaurants, and a wonderful bar called Smugglers where we generally started with a pre-meal beer. Prices are reasonable, so even if you eat well you won't break the bank. For non-divers it can offer a relaxing time, but it is not a beach holiday destination.

Overall a very good weeks diving, and a place I definitely want to dive again. My personal favourites were 'The Inland sea' to 'The blue hole', and 'Lantern point' on Comino Island. The trip turkey award went to John Cook, who when Frances was left behind at 'The Blue hole' was blissfully unaware of the fact, and was happily washing his gear at the dive shop.

Finally a big thank-you to Brian and Stephania at Atlantis Divers, who made my job of organising the trip very easy. Wonderful friendly people, with a great knowledge of the local dive sites. And not forgetting Fluffy, the shop puppy who could chew sandals for Malta.

Simon Steward

One of the highlights of the trip for John and I was the Inland Sea, Azure Window and Blue Hole. It was our first time diving in Gozo and what makes this place special was the underwater topography with its enormous boulders, caves, tunnels, sheer walls and astounding visibility.

Our first dive at this location saw us swimming through a tunnel from the Inland Sea to the Azure Window. At the end of the tunnel and at 20 plus meters we saw a John Dory fish which appeared rather relaxed with the divers and allowed itself to be photographed first on one side and then the other. The boulders and walls were covered in sea weed with peacocks tails and fireworms



scattered about. I was surprised at their turn of speed and reminded me very much of centipedes. The viz was so good we could tell when we had reached the Azure Window. Painted combers, a few parrotfish and damsel fish were about although the fish life is not as profuse as say in the Red Sea. When we reached the Blue Hole we saw fish taking bites off an unfortunate jellyfish. There was a cave nearby and we went to have a look. In the dim light and with torches on we could see cardinal fish swimming about and just outside the cave on the walls there were small orange anemones rather like small daisies. That was a lovely sight to end the dive.

Frances Cook