

Diary:

Following another night in the cottage waking up to what was a wet and windy night we were braced yet again for the possibility that the days diving may be called off. However as the weeks experience has showed by the time we were all aboard the weather had changed for the better – not necessarily the best but the winds had eased and the skies with broken cloud. This was to stay with us for our diving day.

So all aboard the “Invincible”, and once again my drysuit had been returned to the boat by Scapa Scuba after overnight repairs on my leaking boots and knees. Ian had filled cylinders to our requests overnight – this he had achieved for air via a very long whip which meant there was no need for us to move our cylinders from our spots we had allocated ourselves on board for the week. Nitrox fills were a slightly different matter but for most of this only involved our stage cylinders.

Following discussions with the skipper Ian Trumpp the days plan was to go for the KRONPRINZ WILHELM this morning to be followed by the Karlsruhe - or as we began to refer to it as the Carlsberg – probably the unlikeliest dive of Scapa’ [as we had it on our plans on a couple of previous occasions but circumstances denied us the opportunity – lets wait and see what today is going to bring!?

Off we steam and within a couple of hours we approaching the site – and the weather although cloudy is better than what we thought earlier in the morning. Call goes out to get kitted up and ready to enter. Some retrieve their drysuits from the warmth of the forehead store whilst ours manage to kit up inside. Talc is floating around the air and deck as each of us squeeze into our suits. So today with an estimated depth of 38M I am going in with my usual buddy Harvey – the pair of us kitted in our twin 12L’s and carrying a 7L stage of approx 50% Nitrox to ease the deco stop. Of course following the visit on a previous afternoon/evening someone had purchased a lovely colourfully sculptured ‘Nemo’ hood -someone to look out for whilst down under ☺.

Dive 1 – start

Time to jump in, whilst laughing at Nemo floating in the water’s in front of me – not an easy task to keep your mouthpiece in place whilst laughing! Harvey followed me in seconds later and we gather ourselves together at the marker buoy and then signal our descent. Following the shot we quickly descend, slowing down when the wreck comes into sight. We landed amidships at the end of the shot attached to the mast, only to find those of our dive party in front of us heading towards the stern – we envisaged poor visibility with everyone in front of us so we headed for the bow.

Like most wrecks everything was covered in a layer of silt, therefore anything touched or disturbed by any movements too close would cause a cloud to appear – thank god to good buoyancy control ☺. Various marine life was to be seen as we came down the hull towards the seabed where all of a sudden – not being familiar with these things – what appeared to me to be a gun emplacement, albeit upside down. Surely not, Harvey had gone past and he being a seafarer from the navy surely would have recognised it – that is if it were not for the camera stuck in front of him pointing towards some fish. But yeah on closer examination it was, and I was able to follow the gun barrel to its end in open water. Looked inside, no conger to be seen but to me it was a recognisable gun emplacement, not one of the big guns but more for self defence. Progressed along the wreck towards the bow – everything seemed boring now, well not boring really but that gun had set high expectations. We eventually arrived at the

bow, which was intact, to discover some quite large starfish but no signs of the ship's name etc.

We turned back, nosing into every crevice, but avoiding the temptation to go inside, and there was still plenty to be seen. As we approached amidships we could see our dive party returning from their journey to the stern. They looked pleased with what they had seen so we had to find out what had pleased them. As we progressed we encountered a massive hole in the hull where obviously there had been some kind of explosion, but was it due to salvage? There was just a whole lot of mangled wreckage giving home to all kinds of marine life, those hiding and those hunting. Was this the end of the line? We couldn't see what was ahead so what next. Well there seemed to be a line of something strung out in front of this wreckage but where did it lead to? It was suspended – so I assumed that it led to something large. We swam across this ravine of wreckage hovering above the line.

After a couple of minutes shadows began to appear, and, as we get closer the rest of the stern appears out of the gloom in front of us. It was not a particularly large section, but we choose to keep on this section of the wreck rather than searching around the seabed in the hope of uncovering anything, as there was always the risk that we could lose our bearings if we moved too far and the suspended line had soon become invisible in the not so clear water. So having had a nose around we come across the line again – now seems as good an opportunity to head back to the main part of the wreck, not that we are low on air but we like to be safe. It's funny how having looked at something whilst going in one direction, now looks quite different as we approach it from the opposite end, so our return journey to the shot actually takes us probably a bit longer than we anticipated – not a problem, it's not as though we are low on air. We can see others of our dive party rising above the hull as there are making their ascent up the shot. We take our time but we are already making our own ascent if only up the hull to its highest point.

The end is in sight, the shot line is in sight to be more precise. We assemble ourselves together then indicate to each other to begin our ascent. So much to see, yet so little time. We know we still had air to spare but we also know that if we carried on around the wreck we could easily get carried away and find ourselves, without close monitoring, out of air. Up we go.

Surface Interval: I know we had time in the morning for a breakfast, but we choose only to have a light one. Now is the time to take advantage of Fiona's cooking, usually Eggs; Bacon; Baked Beans and either sausages/haggis/fruity pudding, plus the usual teas/coffees and toast. Can you really imagine going on a 38M dive with that lot in your stomach, it was a much more preferable option to look forward to post dive and a good way to fill your surface interval!

Today we followed breakfast with a trip to Lyness, on the island of Hoy, to visit the Scapa Flow Visitor Centre which houses an important record of the role the Royal Navy played in Orkney during both World Wars. A great place to get an overall impression of Scapa Flow, lots of atmosphere, and ask to see the model of a battleship – it really gives you something else to look forward to for the afternoon's dive.



Figure 1: Land party going to Lyness Visitor Centre

Just to think this is a rescued prop from one of the ships we may have been diving on this week, it gives you a sense of size! Visit <http://www.scapaflow.co.uk/> for more information.

Back on board we motored on to the next dive site for our second dive of the day on the Karlsruhe.

Being the shallowest of the High Seas Fleet she was ideal for the second dive of the day. We descended the shot towards the bow which is relatively intact with capstans and mooring bollards still attached to a sloping quarterdeck. The boat is quite badly broken in places, but is nonetheless a rattling good dive. We found a number of places which were nice little swim throughs, and holes that were interesting and large enough to drop into- however we played safe and stayed out, without disappearing into the dark depths of the wreck below as we were unfamiliar with this wreck. The railings had become festooned with plumose anemones growing thickly, practically on top of each other in such a way that they looked like garlands strung along the side of the ship. Looking at the time on my computer I realised that once again this was the end of the dive for me and started a slow ascent back to the surface.