



British Sub-Aqua Club

Expedition Report

For BSAC One Day
Expeditions
'4-40m' off NE Coast

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September 2005

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Expedition Preparations

One of the benefits of being the organiser of an expedition is that you can choose where to go and dive. This year I decided to investigate some quite shallow wrecks off Amble that I'd always meant to visit but hadn't quite got around to.

The resulting expedition was therefore aimed at Sports Divers, Dive Leaders and any more experienced divers like myself who are gradually building up experience on their rebreathers.

I advertised it as a National Expedition and it was therefore open to any BSAC divers suitably qualified members. However I selected and invited a core group of divers to ensure that the expedition went ahead and that I had a group of divers who I knew were capable of acting as assistant dive marshals and as mentors to less experienced divers.

In the North East, there seems to be a 50/50 chance of foul weather messing up your plans and even if you're diving the Farnes you can soon run out of decent backup sites. The expedition was therefore planned for 4 Saturdays spanning 4 different weekends in July and August to minimise the risk of weather problems.

Applications to join the expedition were mainly received from local divers but an encouraging number of divers from further away made enquiries.

Clearly, the lack of guaranteed decent backup dives were a problem for some travelling from quite far away, but others took the risk and got some diving in.

The outline dive plan was relatively straightforward. Charter a boat from Blyth, steam north for about 1 hour, dive deeper wrecks on slack water and shallower ones with some tide running and then get back to Blyth at a reasonable time.

Finding the wrecks did not pose any major problems. This particular part of the North East coast had been re-surveyed in 1999 yielding more accurate wreck location information available from the Hydrographic Department (for a small fee).

Identifying North East wrecks always seems to be a challenge though. The shallower wrecks off Amble would probably be smashed up by the elements, have been salvaged commercially or by local divers or both.

The expedition targets were unknown wrecks in 12, 15 and 30m just off the shallow reefs called White Bank and Northern Hill just south of Amble and Coquet Island. I say unknown loosely; somebody somewhere will know but its just not common knowledge.

The one known wreck was the Admiralty Tug Bullger which lies in 6m of water on the way home at the South end of Druridge Bay but it is infrequently dived.

I must confess to finding wreck history fascinating by rarely motivate myself to dig very deep. On the rare occasions that I do though, I usually turn up something extremely useful such as the wreck is not there or it was not the wreck that I thought it was.

With this in mind, the participants in the expedition were encouraged to research some local dive guides to find some possible names and so we the names of two ships Princess Maud and Dora were considered possibilities. The history of how they actually sank would suggest at least one could be in deeper water but it was a start.

Expedition Diving

A thick fog bank greeted everyone at Dun Cow Quay on the first weekend. The forecast was for it to clear so we gingerly headed out of the harbour and were soon basking in sunshine.

The first dive was on the small wreck in 30m. It was difficult to shot as it was lying in line with the tide rather than across it. We found a fantastic little wreck site, bolt upright, fairly intact and absolutely covered with life. Fantastic for the photography, but if only we had a photographer on this dive!

Unfortunately, the seabed is muddy so it was quite easy to reduce the visibility to nothing if you weren't careful. Plenty of frog leg fin kicks by all the divers prevented a complete silt-out.

It was quite easy to identify the usual wreck features including the propeller, mooring bollards, decking, admiralty anchor, and small engine. However the upright boiler was most unusual, looking more like the conning tower of a Russian submarine. An old trawl net hangs menacingly off the rear starboard quarter but was quite easy to swim around and didn't obscure much of the wreck. An excellent dive was had by all and a sketch was drawn by the group.

We were also expecting a small wreck for the next dive; details from the Hydrographic department indicated that it would be about 27 metres long by 22 metre wide and 3 metres high. The boilers and scrap remains of the engine block were indeed about this size but we were amazed to find parts of what was clearly a large and old ship strewn over a much larger area.

Most divers swam constantly backwards and forwards over the wreck site and never covered the same ground twice. Even when some buddy pairs began to drift off the site having thought they'd run out of wreckage, they bumped straight into the bows!



This was an amazing rummage dive with bits of wreck hidden in and around the surrounding gulleys; no wonder the side scan images only showed a small area of wreckage.

The next time we visited this wreck we went with the aim of mapping the location of the main bits and discovered the wreck was oriented roughly north/south. A rough plan view was produced this time to give us a better idea of the layout of the wreck.

Our final wreck site was a bit more problematic. The tide had turned and was flooding South so we no longer had protection from the reef so was slightly stronger than the other wreck only ½ a mile away on the other side of the reef. We found just a few plates before everyone lost interest in holding on and decided to drift South across some reefs. Still the fact the wreckage is there has inspired us to visit the site on slack to conduct a proper grid search.

Our worst expectations about the weather were realised for 2 weekends of the expedition. One of these days, we resorted in desperation to finding one of the 40m cliffs in Ullswater over in the Lake District. The other day everyone stayed in bed!

However the expedition succeeded in a visiting most of the main sites on the list. Wreck survey forms will be completed and passed to the Hydrographic Department so they can update their records.

The identity of the wrecks is still a mystery. A few hours in the library or maybe just a chat to some of the local divers or fishermen is probably the next step to find out more.

What about the sites still to investigate? Well, weather in November has been known to be surprisingly good and so another couple of impromptu expeditions may take place using club RHIBs.

Expedition Statistics

The Divers:

1. Andrew Hunt, BSAC Expeditions Advisor, FC, Rb
2. Neil Richmond, Darlington Dolphins, Area Coach, ADV, Rb
3. Eddie McCallum, Tyneside 114, DL, Rb
4. Steve Slater, Tyneside 114, DL, Rb
5. Richard Booth, Tyneside 114, DL, Expedition Photographer
6. Dave Robson, Tyneside 114, ADV, ACI
7. John Moor, Poseidon Divers, ADV, ACI
8. Hubert Desgranges, Blyth BSAC, DL
9. Eddie Myers, Blyth BSAC, ADV, OWI
10. Simon Rose, Neptune North, DL, ACI
11. Sybille Moss, Tyneside 114, SP
12. Andrew Moss, Tyneside 114, Area Coach, ADV, AI
13. Paul Warren, Poseidon, DL, Rb
14. Michael Patterson Snr, Tyneside 114, OD
15. Michael Patterson Jnr, Tyneside 114, OD
16. Nick Foster, REDS North East Organiser, ADV, OWI, Rb
17. Nicola Reed, St Andrews University SAC, SP
18. Ewan Maxwell, Neptune North BSAC, DL
19. Sabrina Butcher, Neptune North BSAC, SP
20. Roger Malone, Neptune North BSAC, ADV, AI

1 First Class Diver, 7 Adv Divers, 7 Dive Leaders, 3 Sports Divers, 2 Ocean Divers from 6 different BSAC branches.

6 Rebreather divers (all on AP Inspirations, the expedition leader being the only non-trimix qualified rebreather diver)

Number of Dives: 18 buddy dives

Typical dive time: 45mins

Depth Range: 12 to 32m

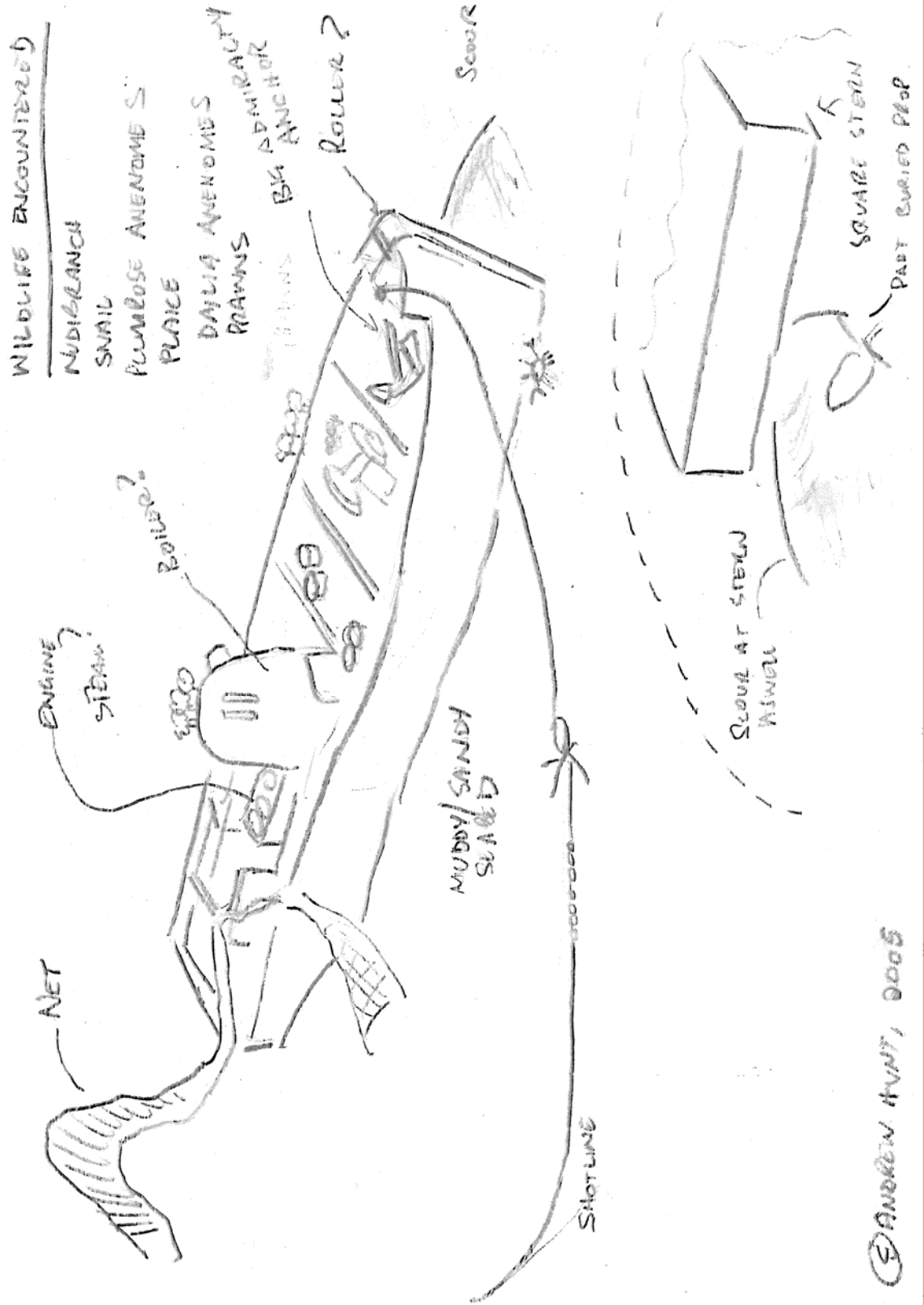
Final Costs:

£30 for hire of boat per diver

Hydrographic data fee waived in exchange for survey information provided on other wreck sites by Expedition Leader.

Other costs down to individual divers

Appendix 1: Sketch of Unknown Wreck (30m)



Appendix 2: Sketch of Unknown Wreck (15m)

