

Club Trip Report

SCAPA FLOW



Diving on
the wreck of the
Tarbarka, one of the
block ships in Scapa
flow. 20m of vis and
plenty of marine
life

A bit of history for youhow did Scapa Flow end up being a mecca for wreck divers from all over the world? At the end of the first World war the surrendered German High Seas Fleet was ordered by the victorious allies to go to Scapa Flow. A natural harbour capable of “holding” large numbers of vessels the “flow” had been home to the British fleet throughout the war, positioned in order to be able to deploy either into the North Atlantic, or the Baltic seas, while at the same time being relatively safe. The German fleet consisted of 78 vessels including several huge battleships (up to 26,000 tonnes) In a highly coordinated last act of defiance, the Admiral of the fleet commanded all his vessels to be scuttled rather than be handed over. Some of the ships were saved by British servicemen who managed to get on board, however around 51 ships sank to the bottom. In a huge salvage operation, most of these were recovered, however several were never returned to the surface. 7 large battleships make up the major attractions, however, with a whole range of other vessels to see, both German and British there is plenty to keep you occupied. In addition a number of “block ships”, sunk to block off an entrance to the flow, also provide superb dive sites.

Scapa Flow 2010

The trip to Scapa followed a format that we had used in the past. The majority of people took to the air and flew up while one of the vans went up at some ungodly hour the day before with all the dive gear. There were no problems with the plan in principal although we did catch Alastair trying to overload the van with his huge supply of nappies and several kg's of clothes hidden away in his dive gear. At 4.15 in the morning we covered the miles pretty quickly. In fact we were doing so well that we decided to take a stop for breakfast at Keele service station. Gastronomically satisfied we went back to the van to find that it wouldn't start. Panic stations as we realised that we had everyone's dive kit and they would not have much fun trying to dive in Scapa in their glad rags without suits or anything else for that matter. While we waited for the AA (so glad I paid for that renewal) we developed alternative plans for van hire from local garages.

Mick, the AA man arrived within 20 minutes and set to work. It wasn't the starter motor and he was perplexed. Scuba Steve then came

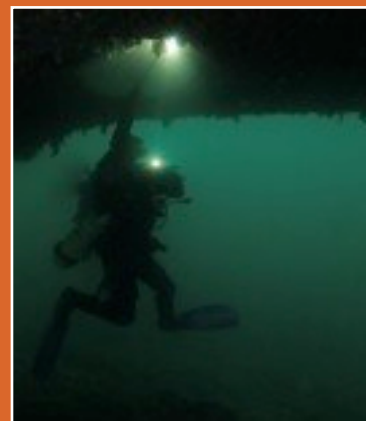
to the rescue and offered advice to the grateful mechanic. It took 2 hours but we were thankfully on our way - not only that but we knew what the problem was and how to deal with it.



The rest of the journey was pretty uneventful - we had a few beers and a curry in Inverness and met the group traveling by car, who had joined the trip from other parts of the country, at Scrabster. Once in Stromness we settled into the accommodation and unloaded the gear. We were in several cottages and a few got together for a beer - excited about the diving to come.



SCAPA FLOW IMAGES



Scapa Flow 2010

Day 1 and we awoke to calm seas and glorious sunshine. We had divided the group onto 2 boats, MV Triton run by Dougie, or Dooogie if you speak Jockense, and Radiant Queen, owned by Emily who had skippered the boat we were on several years before - in fact the last time we went to Scapa. We were straight into the wrecks and dive 1 saw Triton on the Karlsruhe and the Radiant Queen on the Dresden. In spite of plans we never actually dived the same sites at the same time, which actually worked out fine as it meant that the wrecks were never too crowded. There were a few other boats working at the time but with so many to choose from, it was never an issue. On the Triton most of us enjoyed the first dive - amazing vis and seals hunting shoals of fish. Lamby and Ian however, managed to miss the 15,000 tonne lump of metal that the shot line was attached to and came up after 20 minutes having not actually found it - a first in Scapa Flow diving history. I was using a new computer for the first time and clearly had not read the instructions on which algorithm to use as I clocked up 20 minutes of deco - my dive buddy had none so it ended up getting bent. I never thought I would have to resort back to a Suunto to be a "less" conservative computer option. The second dive for our boat was equally spectacular - a shallow (ish) dive on the F2 provided a huge baitball being herded by feeding seals. At times it actually went dark as we were surrounded by so many fish and we were in Scotland.



Diving throughout the week continued to be spectacular. The Brummer (which we did twice by popular demand), offered 100m long swim throughs. Leaning on its side you could see all of the guns as you swam along with the deck on your shoulder. The Dresden and the Kohln were just as impressive. The Margraff impressed the Radiant Queen divers so much they did that one twice.

As the week wore on the weather eventually turned with winds coming down from the north. This brought colder and stronger winds and obviously rougher seas. However it didn't stop the team from diving. During the week Radiant Queen kidnapped Scuba Steve, who was there trying out his own sidemount gear for the first time, and held him to ransom. In return the Triton boat ate all of the ginger cake that was prepared by Jules' wife, Mandy.

There were plenty of notable moments during the trip. Andi managed to place her ankle under the falling ladder on Radiant Queen, Lamby took his camera for several long dives but ended up with no results. He is attending a course on camera operation at Portsmouth college this week. We gorged ourselves on the bountiful fruits of the sea - well scallops and crabs on regular occasions. The Gutter Sound dive was notable for me when I came across a German air dropped 1000lb bomb as well as the usual bottles and crockery. Oh and Sue and Terry managed to make a serious dent in the Scapa Flow wine reserves.

All too soon it was time to go home. First on the ferry and first off we were at the head of the queue going down the A9 and made good time - so good in fact that we arrived in Pompey only 20 minutes behind the guys that had flown. The success of the UK trip has prompted us to look into another UK trip next year, possibly to the Isle of Man, Skye or the Scillies - we will let you know. The final thing to say is to thank Dooogie and Emily for being first class skippers and providing us with some excellent fun and some amazing diving. We cannot recommend them enough.

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