

Spring 2011

brief encounter

beaches, diving and a dash of hurricane

Ruth Beattie

Garry and I needed a holiday. First requirement was a diving destination (of course) – we chose Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI) staying at Beaches Resort on one of the main islands Providenciales (known locally as Provo).

The flight on BA was interesting. We boarded with the announcement that although engineers were still on board we were going to be leaving on time. Just leaving the gate they realised that there was now a problem with an alternator, so back to the stand – 2.5 hours later we finally departed for our 9 hour flight.

they have to be joking?

Roughly half way over there was another announcement: “Ladies and gentlemen we have a problem with the plane (dramatic pause), four out of the six toilets are full and inoperable”. The first bit certainly got our attention

and maybe the announcer had been waiting his entire career to say something like that, and we were just above the Bermuda triangle.

The next bit was funny: “we are just coming round with tea and coffee, it might be an idea not to drink too much!” Finally arriving at Provo airport, via Bahamas was a real relief. (No, they had fixed the toilets at Nassau!)

first impressions

The resort was as expected for this all inclusive holiday, clean and well equipped. Room very good, staff friendly and helpful, colourful tropical gardens, several pools, loads of eating places – some 24/7 if so inclined.

Now the important bit – the included two tank dives each day with full kit if required. Sign up and introductory chat completed, we boarded the boat from the jetty in front of the resort next day and set off for our first dive in Grace Bay only ten minutes away.

This was one of the most disappointing dives ever in the Caribbean – vis worse than most UK diving! What was wrong...had we come all this way to dive in 5m vis?

Then the boat moved about 200m and we jumped in again to 20m+ vis. What a difference! Now we could see considerably more than dull sand, rock and coral. There was colour and a lot of fish life too. Diver satisfaction much increased. Phew that first dive was a glitch!

abundant sea life

Second day we went to North West Point on Provo for a dramatic wall dive. Starting at 18m and plunging up to 2000m below us, it was abundantly decorated with huge colourful sponges and coral formations. There were loads of fish including some really big stuff... barracudas slowly patrolling, jacks bruising along and even a dosing nurse shark.

continues on page 3...



Diver spat out by sponge



Man eater



Look...don't touch!

deep
thoughts

Craig Edwards

plans for progression

So this is my first written piece as Chair and I write it with great excitement and anticipation for the year ahead.

We have many things lined up to bring a lot more fun to the club and do even more on club nights in the pool. We have many activities planned for the pool, from the night dive we had recently, to fun evenings, full face mask try dives, re-breather try dives and other interesting events.

This year our DO, Nick Jewson, is going to concentrate on assisting the membership to progress their own training, so those that have been at the same diving grade for a while will be encouraged to step on to the next level of diving, be it diving or instructor skills. This progression is something that the committee as a whole will be taking part in, so expect us to be speaking to each of you on a one-to-one basis to discuss your diving and where you want to go with it.

We are also planning a big drive to increase the number of new members this year and encourage more new trainees. To this end we are holding a month of free try dives in May, the curtain raiser for this will be a day at the bandstand in Bracknell Town Centre where we will be encouraging people to come and do a try dive with us. Part of this effort can be greatly assisted by you, the members, if you can each bring one friend down, we could have a large number of people taking part.

So let me wrap this up now, be safe, and enjoy this seasons diving.

fun event

buoyancy circuits challenge

Gill Vine

At the beginning of January we held the first of a series of fun events to kick start the new year – a buoyancy circuits challenge.

Four stations, each manned by an instructor, were set up in the pool and members were put into teams moving round from station to station in a clockwise direction.

The instructor at each station demonstrated a skill which was then practiced by each team member until a rattle was sounded by Pool Marshall Garry Beattie. This signalled the time for teams to move to the next station.

let the challenge begin!

Those who started in the shallow end practiced hovers, pivots and helicopter turns with Frances Jewson. I was manning the next station with a set of parallel bars – beginning with simple swim throughs, we progressed to side swims, finning on the back, corkscrews and other fancy configurations! Next challenge on the circuit involved exercises in a more confined space

as Nick Jewson demonstrated swimming through a series of hoops. Finally, Jeff Reed took the teams back-to-basics perfecting the art of forward and backward rolls.

Time moved on surprisingly quickly and the groups only had time to complete two sets of challenges at each of the four stations. Nevertheless, those who attended all seemed to have enjoyed the event.

future events

We are planning to run fun events every 4 – 6 weeks. Rachel Burton and Tim Slow have just organised a night dive in the pool which was thoroughly enjoyed by those that took part.

Our next event, 'get your kit off', is being run by Chris Edwards on 31 March. Come along and see how easily you can de-kit underwater! It helps us to have an idea on numbers for these events, so do sign up on the sheet on the club noticeboard or email chrisedwards@bracknellscuba.org.uk if you wish to take part!



The circuit challengers



The Thunderdome



Under the dome



Just drifting

brief encounter

...continued from front cover

game on

Our next dive on 'The Thunderdome' at 15m was a bit different. This could be best described as an enormous metal colander plonked on the sea bed. It had been part of a French game show, where contestants had to free dive down to retrieve pearls.

At the bottom were divers dressed as mermaids, who could be persuaded to part with air for a pearl. Unfortunately no-one thought to tell the contestants to breathe out as they surfaced, resulting in disastrous consequences.

Needless to say the idea was soon abandoned, as was the metalwork. It has broken up a bit following storms but is covered with life and provided Garry with the only bit of metal for the entire TCI dive experience.

putting ours fins up

Then we were forced to take a six day break from diving thanks to Hurricane Tomas. Beaches began by taking the boats away, and then tied down anything loose. They were not going to be caught out like they had two years earlier by Hurricane Ike. They may have over-reacted slightly but better to

Hurricane Tomas



be safe. This was when we discovered that finding things to do in a resort really directed at under 10's can be hard. There is only so much sitting drinking, eating and reading you can do. Yes honestly!

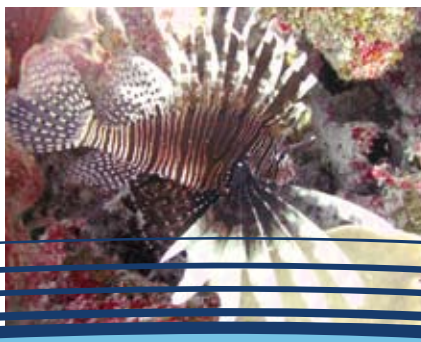
out and about

Before Tomas arrived we walked along the beach – wonderfully clear turquoise water and white sand beaches with pelicans and ospreys overhead. We hired a local taxi driver to take us on an island tour of the cultural highlights – the only Conch farm in the Caribbean, the ruins of the last remaining cotton plantation and the highest part of the island at 450m. This is a small island, but it was good to get out of the resort. Tomas, by the time it got to us, was a damp but windy squib – poor Haiti had a much worse time that we did.

Finally we could dive again but with a taxi ride to the boats at different moorings. It only took about ten minutes, but along a rain gullied track most of the way. We dived two days off West Caicos, another day off Provo's NorthWest Point and on our final day off French Cay.

West Caicos gave us the dramatic colourful walls, with swim throughs

Fish and chips anyone?



and caves topped off with hawksbill turtles, reef sharks, sting rays, horse-eyed jacks, barracudas, angelfish, snappers and massive groupers.

French Cay gave us all of the above plus spotted eagle rays and a free-swimming nurse shark and on the way out, dolphins and a barracuda leaping out of the water to take a fish. Top that!

some final thoughts

Interestingly, there are abundant lion fish which, not being natives and having no natural predators here, are becoming a pest by eating the local fish. There is a campaign to promote their killing. Apparently they make good eating (venomous spines removed). We did not attempt to test this out.

TCI are on the third largest coral reef system worldwide (65 miles across and 200 miles long), and have set up marine parks and fishery reserves with mooring buoys at all dive sites to avoid any possible damage from anchors.

Although sport fishing continues, commercial fishing is banned in several areas and the benefits show. As a result, the islands are consistently ranked in the top five as one of the premier diving locations in the world. Overall diving impressions – excellent!

Calm again



an ice way to spend a weekend

Pete Custeron

Wannabe ice divers meet at the lake

For many years now, Martin Forde and I have been discussing the fact that we fancied a go at ice diving. This year when the email came out to the club group, we went for it!

First challenge was to figure out what to take and how to pack it into the 20kgs weight allowance on Ryan Air. The kit setup is the same as for normal cold water diving with a twinset.

Instead of the twinset itself, you get a single 12L cylinder with a 'Y' valve, allowing you to connect your twinset regulators. This allows for separate isolation of the regulators in the event of a free flow. I also purchased a thick hood and a pair of mittens.

I eventually packed with 18kgs in a suitcase and 10kgs in hand luggage. This would allow equipment to be 'damp' on the return – one litre of water weighs 2kg, so I thought it was enough.

We flew from Stansted on Friday morning, landing in Germany a couple of hours later. We were picked up by Thomas (the owner of the diving company who would be facilitating our adventures under the ice) and driven to the Taucherhof. Once settled in, we met our fellow ice divers and we went through the course lectures in preparation for the next day.

a little bit of magic

Saturday was to be the day of training. The weather looked cloudy and cold, so none of us were looking forward to getting out of the minibus. That was until we went through the 'magic tunnel' between Germany and the Tyrol in Austria. Once through the weather changed to glorious sun and blue skies!

We arrived by the lake and unpacked the gear. We then had our practical lesson which involved being roped

up in pairs and communication to a tender. I somehow got a figure of nine knot instead of a figure eight. Rope knots has never been my strong point!

rope language

Rope communication is easy:

- 1 pull = OK
- 2 pulls = give me rope
- 3 pulls = take the rope
- 4+ pulls = get me out of here.

The hardest bit is turning around while being tied together. The lead diver swims around the diver in the middle of the rope. This way you do not end up in a tangled mess.

There was also a briefing on the rescue diver. The theory is simple, if you come off the rope and cannot find your way out...**stop!** Go up to the surface where the ice is and wait. The standby diver has a rope that is twice the length of the normal rope. The

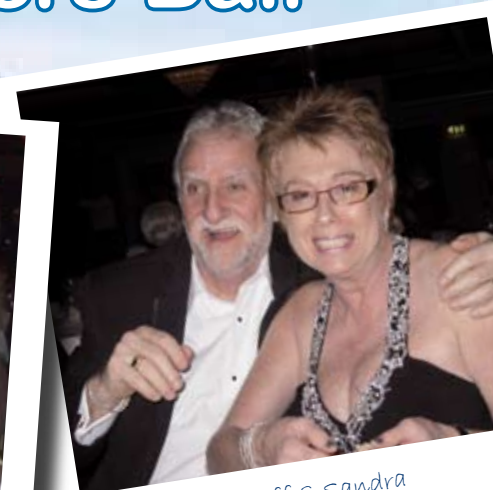
meanwhile back in Bracknell... more fun at the Ice Divers Ball



Louise & Carole



Important discussions



Geoff & Sandra



Pete cuts the ice



Reflecting on ice diving



Martin gets roped in

rescue diver swims out to the extent of their longer rope and swims a circle around the hole, meaning that their rope should come across you at some point.

Another safety feature around the hole was to draw a wagon wheel shape in the snow around the entry point going outwards. Looks like nothing on the surface, but clearing the snow creates very bright spots under the ice, meaning that you could follow the shape to the exit.

The final rule was to never go on to the ice without your drysuit being zipped up.

out on the ice

Training done, it was time to venture onto the ice – Thomas checked it out first and selected two sites. Then the hard work begins. Forget all the chainsaw moments you have seen in the movies as this could pollute the water with oil, so we had to cut the hole by hand. The hole is triangular in shape, as it only requires three cuts in the ice. Good job...I was knackered before we went diving!

The ice forms on the particles in the water making it clear, 30m+ vis!

Fantastic. The water is not as cold as you might think – 4 degrees.

training dives

Then we all had two training dives with our instructors. First dive was general rope work and confidence building. The only other thing we had to master was that we had to remove our drysuit hose. Lucky for me I can put it back on easily, so no leakage.

Second dive was more of the same, except at the end, we gave the four pulls on the rope. The tenders then pull you out as quickly as possible. What fun! You fly up at a rapid rate and head straight to the hole exit. The only thing you need to watch is hitting the 'plug' just before hitting the surface. Some people repeated that drill several times, they enjoyed it so much!

Martin and I are now qualified ice divers...so back to the Taucherhof for the hot tub. Thomas later entertained us with a 'hot stone' dinner.

a bit more magic

Day two came with another trip through the magic tunnel to more blue

skies and sun. As qualified ice divers, Martin and I roped ourselves up and had two fun dives. With training over, we had more time to spend on looking at our bubbles under the ice, mirror effects and enjoying the ice formations.

Best bits included seeing 'BSAC' written in the snow above (it showed clearly under the ice) and going back to yesterdays hole to see people through the freshly frozen surface.

Again we returned to the Taucherhof, for hot tub and beer, beer being just over a pound a bottle, lovely.

heading home

Monday saw us pack up our gear, which had dried surprisingly well in the drying room, weigh in was 20kgs exactly (phew), and the flight home.

All in all a fantastic weekend, recommended to all...although our Social Secretary, Sue Payne, won't thank me if half the club decide to go ice diving next year instead of attending the Ice Divers Ball!



Karen & Dave



On the dance floor



Fundraiser haircuts for JP and Bendy

mixed reviews at Marsa Alam

Zosia Rusilowicz



Fan coral



Blue spotted ray beneath the coral



Diving with turtles at Abu Dabab



Crocodile fish on night dive

The November trip to Marsa Alam was my fourth visit to Egypt and the first with the club. My sister Barbara came along as a non-diver. We stayed in a very nice 5 star hotel – Iberotel Coraya Beach.

There are four hotels along Coraya Bay but I think ours was the best. There is no town nearby, so it is very quiet and relaxing, not at all like in Sharm or Hurghada. That is the reason I like Marsa so much.

The flight was the usual five hours in a cattle truck followed by confusion with lines for visas and passport control. Our transfer (15 minutes) to the hotel was in two minibuses. We were all very worried about our heavy bags as we saw our drivers struggling to lift them on to the roof racks.

the good, the bad and the ugly

I did six days of diving but wasn't very impressed with *Coraya Divers*. They struggled to cope with a large group of experienced divers from the UK and the dive guides didn't really want to go in the water – they simply lacked a passion for diving. We even had to carry our own boxes and cylinders while our supposed helpers were just chatting to each other...very unusual for Egypt.

Coraya also seemed to be interested only in sites close to their centre, where the coral was in a poor condition. It was very disappointing

as I remember Marsa as a place full of pristine coral. The situation improved after a few complaints!

It wasn't all bad of course. We had a great, half day trip to Abu Dabab where we saw a lot of sea grass and majestic green turtles.

the only wreck in town

We also travelled for two hours on a bus to dive the only wreck in Marsa area, 'The Hamata', that sunk in mysterious circumstances in 1993. She lies in 12 –18m almost intact, even the propeller is still there. Pure brass checked by Ian Young, who was later rumoured to be masterminding a plan to recover it.

out to Elphinstone

One day when the wind had calmed down and after a lot of nagging from us, the owner of *Coraya* decided it was OK to go to the Elpinstone. I love this cigar shaped offshore reef. We did two quite fast drifts along the wall full of soft corals, gorgonias and fish. No sharks unfortunately – apparently, a few weeks earlier, a fishing boat had stopped by and fished them all out.

what's next on the list?

It was fantastic week spent with friends. I would like to say one more, big thank you to Dave Hughes for organising this great trip. I am looking forward to the next club overseas trip in 2011. Where will it be, I wonder?

Backdrop: scenic swim-through

no tanx taster

Steve Lawson

When we were invited to take part in a *NoTanks* taster session at the club last November, I recollect hearing the principal of the organisation, Marcus Greatwood, speak at a *DiverSE* seminar. He had conducted breath holding exercises with the audience and the results had been incredible. I was looking forward to hearing more.

The session was divided into two parts: classroom and pool. Marcus and two of his colleagues started by convincing us of the merits of Wraysbury lake for observing aquatic life! Yes...honestly – he had a film, taken in Wraysbury, showing clear water and huge fish!

He began with a brief explanation of how our metabolism can be controlled and explaining that by exercising such control we can become more relaxed, less anxious and breathe less. This can help in many different situations, including examinations, interviews and, of course, diving.

the breathing exercises begin

With eyes closed, we were asked to gently inhale, forcing our sternum down into our stomach, long and hard until told to breathe out, once again very controlled, forcing our chest walls to the back of the chair. "Think of big colourful numbers" as we slowly breathed in and out, in and out.

Following a period of the breathing exercises, still with eyes closed, we held our breath. Even after such a short time of calm, we were all surprised at just how long the breaths could last. We repeated this exercise a number of times.

into the pool

Once in the pool we teamed up in groups of three. The first exercise was to repeat the relaxation techniques, but this time with heads submerged. The key was to relax, as any body tension uses energy.

So, holding the rail with face submerged, we had to let all tension go and be suspended in the water. Meanwhile our buddy was watching carefully to make sure you eventually made it back to the surface. After two sessions each, the final go allowed breath-holding for as long as you were comfortable. Timings varied from thirty seconds to over two minutes!

mermaids in the making

The pool session continued, seeing how far we could swim underwater using a variety of free-diving fins. These included solo fins which both feet fit into...it was a lot more difficult than it looked, although the butterfly swimming stroke did give Jeff Reed a very impressive style.

The session was brought to a conclusion with a demonstration of how the solo fins should really be used. One length of the pool using the correct movement, very graceful, with the return length – still on the same breath – being swum as fast as possible. The speed was unbelievable! Later we were told that on average, two lengths should take just fourteen seconds!

The whole exercise had been very enjoyable and was just a taster of the course that Marcus and his team provide. I suspect that a few of the breathing techniques will be being put into practice this dive season.



In the classroom



Breath holding with buddy support



Trying the mono fins for size



Mono fin demo

your club NEEDS you!

As mentioned in *deep thoughts*, we need to grow our membership. So to kick this off, on 30 April, we are staging a promotional event in the Bandstand in Bracknell town centre and for the whole of May our club will be offering free Try Dives.

So how can you help?

We have posters advertising the free try dives. We need them to be distributed at places of work and sports clubs...so please take some for display on their noticeboards.



Is there a sports or social club where you work that might be interested in organising a group to have a go at try dives? Is there someone you can arrange it with or can you put me in contact with them?

Alternatively do you have a friend or work colleague who has expressed an interest in diving? Let them know about the free try dive!

Then there is the Bandstand. Do you have ideas how we can use the space, can you come along and help with setting up or staying around to talk about our club, our diving and our social events?

If you have other ideas how we might spread the word about Bracknell BSAC, I am at club most Thursdays, so please do come and talk.

Ruth Beattie, Publicity Officer

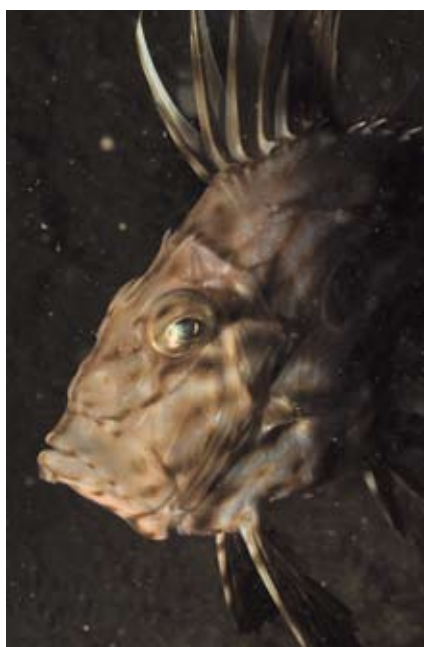
triple winner

Our AGM last November saw a new class introduced into our ever popular photo competition. In addition to the UK and overseas categories, members were also able to submit a fun photo.

As usual the standard of all photos was high and it was difficult to choose. But it came as a complete surprise to everyone and certainly a 'first' for the club when the winner for all three categories turned out to be the same photographer...well done Peter Hewitt!



Peter Hewitt is announced winner – Rachel Burton presents the framed copies



UK: John Dory, James Egan Layne, Plymouth



Overseas: Cuttlefish, Myanmar (Burma)



Fun: Grey Seal, Lundy Seal Cave

diary dates

Don't forget to visit the new club website to check out what's on! The four most recent events are listed in the club diary on the right hand side of the home page and you can click on **>>more club events** to see the whole calendar.

Once you reach the club diary page you will see the calendar and a chronological list of all club events. You can **refine your search** by clicking on particular categories such as training, social and dive events.

www.bracknellscuba.org.uk

