



Lundy 2010

Trip Report



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Introduction

On Friday 9th July twelve intrepid divers (and one land lover) ventured into the deepest reaches of northern Devon for a weekend of diving off Lundy island. The trip had been organised with military precision by Mark Mumford and was (weather permitting) to involve trips to Lundy on the Saturday and Sunday.

Our group of divers consisted of:

Mark Mumford, Chris Higgins, Andy Sarson, Debbie Sarson, Mark Fuller, Ray Miller, Pete Gooch, Pete May, Lucy Heinemann, Derek Dunk, Terry Woods and me.

As the newest member of the group I was given the task of reporting on our adventures over the weekend. Having only done two sea dives before I was very excited, if a bit nervous about what to expect!

Lundy

Lundy lies off the north Devon coast, where the Atlantic Ocean meets the Bristol Channel. It is around ten miles from the nearest point on the mainland but 16 miles from Ilfracombe where the group were based. Lundy itself is three and a half miles long by a half mile wide.

Lundy is owned by the National Trust and managed by the Landmark Trust. It is famous for its seabirds, in particular puffins, but there is also a wealth of other animals and plants on the island and in the waters around it.

The waters around the island are England's only statutory Marine Nature Reserve and two of the wrecks at Lundy are protected and require a permit to visit. The No Take Zone around Lundy is small (approximately four square miles) but a recent talk at the club by Ted Coleman's daughter, Louisa, about marine protection zones and in particular Lundy helped to whet the appetite and all were excited about what we might see.



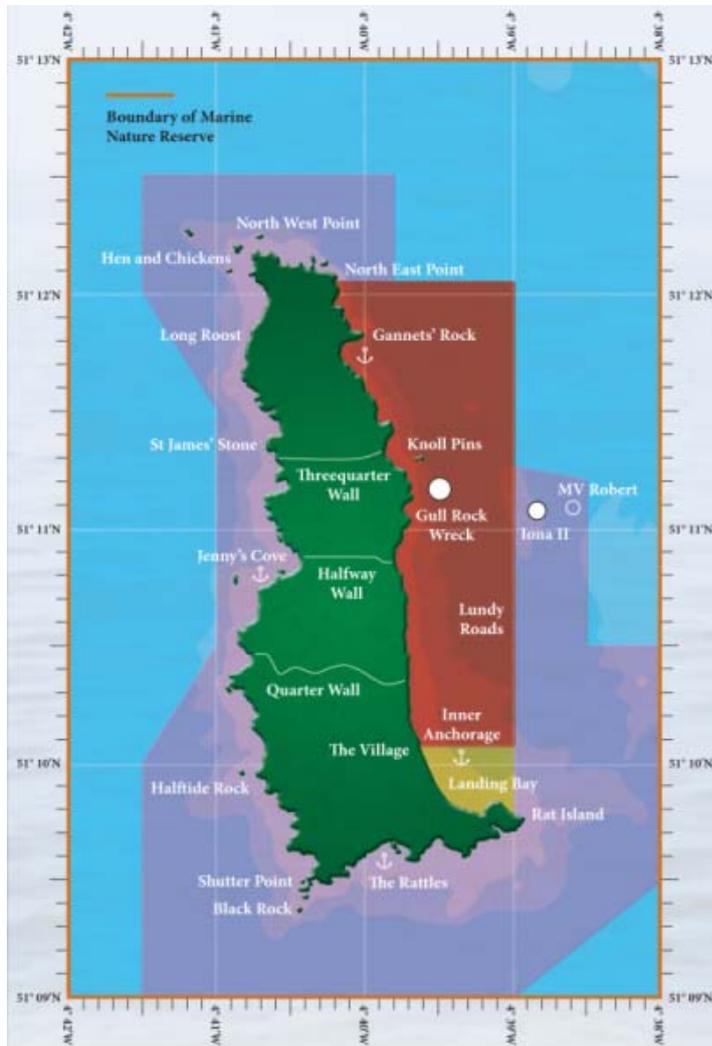
The Joint Nature Conservation Committee describes the reason for the designation of Lundy as a Special Area of Conservation as follows:

"Lundy is a granite and slate **reef** system and is selected for its outstanding representation of reef habitats in south-west England. Lundy Island is exposed to a wide range of physical conditions as a result of differing degrees of wave action and tidal stream strength on sheltered and exposed coasts and headlands. This range of physical conditions, combined with the site's topographical variation, has resulted in the presence of a unusually diverse complex of marine habitats and associated communities within a small area. The **reefs** of Lundy extend well over 1 km offshore and drop steeply into deep water in some areas. The variety of habitats and associated species on the reefs is outstanding and includes, for example, a large number of seaweeds and many rare or unusual species, including Mediterranean-Atlantic species representing biogeographically distinct communities at, or very close to, their northern limit of distribution. In particular, fragile long-lived species, such as the soft coral *Parerythropodium coralloides*, sea-fan *Eunicella verrucosa* and a variety of erect branching sponges, are found in deep, sheltered conditions, particularly on the east coast of the island. All five British species of

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cup-coral are found here, including the scarlet and gold star-coral *Balanophyllia regia* and the sunset cup-coral *Leptopsammia pruvoti*."

Below is a map of the Lundy Marine Conservation Zone and a key for what can be taken from each zone.



No Take Zone No fishing or collection of sea life of any kind. No anchors or diver shot lines within 100m of Knoll Pins.

Refuge Zone No fishing except potting and angling.

Recreational Zone Restrictions as for Refuge Zone but be aware of other water users.

General Use Zone No spear fishing

Gull Rock Wreck and Iona II both require permits to dive.

Diving off Lundy

Apart from Louisa's talk, none of us really knew what to expect from Lundy. Information was gleaned from websites and books to help prepare us. The following is an excerpt from the Lundy Field Society website (www.lundy.org.uk) which was prepared by the Ilfracombe and North Devon Sub Aqua Club. It details the type of diving conditions you can expect around Lundy together with some of the things you can hope to see.

"The diving season on Lundy is short but spectacular. The visibility is good enough for diving from the end of April to the end of September. The tides of the Bristol Channel are fierce but the island lies N-S in a tidal stream that is mostly E-W, so there is always some part of the island with slack water. Dive the west side on the ebb and the east side on the flood. Below the surface of the sea there is magnificent scenery and a huge variety of marine life, some of which is unique to the British Isles. For this reason the waters around Lundy are designated as a **STATUTORY MARINE RESERVE** (the first in the country). There are many types of fish including basking sharks in the summer months

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and the unique population of red banded fish (a metre long, shaped like an eel with a red band and a single dorsal fin the whole length of their body - they live in burrows in the mud). Crabs, lobsters and crayfish are still common but their populations have been affected by commercial fishing. There are huge numbers of sea urchins and starfish and the population of jewel anemones rarely fails to amaze the visiting diver. Common and lesser octopus are also regularly seen.

There are shipwrecks of course - 137 to be precise - the battleship Montagu lies close into the South West tip of the island - she ran aground on Shutter Point in May 1906 in thick fog whilst making trials of the new wireless telegraphy apparatus. Much of her was salvaged but there are still huge sections of armour plate, parts of the gun turrets and 12in diameter shells. The small coaster 'Robert' foundered off the east side in 1975 when her cargo of anthracite duff shifted. She is now a man made reef covered in plumose anemones and populated by shoals of pollack and solitary wrasse. Angler fish can be found on the sea bed around her and conger eels lurk in holes in her keel. Nearby is the wreck of the 'Iona' - an American Confederate paddle steamer designated as a Protected Wreck (A licence is needed to dive here - see the [MARINE NATURE RESERVE ZONES](#)). There is the Carmen Filomena, the Earl of Jersey, Ethel, The Heroine and many others all with their own atmosphere, history and population of sea life."

Ilfracombe - Osborne Hotel

Ilfracombe was to be our base for the weekend and Mark M had kindly organised us all so that we all travelled in pairs, helping to save the planet en route. Ilfracombe is 225 miles from Crawley, so around a 4-5 hour drive. The group arrived in Ilfracombe early on Friday evening, with Pete, Lucy and Chris travelling down later that evening. Upon arrival it appeared that not only had we driven 225 miles but we had driven back in time about 40 years, arriving at the Osborne Hotel – Ilfracombe's very own Fawlty Towers! The hotel was a seven story, 70's style hotel complete with its very own Ballroom. However the rooms were clean and the staff friendly, although the nesting seagulls did wake several of the group up at first light!

Having retired to the bar for a drink, we realised the Bingo started at 8pm and took that as our cue to venture out into the town. A stroll down to the harbour brought us a first sighting of our boat for the next two days – Obsession I. A small but perfectly formed boat, there was some concern about the lack of a lift (with our thoughts going to Pete and Lucy with their twin sets) and also how we would get the kit on board with the boat being some metres below the dock. Mark M was confident we could rope it all down fairly quickly although as someone who finds the kit a struggle at the best of times I was slightly dubious on this point!



We then headed to a local restaurant (Capstone's) which provided a very nice meal which complemented the friendly banter around the table very well. After a long drive it was back to the bar for a swift drink before heading to bed, ready for the next day's diving.

Journey to Lundy

Breakfast was at 7.30am, a little early for some judging by the tired faces (Chris in particular looked a little dishevelled!). A cooked breakfast was had by most, although you needed to be careful where you sat – if you weren't at your allocated table you were swiftly moved!

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We all met at the quayside at 8.30am, to happily find that the quay housed a secret passageway down to the *Obsession*, so no ropes were needed to lower the kit. The kit was placed on the boat and we were soon off on our journey to Lundy. The sky was a bit cloudy, with a little wind, and most were concerned what the crossing would be like. Our skipper informed us that it would be a bit rough and that if you wanted to stay dry then you would either need to be inside or under the canopy at the back of the wheel house. Within 5 minutes of leaving the harbour he was proved right – a few large waves and having sat in the middle of the deck I promptly got my first soaking. Soon all were huddled inside or by the wheel house and I got my first experience of being in a small boat in big swells. Despite the skippers best efforts every few minutes the boat would come down with a juddering crash, which was very disconcerting to start with. However soon most had got into the 'groove' of the sea and knew when to expect the inevitable crash of the boat. The crossing was due to be one and a half hours due to the rough sea and once Lundy was in sight it seemed to stay the same distance away for some time! Eventually we neared the island and the seas calmed a little, much to the relief of some of the group who were looking a little green by that stage!



As we neared Lundy a pod of dolphins was sighted of the side of the boat and they promptly swam alongside for 10 minutes putting on a show for us. As I'd never seen dolphins in the wild before this was incredibly exciting and it took me a few minutes to realise I had my camera with me! It turns out that taking photos of dolphins is much harder than it looks but I managed to catch a couple of them on camera. It certainly was a great way to arrive and set the bar high for the rest of the trip.

Gannets Pinnacle

Having arrived at Lundy, we headed for our first dive site, Gannets Pinnacle. The skipper explained the pinnacle tops out a few metres below the surface, extending down approximately 30 metres. Below is an extract from the Dive Magazine website (WWW.DIVEMAGAZINE.CO.UK) which explains what can be seen there.

GANNET'S ROCK

Position:

51° 11.77' N

004° 40.9' W

Lundy's jewel-anemone capital is located at the north end of Gannet's Bay on the eastern side of the island. The outside wall of the rock drops down to approximately 30m and you can work your way back up and around the rock, checking out the overhangs on route. Its biggest-selling point is its small creatures, so good visibility isn't really essential here.

There are carpets of both jewel anemones and the incredibly pretty yellow anemones littered across the walls. The latter are another example of larvae that hitched a lift on the Mediterranean current, and Lundy is about as far north as these delicate anemone colonies are found. The wall is also covered with radiant red fingers and their more common



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relative - dead men's fingers. All of the small cracks and crevices have been utilised by the crustacean populations with both edible and velvet swimming crabs, squat lobsters and shrimps peering out from the relative safety of their rocky homes.

Having got kitted up in the shelter of a cove next door, we headed to the dive site and made our entry. I was diving with Chris Higgins, who waited patiently whilst I equalised my ears, having had a recent cold. Having descended below 10 metres the water seemed to become much clearer and wearing only a thin layer under my dry suit I wasn't cold at any time. The visibility was very good (to me at least) and was around 10 metres, allowing us a great dive. Most of the divers stayed around the 20 metre mark where there was plenty to see, although Mark M, Debbie, Pete and Lucy ventured down to 35 metres so Pete and Lucy could complete some training on advanced decompression.

The marine life was abundant with some amazing anemones and sea urchins. Having only seen small black urchins on holiday, it was great to see them in so many colours and some the size of footballs! There were also a few large spiny spider crabs scrambling round the rocks. We were also lucky to see 3 dogfish sleeping on the rocks, my first 'shark' sighting under the waves! Chris somehow spotted a lobster claw poking out a hole and on closer inspection it turned out to be the biggest lobster I'd ever seen. It seems the no take zone was working as the lobster would have been a prize catch, feeding a whole family!



There were plenty of fish around, many of which were fantastically coloured (I think they were wrasse – my identification skills leaving a lot to be desired!). They seemed to all be of a very good size, which is hopefully testament to the success of the no take zone and certainly an advertisement for more of them around the UK.

Eventually it was time to return to the surface and as requested by the skipper we were



to put up a DSMB. This was only the second time I had put one up and doing so whilst knelling on uneven rocks that I kept falling off was not that easy! Having ascended, a two thirds full DSMB met me but it had done its job and the Obsession was soon next to us. It was then time to get aboard using the ladder which I wasn't looking forward to. However once you managed to get above the water line it was easier than expected and the helpful crew made sure I didn't fall off!

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Seal time

With everyone safely back on board it was round the corner for a spot of tea and lunch. It seems divers aren't that healthy a group, with a lot of chocolate biscuits and crisps being consumed. We swapped stories about what we had seen and I'm sure the lobster Chris and I saw grew in size every time we told someone about it!



After a short break the next dive site was discussed and it seemed the whole group were keen to get in with the seals of Lundy. When we arrived a few had been sunning themselves on the rocks and they had now entered the water and could be seen popping up to the surface now and again. It was decided that we would drop off not far from Gannets Pinnacle, as this seemed to be where the seals were congregating. The skipper explained that the water was only 4

or 5 metres deep and that the seals were likely to be quite relaxed and may even start

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nipping at your fins. He mentioned that they did have rather large teeth so to be careful with getting too close! I was just hoping to get a decent view of one of them and didn't want to get my hopes up too much.

Mark and I were the first in and as we went over to the cliffs, a seal appeared just a few feet in front of us. It eyed us up for a few minutes before coming over. By this stage I was incredibly excited but it got even better when it caught its reflection in the mirror and went right up to Mark's camera. After that it seemed we were surrounded by seals who weren't bothered by us at all. All of a sudden I felt a slight tugging on



my fins and looked round to see a seal playing with my fins. It was a truly magical moment and one I will never forget. They seemed to be attracted to everyone's fins and even some people's masks, !



It seemed that no matter where you went there was a seal, whether asleep, eyeing you up or trying to play with your fins. They were truly beautiful in the light and their grace

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under the water was a sight to behold. Back on board everyone mentioned they wished they could swim with half the agility of the seals.

The dive was over all too suddenly and it was time to leave the seals behind. Gradually we all got back on board and everyone emerged from the water with a big grin on their face. I think for all on board it was a very special dive and one that will live long in the memory. As it was only my fourth sea dive, I knew I had been truly spoilt and am not sure how I will manage to better it!



Evening fun

The journey back to Ilfracombe was a lot smoother and some of the group appeared to doze off on the way – Pete May dozing off on the back of the boat, despite getting a soaking from the spray every few minutes! Once back it was off with the tanks for refills at the local BSAC club. After a freshen up we met back in the bar before heading to the Harbour Lights restaurant for dinner. A good meal was had by all and plenty of 'table swapping' helped mix the group up. It was then back to the hotel where we found 'Monty' and his keyboard belting out the (not so) greatest hits of the last few decades. However the group soon got into the swing and led by Pete M there was some very out of tune singing. Rapturous applause led to Monty playing on longer than planned and soon the whole group got involved with a host of percussion instruments. The noise was worse than a room of vuvuzelas but it did drown



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out the singing! When the YMCA started up I knew it was time for me to leave, although the fun continued until late in the night.

Sunday

It was another early start, arriving at the quayside at 8.30am. On the drive down a quick glance at the sea revealed white foam on the waves, despite it being a lovely day. Upon arrival our fears were confirmed – the sea was simply too rough and no diving was to be had. Due to the direction of the wind we couldn't even get a nearby dive and so all the kit was unloaded from the boat. Despite the disappointment, the dives the previous day had been so good everyone felt they had had a great trip. Mark Mumford and Chris kindly offered to take Mark Fuller and I to Vobster for a spot of inland diving as we had both planned on doing lessons that day. Despite good visibility, Vobster wasn't a patch on Lundy, even if I did see my first gnome under water! It was also a lot colder, as Mark M's hands found out having only bought thin gloves.

Overall

Despite only getting in one day's diving it was a fantastic weekend, with memories to treasure. The boat was excellent, despite being a bit cramped when everyone was getting kitted up, but the dives more than made up for it. There was plenty to see and playing with the seals was very special so I'm sure there will be a few of the group making plans to return to Lundy in the not too distant future.

However it was the friendliness of the group that made the trip for me. As a new member it was a bit daunting going away with so many experienced divers but everyone made me feel very comfortable, although I wasn't spared from the banter! For me, the social side of the trip is every bit as important as the diving and the weekend certainly didn't let me down.

Overall how would I sum the trip up?

Great fun, great dives, great time.

Faye Bargery
15.7.10