



**Issue 33
Summer,
2006**

www.swale-divers.org.uk

How to Become a First Class Diver

Well I guess the first question has to be 'Why?' and the only answer I can really give is 'because it's there' I first thought I might like to have a go about three years ago, when they did a talk about it at DOC. I signed up for the prep pack, which gave some guidance as to what's required. I found I needed to complete some prerequisites which I spent the next year doing, which were the entire rescue SDCs, the Chart work and Position Fixing SDC and ERD which I wanted to do anyway.

There are four parts to the first class diver assessment, and it is just that, there is no training for it. They are the theory exam, the expedition plan, the adventurous diving trip and the task dive. You can take them in any order.

About 18 months later I decide to actually go for it. And to start with the theory exam. This is a 1 hour 30

question exam, and is the only BS-AC exam which requires written answers instead of multiple guess. There are a number of past papers published on the BS-AC website which I worked my way through and felt reasonably comfortable with. The exam is run twice a year in March and October. I booked onto the March 2005 exam. I had heard of study groups and people doing all sorts of reading. Unfortunately none of these groups were near by or at times I could get to. Self study and revision has never really been something I've been good at, and so by the time the exam came, I had done virtually no revision. I was nervous to say the least, I viewed the exam as nothing more than a 'mock', I never expected to pass the exam first time. That year it was held in a tiny office above the dive show at ExCEL, with 15 of us crammed in. The hour flew by. I was surprisingly confident afterwards, it wasn't as bad as I'd expected, there had only been two questions I couldn't answer and few I wasn't completely sure

In May I went on a long weekend diving out of Weymouth on the hard boat Tango. Although primarily intended to be a fun weekend diving deep wrecks, there were two other FCD candidates along. So we invited a couple of National Instructors along to do some prep with us. We practiced our dive leadership skills, for which I got slated. I discovered they want to be treated to my mind more like Ocean Divers than the slightly less formal manner in which I lead them. (I don't think the 'I'm here you're there see you on the bottom' buddy check helped!). We also tried some tasks. We conducted a marine life survey on the James Fennel and measured and drew the stern half of the Countess. I discovered the art of writing legibly under water, which for someone who struggles to write legibly on the surface proved to be something of an art.

I had heard teamwork was the key and I had seen the importance of spending time together getting to know your fellow candidates on the AI exam. When I signed up, I was added to an e-mail group for FCD candidates. This was very useful and allowed the 12 candidates to communicate with each other. We decided the best thing to do was go down the week before the exam and practice together. We also managed to rope in Sophie Rennie the South West Regional Coach and National Instructor, who has been an examiner on other FCD events. One of the candidates brought his RIB down; we also chartered a hard boat for a couple of days. Two of the candidates were from the forces so we were able to use the diving facilities at Fort Bovisand where we setup base for the week and a Joint Services RIB.

The week proved to be invaluable, everyone got to know each other, exchange horror stories of things of things they had heard about the exams, and discovered each other's strengths and weaknesses. I seemed to be the one in the group with the best knowledge of rescue techniques and physiology and the worst on (unsurprisingly!) seamanship. We spent every spare moment reading and quizzing each other on their

areas of expertise from day signals on boats to the chambers of the heart. We practiced line laying, surveying, measuring, laying grids, using decompression trapezes and of course diving and dive leadership. The most fun elements though were the rescue management scenarios. Sophie hatched various surprise 'incidents' throughout the week, including someone throwing themselves overboard, the inevitable quiet collapse in the corner and the diver surfacing unconscious - who later regretted it as they were par-buckled into a hard boat with rather high gunwales. I was rapidly regretting never having dived from Plymouth before. I had taken the rather brash view that a First Class Diver should be able to pick up a chart and plan to dive anywhere, but I was starting to feel rather uneasy compared to my colleagues who all knew the area well.

The Friday came and we had concluded we could do no more. We had been briefed to meet at the Deep Blue dive lines vertically above each corner. We were then to survey the depths at each 1m grid point and the nature of seabed and marine life in each square. We then had to move the grid to the adjacent area ready to be able to survey that area.

We had some discussion over the chart, trying to find a suitable location. We worked out what we thought was a workable plan, assigned everyone tasks and produced a voyage plan. By this time it was 1am. Thankfully the examiners left several hours earlier.

The morning came and we met bright and early, long before we had told the examiners to give us some breathing room. We had a dry run in the car park, which could have gone better, but did at least identify a few problems with the kit we had. We launched the two RIBS, which lead to me getting soaked as the dive marshal at the time had decided we didn't need to be suited at that time. We all had to take turns at all tasks, being dive marshal, navigating (no GPS allowed!) coxing and of course diving!. I was quite pleased, I got the first surveying session. We had trouble finding the required depth variation; however we were allowed to use the sounder. The examiners didn't like the look of the first site we chose and made us move to another area, which was eating into our precious time. Finally, three teams laid the lines. Unfortunately the site we had picked turned out to be right adjacent to the path of a popular yachting channel, so

we were constantly having to play chicken with yachts that weren't paying heed to our 'A' flags. One team were heart stoppingly late, coming up just one minute before the 'call the coastguard time', whilst we weren't really worried about them, as we could still see their bubbles moving around the area, and it was only 15m, we knew we would have to call the coastguard for the examiners as that was the plan. My turn to dive came, and it went pretty well. You dive with an examiner, who you have to keep involved and interested. We took turns between measuring and scribing. We managed to get into quite a good rhythm and managed to survey 30 x 1m squares. Unfortunately we ran out of time and were unable to move the grid, but overall things seemed to have gone pretty well. I was feeling fairly despondent though as I thought my marshalling had been appalling, nowhere near verbose enough. Barely had we got back when we were called in for the briefing for day two, the adventurous diving day.

What was adventurous diving was the hardest thing to consider. We had a huge array of interests in the four examiners who would be diving with us. We had the FCD Chief Examiner who stated he favoured deep wrecks, the

Technical Diving Chief Instructor who is an ardent re-breather diver who said he liked doing deep deco diving and two others who were photographers who like shallow reefs and hate deep diving. What mix! We had been tipped by Sophie that if weather permitted Hand Deeps, a pinnacle that drops from 7m to about 60m, 10 miles off shore would be a favoured site. Thankfully the weather promised to be good, so Hand Deeps followed by the wreck of the Rose Hill it was. We came up with a plan, which meant a 07:00 meet, at which we were firmly told the centre at 20:00 fed and watered for the start of the exam. We went for a 'last supper'. Instead of the usual banter and quizzing, it was a very sombre affair. The minutes seemed like hours. Finally it was time. We had a quick intro to the examiners and what would happen and were then split into two groups of six. One would do the task day first, the other the adventurous diving. My group had the task day first. We were shocked when we got the task it was far more complex than we had heard of previous tasks. The task was:

To locate an area of sea bed with at least 3m depth variation through it. Lay out a 10m x 10m grid exactly level and 1m above

the highest point, with shot

examiners wouldn't go anywhere before 08:00 - take 2! Someone went out for take away, while we got on with the planning. We managed to finish just after midnight.

Again we made sure we were on site well before the examiners. We briefed everyone on how to load the boat. It was the second worst hard boat I have ever dived from, small no kit benches, and a tiny ladder, which considering virtually everyone had twin-sets, was a nightmare. The skipper was Tony Hoile, the former NDO and as a National Instructor was also acting as a non-diving examiner. Throughout the day again we would all have to take turns at being dive marshal, helmsman, navigator finding a wreck by transits and deck hand, all while being questioned on every aspect of diving and seamanship. I was quite pleased with my navigation, but my helming was awful, thankfully that doesn't count too much in the marking.

The day sunk to a low just before the dive. The examiners are frequently questioning you about what is happening. We found that as long as we kept them well

briefed and appeared organised, they generally left us alone, but the slightest hint of disorganisation, they would exploit it. We gave them the rope, and they hung us. We had to make sketches of the site, a sheer pinnacle. They questioned whether the plan we had come up with would meet this objective, which started heated debate amongst the group – just what the examiners wanted and what we didn't. We eventually concluded to stick with the plan despite the examiners mumblings. We had a nice dive on Hand Deeps. Just after that dive, came the inevitable incident. One of the examiners went and hid himself away down in the berths and went very quiet – but it would take more than that to catch us out! We spotted him very quickly and went into the full drills. Unfortunately the guy who found him, decided he would be better moved up on deck, something I really didn't agree with, but he got handed to me and I decided it best not to argue the point. I got into auto going through casualty assessment and administering O2 at which point he 'stopped breathing'. It was about then I got pulled off of him as it had been realised he had been my buddy and I could be a potential casualty. One relief was we were told any other incidents would be the real

thing, so at least we knew there we be no more nasty surprises.

We headed off to the Rose Hill, which I sat out, as I had already done my dive with an examiner, and had dived it twice in the week. I then had the grave yard shift of dive marshalling, responsible for getting back on time (when I took over we were 10 minutes behind plan and we still had to find a wreck) and get the boat unloaded and stowed. This may sound like a nice easy task but after the two days the candidates were flagging and unfortunately the same couldn't be said for the examiners, who still had plenty of questions. We actually made it back 5 minutes early, the guys finding the wreck hit it almost first time and we had been generous in the timings for the voyage back.

Finally it was over. Another wait, and about two weeks later I was again amazed to find I had passed both days.

All that was left was the expedition plan. You have to plan a 4 day diving expedition for 12 first class divers with the option of three dives per day doing 'adventurous' diving. I deliberately left this section until last to find out what 'adventurous' diving was from the practical. It paid off. You must plan accommodation, directions,

find a hard boat, facilities for fills including trimix and for re-breathers, and provide costing. You have to describe the sites and produce voyage plans and timetables. The hardest part was making it fit within the required maximum 15 pages. You can base the plan anywhere in the UK. I selected Porthkerris, as I felt it offered a vast array of diving including wreck and reef in a wide variety of depths. I submitted the plan as required to the FCD Chief Examiner and just 3 days later I heard I had a pass.

The next day, I received a letter confirming I was now a First Class Diver and inviting me to DOC to collect my certificate!

Was it as bad as the stories? – No. Would I do it again? – Absolutely, I really enjoyed the week in Plymouth. I found I needn't have worried about the preparation. I concluded the best preparation is to go diving and organise loads of dives. Reading Dive/Diver helped, they expect you to be bang up to date on equipment and practices, several of the questions had obviously been derived from recent articles in the magazines.

I would absolutely recommend any Advanced Divers to have a go, you have nothing to lose, and it's fun – honest!

For any one interested, you can try the exam paper I sat here:

<http://www.bsac.org/techserv/fcd/March2005.pdf>

And find out more here:

<http://www.bsac.org/techserv/fcd/fcdpack.htm>

And to see the kind of feedback you get, look here:

<http://www.swale-divers.org.uk/clubonly/fcd/grahamfcd.htm>

Finally I would just like to express my sincerest thanks to you all for the award you made to me at the AGM. It really was a tremendous surprise; you couldn't have got anything more appropriate than a re-breather course. Thank you all so much.

When Men Were Men

(Or a bunch of nutcases at Portland in November)

The month of November had started off well. Air temps were above normal and sunshine was abundant. However the week before we were due at Portland the weather started to deteriorate, and Kaddy started to make noises of white stuff for the next weekend, and "yes" there it was hovering over Norway-ish waiting to pounce. By

Thursday night it was sliding down the west coast driven now by a stiff northerly wind

which had quite a cutting edge to it. A couple of members phoned me hoping I think to hear "it's off" no such luck. Yes I too was starting to put on a brave face when told by who that must be obeyed "you're not surely going are you" (must make sure the thermals are packed). Friday lunchtime arrived and Paul Stevens was at my door with a bit of a fixed grin on his face. Over his shoulder I could see yes you've got it white flakes. We chose to ignore it, packed up the car and amid shouts of "you're all mad" set off.

The journey was by and large uneventful and we made good time to Portland. The road chaos which was going on around us was to say the least worrying, snow drifts on Bodmin, people stranded in their cars, A303 shut at Ilminster and as the crow fly's is not all that far from Portland, but we pressed on.

Our arrival at the Aqua Hotel found the rest of the motley crew was there apart from two. We all met up at Breakwater Hotel for a meal and the first problem was about to descend on us, the kitchen was closed for a rebuild, luckily one of the group noticed the pub next door did grub so we all trooped there, but not before I left the governor of the Breakwater crying at the bar

because I had just told him he had lost out on 24 meals!!!

Saturday morning dawned cold but bright with a strong north/north west wind blowing. Our first dive at 0900 was the "Countess" a paddle steamer which had to broke its moorings and been wrecked against the harbour wall in 1935. She lays almost upright at 17.5 metres most sites within the harbour only take ten minutes to reach so we were ready to jump in as soon as we were on station. On the way out the wind was blowing large amounts of spray across the stern of the boat where the first two pairs were ready. Nigel and Glenn had become so wet that they had got their masks on and their DVs in; they looked so wet that for a moment I thought they had already been in! I was last in with Michael who was finishing off his open water drills to qualify for Ocean Diver award. The Sea temp is still around 12/13 deg and it was well nice to get in, the vis was about 3-4 metres, average time down was between 35 and 45 mins.

On return to the boat we were greeted with a nice cup of hot chocolate which went down well, one of which was repeated through the whole weekend. Back to shore de-kitting was quick then a dash to the café for the obligatory

full English. I will leave out the details

Saturday afternoon with the same conditions saw us off out to the "Spaniard" quite near the morning dive, but just on the other side of the harbour entrance. Same general depth but the vis was not quite so good. This wreck had a similar fate as the "Countess" only dragging her anchor in a force 9 gale and grounded against the breakwater wall in the 1900s. Life on these wrecks is not as good as the open sea but having said that there was plenty of fish, dead mans fingers and fair few anemones of all types. Back on the boat and the woolly hats and dry gloves were soon on. By the time we were back the wind had moderated quite a lot, enough so that Dave Phillips was able to finish his open water rescue tow with Scott being the body .

The evening was spent doing justice to an Indian.

It was during the after dinner discussions that a rebel group started to emerge suggesting a change of venue for the Sunday dive, "M2" was mentioned and "The Hood". The ring leaders were Paul Heed, Daren and Scott, the rebel group were subdued with a stick and whip! Mind you Lyme Bay where the M2 is resting was reported and flat calm.

Sunday morning saw twelve delicate faces all of which could have done with a few more hours' kip. The wind had overnight moderated very well and there were no longer waves breaking on Castle Town Beach but the air temperature was still quite chilly. The odd rumble about the "M2" was met with the threat of keelhauling. This mornings wreck was double booked. Two boats on the same wreck at the same time luckily one of the guys on the other boat I knew, and after a huddle, they were quite happy to do another dive. This meant while the rabbles were getting on the boat yours truly was not even changed. Picture the scene of the late business man running for the train with a lump of toast wedged in his mouth his coat half on, shoe laces not done up case under his arm, get the picture right not easy when you do the same thing but with diving kit believe me. On the boat, puffing I was asked if I was ready to dive "er yes was the answer groping for all the important bits" "Even with your zip undone?!!" "Big titter going round the boat! Thanks to Paul and Darren who managed to get it done up, NO we are still not doing the "M2"!!! Off we went to the landing craft. On reaching the wreck it quickly became apparent that this was not the landing craft but the "Bombardon Unit" strange

wreck sort of on its side with a "V" shape hull, vis was good but it did silt up quickly and go to zero. Some odd chunks of metal sticking up at funny angles. It would appear this was an experimental wave breaking unit apparently made for the D-Day landings

For the afternoon dive we changed boats "Goose" was new in the water this summer and very nice too. Ample room a private toilet on deck, large warm cabin for all day trips. Our last dive a drift dive at "Grove Point" but due to the uncertainty of the turning tide was more like "Balaclava Bay" but never the less it turned out to be a good dive with a couple of dog fish taken, a few edible crabs firmly hidden in the rocks. Michael and I being the last in were nearly last out after 45 minutes, to be told that Paul Heed and Daniel were still down after 50 minutes and their SMB was heading for the "Hood"! Our thoughts were for Daniel who was diving in a semi dry and had obtained the name "iceman" over the weekend. They were within a quarter of a mile of the "Hood" when they surfaced, Dan being low on air. When Paul came up the lift he complained he could have reached the "Hood" as he still had 100 bars of air left. I give up!

We were very lucky with the weather as we never saw a flake, but had sunshine both days although it was cold out of the water. I hope every body enjoyed it as much as I did. It's so good when we all get together with like minded people for enjoyment.

Congratulations to Michael Maley for completing all the necessary open water tasks for his Ocean diver qualification also to Dave Phillips having now completed his final open water rescue to qualify as a Dive Leader. Final thanks to the mob that made the whole weekend possible: Nigel & Glenn Woolley, Pual Stevens, Paul Heed, Darren Stickings, Dave Phillips, Trefor Lee, Daniel Newman, Scott Crucikshank, Malcom Carter, Michael Maley.

Dive Safety

The dive season is now getting into full swing and as such I thought it was time to talk dive safety. Thankfully as we know diving and in particular Swale Divers has a very good safety record. I'm sure we would all like to see it stay that way.

One of the most important factors in dive safety is

having up to date, practiced skills. As always I would strongly recommend that you build up your diving slowly through the year. I deally starting with a dip or two in the lakes or even the pool to at least test your equipment and even better practice some of those basic skills, especially the rescue ones which don't get practiced in the routine course of diving. It is absolutely vital that all of these skills are an automatic reaction in an emergency.

Another factor is safety stops. This is something I believe the club could improve up on. There has been increasing re-search showing the benefits of safety stops. Tests on divers have shown that the level of sub-clinical DCI (that is bubbles which form in all divers on every dive but aren't significant enough to cause a problem) is significantly lower in those that have undertaken safety stops. BS-AC does not offer any specific advice on safety stops other than that it is recommended to do them. What to do is very much a personal decision.

Traditionally safety stops

have been undertaken just in the 3-7m depth range. Newer research is showing the benefits of 'deep' stops, also know as 'Pyle' stops, that is stopping at one or more depths between the bottom and you normal safety/compulsory stop. Technical divers have been doing them for many years, but now more and more recreational divers are seeing the benefits.

I would like to share with you my own personal preferences for safety stops. For any dive on air or nitrox I will do the following:

| Max depth | 'Deep' stops | 9m | 6m |
|-----------|--------------|--------|--------|
| <15m | none | none | none |
| 15-20m | none | none | 3 mins |
| 20-25m | none | none | 5 mins |
| 25-30m | none | 1 min | 5 mins |
| 30-35m | 2 mins @ 20m | 2 mins | 5 mins |
| 35-40m | 2 mins @ 25m | 3 mins | 5 mins |

If I incur compulsory decompression stops, then I will add this on to the compulsory stops. I must emphasise that this is purely my personal preference and in no way a recommendation as to what you should do. There are some other points to remember, when making your decisions:

- If the water was exceptionally cold or you were working hard (e.g. finning into a current) consider extending your safety stop(s)
- Take into account your computer's recommendations, some, notably Suunto include safety stops.
- If you plan to include 'deep' stops, these must be included in your 'dive' time, and some you must leave the bottom with

enough 'no stop' time left to carry them out.

- Slower ascent rates aren't always better, coming up too slowly can cause you to run out of no stop time as you are still deep enough to be absorbing significant nitrogen until you reach around 6m. You should read and understand your computer's manual. For example on Aldan computers it is acceptable to have the 100% being displayed, this means you are ascending at the maximum allowable ascent rate.
- Safety stops are just that, and added safety precaution, if you are very low on air, conducting a CBL or have any kind of

other emergency, do not stop to make safety stops, proceed directly to the surface.

Some further interesting reading can be found at these URLs:

http://www.divetekadventures.com/Technical_PyleStops.htm

http://www.dive-tech.co.uk/resources/deeps_tops.pdf

I hope this helps you all, if you have any queries or simply want to talk it through, please don't hesitate to contact me. If you ever want a buddy to practice some skills, I'm always happy to go over the lakes and do so.

Graham

Swale Divers - Profile

| | |
|--|--|
| Name: | <i>Roy Povey</i> |
| Age/Family: | <i>61 wife Anne children Sean and Rosalind</i> |
| Number of years diving: | <i>34</i> |
| Diving qualifications/ Club appointments: | <i>Advanced diver, open water instructor. Club sec, DO.</i> |
| Best diving experience: | <i>So many , diving in a shoal of jack fish off Ras Muhammed</i> |
| Worst diving experience: | <i>Bad case of narks 30m down Maiden Island first dive of the season and I should have known better.</i> |

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Location would most like to dive: | <i>Aldabra Islands</i> |
| Occupation/Other interests: | <i>Paper Maker, Photography, computers.</i> |

If you have any comments on any of the articles published in this Magazine, please contact me, Roy Povey

