

Diving the Farnes

by Jean Michel Machefert

Since the autumn of 2016 my wife and I have been diving for one week each year at the Farne Islands in Northumberland, UK. Our first trip in 2016 was reported in UWP96.

The last 2 years our trips were scheduled at the end of September beginning of October in order to see and play with the seal pups who are especially friendly and ready to play at this time of year.

At other times the seals are still on the islands but the older seals spend their time either fishing at sea for several days (sometimes several weeks) or in digesting, lying on the shore. The babies under one year are always a little bit shy with the divers and the pups over one year behave more as teenagers and are by far less interested by the divers as they were when they were 10 months old. So there are some seals underwater and some of them continue to play with divers, but less than in autumn. We really have the feeling that for the seal pups a diver is a kind of toy and for sure we make them laugh!

The Farne Islands are also well known for bird watching, since several thousands of sea birds as puffins, guillemots, shag... are nesting on the islands before leaving the place for some overseas adventures. The best period for watching is in springtime before mid-July. After the 15th of July almost all the birds leave the islands.

Knowing that this year we decided to give our preference to bird watching by going the first week of July and also for diving. What was there to see if the seals are not ready to play in water with us?

Indeed plenty of things! First of all the Farne



Happy puffin, Nikon D2x, ISO 200, Sigma 200-500mm at 500mm, 1/1000, F9.

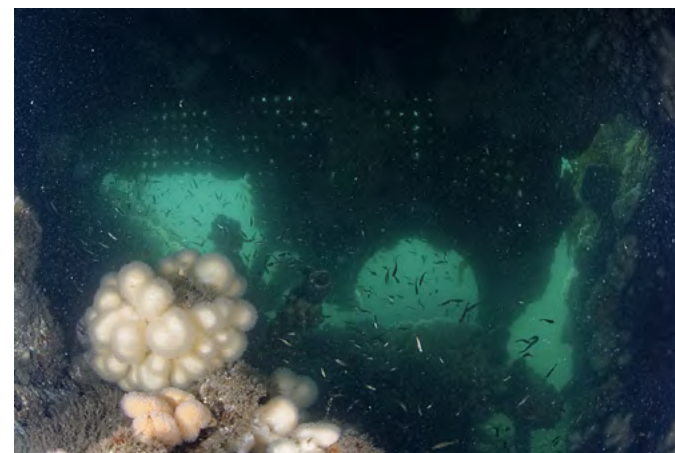


Seal pup at the sunset, Nikon D2x, ISO 400, Sigma 200-500mm at 400mm, 1/800, F6.3.



Diver over boulder, Nikon D2x, housing Aquatica, Nikkor 10.5mm, 1/ 60, f 11 , ISO 400 , 2 strobes nikon Sb 910, Patima housings, 1/2 and 1/4 power

Islands are really dangerous for ships and more than 1000 wrecks lie in this area and since the islands are the eastern remaining part of the 300 million years old "great whin sill" made of very hard volcanic rocks (dolerite) the underwater edges of the islands forms cliffs and plenty of big boulders



Inside the wreck of the Coryton, Nikon D2x, housing Aquatica, Nikkor 10.5mm, 1/ 60, f 9 , ISO 400 , 2 strobes nikon Sb 910, Patima housings, 1/2 and 1/4 pwr

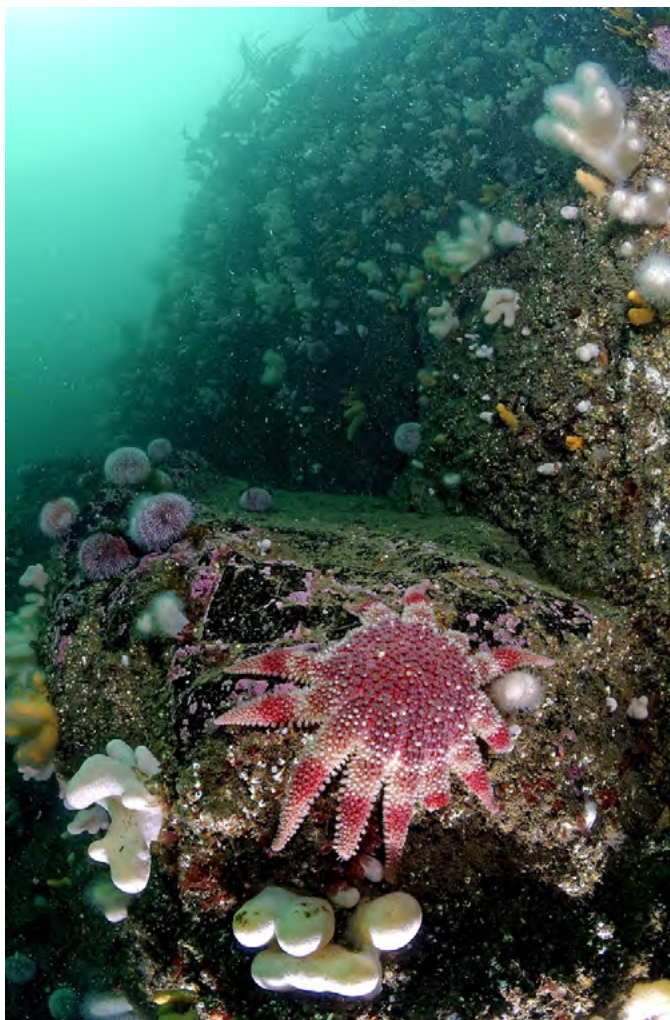
relics of the erosion process of the volcanic still lie on the bottom of the sea. Of course by looking at the diving guides written by British divers the best scenic dives of the world can be done here. As French divers we need to check if this is true or if this is chauvinism.

For the first dives we went on the very comfortable catamaran of Sovereign Diving driven by Ron; a highly experienced diver and skipper to the outer islands for beautiful dives along underwater cliffs fully covered with white and colourful life, plenty of dead man fingers (a nightmare for photographers when they are bright white and stay on black volcanic rocks!).

By looking carefully between the soft corals there are plenty of small animals such as crabs and bigger ones such as the beautiful starfishes like the common sunstar (Crossaster Papposus) typical from the cold waters and almost impossible to see in the French waters. Of course from time to time a seal arrives always from behind biting the fins of the divers before disappearing at full speed and too fast for a portrait shot. This is really interesting to see that the fascination for seals in autumn let us miss or at least not appreciate as it should be such beautiful sceneries. Since we are French we can confirm without any suspicion for chauvinism that such dives are really among the most beautiful in temperate seas.

Then for changing a little bit from the cliff dives we went for a drift dive in a gully between two flat and low rocky islands in the location named Whirl Rocks (you can imagine how still the water can be at this place!). Even in July some seals are here playing in the gully. Most of the time they stay at few meters from us (a little bit far for a photographer but good for seeing them) and time to time one of them comes close to look at us (then the photographer is happy as soon as he is ready for a very fast portrait shooting). Really nice as usual... As soon as we go out of the gully there are no more seals underwater.

As said before there are also plenty of wrecks



Scenery with star fish, Nikon D2x, housing Aquatica, Nikkor 10.5mm, 1/ 60, f 14 , ISO 400 , 2 strobes nikon Sb 910, Patima housings, 1/2 and 1/4 power

in the area. The most famous shipwreck was the Forfarshire in 1838 with the saving of nine crew members by the heroin Grace Darling.

We will not dive on the Forfarshire but on the Coryton. The Coryton was a commercial ship 121m long transporting 3000t of wheat heading to



Boiler of the wreck of the Coryton, Nikon D2x, housing Aquatica, Nikkor 10.5mm, 1/ 60, f 11 , ISO 400 , 2 strobes nikon Sb 910, Patima housings, 1/2 and 1/4 power

Hull when machine gunned by German bombers on Sunday 16th February 1941 at the north of the Farne Islands. The ship was badly damaged and Captain Evans choose to beach the boat in Budle Bay (a sandy bay between Seahouses and Holy Island).



Top of the boiler of the wreck of the Coryton, Nikon D2x, housing Aquatica, Nikkor 10.5mm, 1/ 60, f 14 , ISO 400 , 2 strobes nikon Sb 910, Patima housings, 1/2 and 1/4 power

Unfortunately the seabed is quite shallow in front of Budle Bay and the Coryton sank 300m from the shore. The weather worsened and the ship began to break up. 39 crew members were saved by the life boats coming from Holy Island and from north Sunderland. Captain Evans decided to remain on the Coryton, but then the storm increased and sadly his body was found ashore the next day.

Now the Coryton lies in less than 10m of water on a sandy bed broken in three parts. The rear is often covered by shifting sands and now only the

bow section and the boilers stand up from the sandy sea bed. We dived on the boilers that are split open with a huge quantity of broken condenser pipes laying at the bottom. But this wreck is not dead, plenty of dead mens fingers and soft corals are growing on all the relics transforming them into beautiful gardens where plenty of small fish are living. At the top of the boilers close to the sun big kelps are seen.

During the week we also dived at Gun Rocks on the wreck site where more than 20 cannons, a lot of cannon



Cannon muzzle from a wreck of the 18th century at gun rocks, Nikon D2x, housing Aquatica, Nikkor 10.5mm, 1/ 60, f 10 , ISO 400 , 2 strobes nikon Sb 910, Patima housings, 1/2 and 1/4 power

balls and such artefacts as parts of swords were discovered scattered around the rocks.

Documents written at the end of the 18th century report a loss of a Dutch merchant vessel without any survivors at the beginning of the 18th century and in the 19th century it was then reported without any explanation that the wreck on Gun Rocks was associated with the Spanish Armada. With different archaeological surveys in 1970 and in November 2013 by the Wessex Archaeology Portway House for the English Heritage (<https://>

www.wessexarch.co.uk/our-work/gun-rocks-farne-islands) it is now confirmed that the wreck is a Dutch merchant ship sunk at the beginning of the 18th century.

A dive on the wreck is quite amazing with a bored muzzle of a cannon pointing out of the kelp in shallow water and also beautiful scenery on boulders and cliffs with plenty of soft corals and also some urchins with beautiful spines.

To conclude this week of dives at the Farnes without many seals it was really a nice moment with plenty



Flying puffin, Nikon D2x, ISO 320, Sigma 200-500mm at 500mm, 1/800, F13.



Seal on the rocks, Nikon D2x, ISO 200, Sigma 200-500mm at 500mm, 1/1000, F6.7.



Seal in a gully, Nikon D2x, housing Aquatica, Nikkor 10.5mm, 1/ 160, f 14 , ISO 400 , 2 strobes nikon Sb 910, Patima housings, 1/2 and 1/4 power



Diver & cliff with soft corals, Nikon D2x, housing Aquatica, Nikkor 10.5mm, 1/ 60, f 11 , ISO 400 , 2 strobes nikon Sb 910, Patima housings, 1/2 and 1/4 pwr

be honest we need to come at the Farne islands at least 2 times a year to experience the full benefit of nature!

Also as French divers we really appreciated the organisation of the dives in the Farne Islands with skilled and experienced skippers coming to pick up safely the divers as soon as they are at the surface and with boats always equipped with lifts which are really a must for photographers and divers with quite heavy equipment as we have. The water was at 12°C which was comfortable with dry suits (and heating vests for the chilliest!) and the air at 25°C and even more. The only problem with such weather and difference of temperature is the moisture in the plastics housings if not filled with silica gel.



Jean Michel began to dive in caves, lakes and the oceans in 1987. He started underwater photography in 1992 using a Nikonos IV. After shooting many years with a Nikon D70 he now uses a Nikon D2x in an Aquatica housing with 2 Nikon SB910 strobes in Patima housing.

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of beautiful and unique scenery and for sure we did not have any regret to be there in July and not at the season of the playful seal pups. Now we can confirm without any chauvinism (we are not British!) that the dives in the Farne Islands are for sure among the most beautiful in the world of temperate waters.

Moreover as soon as we were out of the water it was a pleasure to see thousands of puffins, guillemots and other seabirds on the islands. To

Guidelines for contributors

The response to UwP has been nothing short of fantastic. We are looking for interesting, well illustrated articles about underwater photography. We are looking for work from existing names but would also like to discover some of the new talent out there and that could be you! UwP is the perfect publication for you to increase your profile in the underwater photography community.

The type of articles we're looking for fall into five main categories:

Uw photo techniques - Balanced light, composition, etc

Locations - Photo friendly dive sites, countries or liveaboards,

Subjects -, Anything from whale sharks to nudibranchs in full detail

Equipment reviews - Detailed appraisals of the latest equipment

Personalities - Interviews/features about leading underwater photographers

**If you have an idea for an article,
contact me first before putting pen to paper.
E mail peter@uwpmag.com**

How to submit articles

To keep UwP simple and financially viable, we can only accept submissions by e mail and they need to be done in the following way:

1. The text should be saved as a TEXT file and attached to the e mail

2. Images must be attached to the e mail and they need to be 150dpi

Size - Maximum length 20cm i.e. horizontal pictures would be 20 cm wide and verticals would be 20cm high.

File type - Save your image as a JPG file and set the compression to "Medium" quality. This should result in images no larger than about 120k which can be transmitted quickly. If we want larger sizes we will contact you.

3. Captions - **Each and every image MUST have full photographic details** including camera, housing, lens, lighting, film, aperture, shutter speed and exposure mode. These must also be copied and pasted into the body of the e mail.

Parting Shot

by Lee Newman

In the summer, easily the most talked about dive-related subject is visibility. Challenged by successive blooms of algae, the visibility often falls to just a few feet in the waters around Vancouver. The algae blooms start in the Spring, usually around April, when the rivers and streams swollen with snow-melt deliver an abundance of nutrients to the ocean.

The first of the blooms is usually brown - a combination of silt from run-off and phytoplankton. As the Spring rains give way to increased sunshine, the available nutrients cause a bloom of green phytoplankton that typically lasts for most of the summer.

For about eight weeks - in July and August, Vancouver enjoys mostly sunny days with very little, if any, rain - and it is these conditions that cause the red-tides. The red-tide can vary in colour and also in the species responsible. With the poor visibility, many of the area's divers reluctantly relinquish their sites to boaters and 'sea-sweepers'. However, some - myself included, steadfastly refuse to give up on summer diving and go regardless of the turbid water.

On a weekend in mid-July, on a routine dive at Porteau Cove Provincial Park, we experienced the horrible visibility associated with a dense red-tide at about 20', down about 30'. After that, we found ourselves under the bloom in relatively clear water (for summer, anyway) - with about 20' of visibility. Above our heads was the swirling red-tide. It looked like a storm at sunset - and me with no camera!

The following weekend we went back, this time armed with my camera and Tokina 10-17, hoping that the red-tide was still there. It was! We again groped our way through the bloom and into the clearer water below and proceeded to make some images. With Lisa's exhaust bubbles punching holes in the bloom, and the algae moving with the water (mostly tidal action), framing a shot became an exercise in pre-planning.



The author's wife, Lisa, under the red-tide. Canon 7D, Tokina 10-17 @10mm, 1/25th, f5, ISO 640, a single Ikelite DS-160 at reduced output.

I had to anticipate where I wanted to shoot, get in position and then wave Lisa into position before the bloom changed significantly. It was very exciting in a creative kind of way!

Luckily, during the summer the ocean tends to stratify with regard to temperature - despite the relatively large tidal exchanges. The temperature stratification of the water also tends to stratify the algae blooms - forming a layer of brown, green or red, which rises and falls with the tides. As long as you can get under it - and assuming there is still some ambient light, there are plenty of reasons to dive, and shoot!

Lee Newman

Do you have a shot which has a story within a story?

If so e mail it with up to 500 words of text and yours could be the next Parting Shot.

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and yours could be in UwP105**