

BUIPC winning diary

by Kirsty Andrews

Having recently won the British & Irish Underwater Photography Championship for the second year running, UWP Mag asked me to give some insights into the day, perhaps giving away some secrets of my success.

The competition window is 10pm Friday to 10pm Saturday but my trip started a little earlier as my club, the Bristol Underwater Photography Group, had a 4 day charter booked on the Celtic Cat out of Porthkerris, Cornwall.

When BSoUP changed their historic Plymouth splash-in weekend to the BIUPC, taking place all over the UK and Ireland, entrants were encouraged to get together in groups to enjoy the sociable competitive aspect on a micro-scale - the timing of our BUPG trip was coincidental but nice in a way. Some upsides and downsides, as I will explain.

The week before the competition - constant checking of the weather forecast. Winds not great but at least no Easterly which tends to blow out the

whole of the South coast.

9am Friday - although the competition hadn't yet started, I arrived in Cornwall for day 1 of our charter. Time to get the gear together (I shoot a Nikon D500 and mostly my Retra Pro strobes) and check out the conditions. Two fun dives with our group on the Manacles reefs.

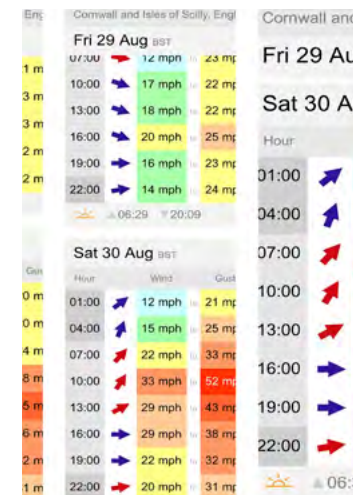
4pm Friday - I wanted to check out the shore dive as well; it had been productive for me before. I chatted to the Porthkerris staff about conditions and recent spots, and Sophie the PK DM gave me foolproof directions to spot an octopus in a den with eggs - massive thanks to her. The only trouble was the den was directly under the boat mooring so was only diveable early and late. But the den and the eggs were very accessible.

10pm Friday the competition opens! I usually do a night dive at this point; I love them and the unique wildlife and behaviour they bring. This time though I was wary of a slight swell, and opted to pass. Nothing to do with the excellent pub grub



Mother octopus and eggs, Porthkerris house reef.

Macro winner and overall championship winner. Mother octopus with eggs Nikon D500 in Nauticam housing. Nikon 60mm lens, Nauticam MFO-1 diopter. Single Sea & Sea ysD1 strobe with uwcamerastore fibreoptic snoot. 1/250th, f25, ISO 800



Weather watching

www.uwpmag.com



Mankind's impact Highly commended - Lobster sitting outside an abandoned pot on maerl, Helford River. Nikon D500 in Nauticam housing. Tokina 10-17mm lens and twin Retra Pro strobes. 1/25th, f11, ISO 640

Wide angle winner - Common octopus portrait. Nikon D500 in Nauticam housing. Tokina 10-17mm lens and twin Retra Pro strobes. 1/40th, f11, ISO 500

with fellow photographers in the Three Tuns at 7pm...

6am Saturday Feeling cross with myself for skipping the night before, I did at least get up early to revisit the octopus mother (before the boat charters started while access was safe).

I set my camera up specifically for the shot, with my 60mm lens and MFO-1, and a single strobe with fibre optic snoot enabling me to direct the

light into the den. The octopuses pull rocks towards the entrances of their dens so getting close and getting light on the subject is the challenge. Even with my fibre snoot I found myself shooting upside down just to get the best angle. It's important for this shot to get eyes and eggs in focus so depth of field is a challenge and I pushed to f29, with high ISO. The dive was only 20 mins and maybe a dozen shots in total; I knew what



Zooming cuttlefish, Porthkerris house reef. Nikon D500 in Nauticam housing. Tokina 10-17mm lens and single Retra Pro strobe. 1/5th, f16, ISO 160

I wanted and was pretty happy with the results.

10:15 Saturday - The East Narrows on the River Fal, on the Celtic Cat. Reunited with my group and with a macro shot in the bag.

Prevailing winds restricted our site choices but the Fal would have been a great choice anyway.

Lens choice was a real dilemma. I decided to hedge my bets, with my trusty 60mm lens and a versatile combination of a twin flip with CMC-2 and MWL-1 wet lenses (for close-up and a wide, midrange 130 degree field of view respectively). I find this is a

handy set up when I don't know what I'll see, but it's quite big and unwieldy.

The pink maerl beds of the Fal are an absolutely stunning habitat, there's a wall that drops off to 30m+ and the shallows are delightful, especially for macro: crabs, worms etc, or on the larger side, thornback rays and mid-size sharks. We had a very enjoyable 90 minute dive. There's a population of butterfly blennies in bottles that I particularly like here and I spent much of the dive shooting them. It's a good topic for 'mankind in the sea', one of the BIUPC categories. In the end though I didn't enter these



Pair of crawfish on the Manacles reef, Cornwall. Nikon D500 in Nauticam housing. Nikon 60mm lens, Nauticam MWL-1 wet wide lens and twin Retra Pro strobes. 1/30th, f18, ISO 800

shots as I was aware that similar images had been awarded in previous years.

I had some other nice opportunities, like a nurse hound egg case with two shrimp on it, against pink maerl. One oddity in this comp is you can only enter 2 images in total, so image selection is tough.

One of the downsides of diving as a group in an on-the-day competition is that if you're not careful you can all be shooting the same subjects. As

it turns out though we all had very different takes on this dive. Cathy Lewis shot some lovely super-macro of skeleton shrimp which ended up being commended in BIUPC - I didn't see any, having my eyes on slightly bigger subjects.

Dive 3: 90 mins on the Helford river. The winds changed again, but we found shelter in the Helford. I changed to my Tokina 10-17mm fisheye lens, for variety, although visibility was pretty murky.



Butterfly blenny in an abandoned bottle, Fal River. Nikon D500 in Nauticam housing. Nikon 60mm lens and twin Retra Pro strobes. 1/125th, f8, ISO 250

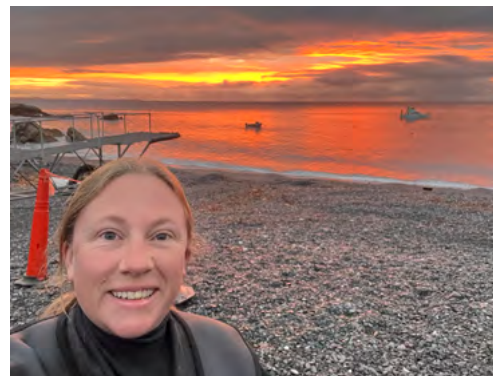
Although for some of my group it's their favourite local dive, for me the Helford river can be hit or miss so thought I'd play around with arty blur techniques in case I didn't find a subject. As it happened I saw a few nice thornback rays, and also found a very old abandoned couple of lobster pots with some massive lobsters hanging out next to them. These ended up one of my favourite shots of the day.

For an on-the-day competition, this type of diving is a bit of a gamble as although I've dived these sites many times, I was relying on a subject

appearing when I needed it. I'm an optimist and an opportunist though, so happy to take the chance.

3pm Saturday. Several of the group including me had planned a shore dive to finish off the day, but when we got back to base, lunchtime rain combined with the consistently strong winds meant, to quote the staff, "you couldn't see your hand in front of your face". I took the hint and opted to take a look of my shots of the day instead, hoping I'd got them in the bag.

6pm Saturday I was happy with my macro shots but not particularly



wowed with my wide angle effort. Astonishingly, divers had just started to surface from the shore reporting 5m or so viz - the tide was rising and bringing clean water in. So, I thought I'd give it one last try.

Funnily enough this is exactly what happened last year, when I wasn't quite satisfied with my efforts, went in for a final dive in dusk light and shot the winning photo of an ICM cuttlefish. It made me late for the group BBQ but was worth it!

This time, the viz was surprisingly ok with my favourite Tokina 10-17mm, but there weren't many subjects about. I revisited spots I knew and saw some nice crawfish but no special shots. On my way back at the end, finally, a lovely octopus, in the kelp. It moved away from me but pretty slowly and steadily, investigating nooks and crannies in the kelp covered rocks. In order to get the camera as close as possible, I set up for a vertical shot and then shot close-ups blind 'from the hip'. This meant

lighting was a bit of a gamble due to the thick kelp, but as the octopus emerged at the top of a rocky section, I got the portrait I was looking for. And was late for the group BBQ for the second year in a row, but it was worth it.

All in all, it was, as it turned out, a successful day competition-wise but importantly I was able to enjoy the group experience and concentrate on images for the competition at the same time. Pub grub and BBQ's topped a perfect weekend.

Kirsty Andrews
www.kirstyjandrews.co.uk

Instagram

