

South West Ramblings 6

By Mark Webster

“Summer time and the living is easy.....” or so the song goes and after several years of very poor summers in the UK the words are finally appropriate! So at long last during July we were blessed with more than two weeks of continuous sunshine, light winds and calm conditions whilst a high pressure system barely moved over the UK whilst we were bombarded by the media with claims of numerous heat wave records being surpassed. The UWP gods were obviously smiling on me as this coincided perfectly with my leave rota in Norway and I arrived home plotting numerous diving excursions to normally inaccessible sites.

Plans even included a daring trip across the border between the counties of Cornwall and Devon, an excursion not to be taken lightly but the rewards were high....a touch of magic (MV Magic that is...) and variety during another day out on our revered editor's charter boat from Dry Stack Marina.

There are many offshore dive sites which require calm conditions and perfect timing of the tides to enjoy at their best and there are a number which I had been unable to

dive for several years due to inclement conditions when I had time available. So expectations were high and we just needed the marine life to cooperate for the camera. Although the plankton bloom during May and June seemed to have expired there were some fears that this burst of sunshine and increase in water temperature might propagate another, but on reflection the visibility was pretty good (for the UK) during all our dives.

Our first target was a reef in Falmouth Bay known as the outer Bizzies a couple of miles offshore from Killigerran head which is an

The wall and gullies of the Bizzies reef are crammed full of invertebrate life, soft corals and gorgonians. Nikon D300, Subal ND2 housing, 10-17mm FE zoom, Inon Z240 flash guns, ISO 200 f11 1/40.

Jellyfish are always a distraction and excellent wide angle subjects. This compass jellyfish contrasts well with the aquamarine blue water and sun burst. Nikon D300, Subal ND2 housing, 10-17mm FE zoom, Inon Z240 flash guns, ISO 200 f16 1/200.





The Pen-Win reef on the Manacles is swept by very strong tides so must be explored during slack water periods. The colonies of jewel anemones here are utterly striking and the range of pastel and primary colours are a dream for a wide angle lens. Nikon D300, Subal ND2 housing, 10-17mm FE zoom, Inon Z240 flash guns, ISO 200 f11 1/30.

extensive reef system of deep gullies and walls that are swept by the tides. The seabed depth is around 24-26m but the walls of the gullies can rise 10m above this, so in good visibility it can be an exhilarating dive with plenty of light being reflected from the bright sand filling the gullies. The tidal action here supports large colonies of soft corals and gorgonians with plenty of anemone species to add to the colour. My focus here was mostly to try and capture the vista

and topography with the density of marine life using a wide angle lens. I managed to maintain this plan for most of the dive until I spotted one of several large compass jelly fish moving down my particular gully towards me. This proved too much temptation and I was lured into mid water to capture this graceful beastie against the sun on the surface. Of course once you engage with this sort of subject you will inevitably begin to move with the subject and the tide and



The tunnels of Killigerran head are subject to strong surges which in turn feed dense colonies of jewel anemones. Look carefully for other residents like this scorpion fish. Nikon D300, Subal ND2 housing, 10-17mm FE zoom, Inon Z240 flash guns, ISO 200 f16 1/125.

lose some control over your location and orientation. Fortunately the tide was not running too hard, but by the time I had finished shooting the jelly fish and then made a safety stop I was quite a distance from our boat so was grateful for the good surface cover and the extendable flag I carry with me!

From the Bizzies we headed inshore to a delightful dive site under Killigerran Head which is very shallow and rocky so requires calm

sea conditions to access. During our lunch break and surface interval we had several curious seal pups and one adult circle the boat and come progressively closer, so I conjured visions of engaging them underwater but unfortunately they were not brave enough for that.

This dive site comprises deep over hanging gullies, swim throughs and tunnels with gaps in the rocks and kelp cover that allows the sun to stream through. The overhanging

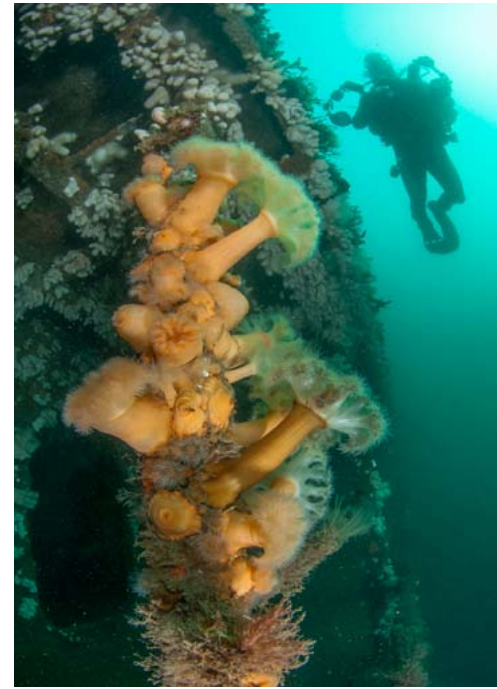


HMS Scylla was sunk deliberately as an artificial reef for scuba divers several years ago. The wreck has been quickly colonised by anemones, soft corals and colourful invertebrate life. This view is from inside the wheel house. Nikon D300, Subal ND2 housing, 10-17mm FE zoom, Inon Z240 flash guns, ISO 200 f11 1/30.

faces and tunnel walls are covered in colourful anemones, sea squirts, sponges and hydroids which are fed by nutrients in the strong surge which exists here on all but the calmest days. There is lots of invertebrate life to be found as well as numerous shannies, blennies, gobies and scorpion fish. Average depth here is 3m to 6m so it makes a great second dive using the remains of the air in the tank from the first dive.

A couple of days later we were

out again to dive the tricky Manacles reef system which has claimed a number of ship wrecks and sadly also a number of divers over the years. The tides here are very strong so local knowledge is a must and slack water is the safest time to dive. The slack period can be very short on a big spring tide so you need to be on location early with a shot line deployed and observe the current on the buoy as the window approaches. We chose the Pen-Win which is one



Add a passing photographer to complete the composition. Nikon D300, Subal ND2 housing, 10-17mm FE zoom, Inon Z240 flash guns, ISO 200 f11 1/100.

of my favourite dives on the Manacles and is immensely colourful with sheer walls, large boulders and gullies all carpeted with dense colonies of jewel anemones in a variety of colours. It's a great location for wide angle and macro and you will also see numerous fish species here including shoals of mackerel and bass if you are lucky. Visibility here was fairly good but the water had a strong emerald green cast to it from remaining plankton, which I quite like as a contrast to the bright

colours of the anemones on the reef. Our next excursion was over the border to Devon for a day out with Peter Rowlands on MV Magic. It was another perfect sunny day with just a breath of wind and we were swiftly off the quay on our way to the wreck of the Scylla for the first dive. This was only my second visit to the wreck but that little bit of knowledge meant I was better able to plan my imaging to specific areas rather than to cover the whole wreck for possibilities. There was a little tide running which is just what you need to encourage the plumose anemones and soft corals to extend and feed and also take any disturbed silt out of shot. The Scylla is a great wide angle dive but ideally I would recommend having a buddy/model to pose for you to complete the image. Another photographer sometimes works but of course we all have our own agenda and a desire not to waste too much time posing for another camera!

Conditions were so good that we were able to drift on glassy smooth seas around the Eddystone lighthouse 12 miles offshore whilst eating lunch and waiting for the tide on the neighbouring reef of Hands Deep. This is a fully submerged reef system with five pinnacles (hence the name Hands Deep) with vertical walls, ledges and gullies all carpeted in colourful marine life. In fact it is

quite reminiscent of the Manacles reef although the kelp line seems to extend to 20m and deeper in places here so you will spend much of the dive at 25m or more. Throughout the dive here I was shadowed and pestered by a very persistent male cuckoo wrasse who was determined to get in front of the camera or nibble at my hands or mask. I finally gave in and let him attack his reflection in the dome which was described in a parting shot feature in the previous issue of UWP. Having defended his territory and his pride the cuckoo wrasse calmed a little and allowed me to make some compositions without fish in the frame, although he did not back off fully until I commenced my ascent.

Between the boat dives there were beach dives from my regular sites in Falmouth Bay and on the Lizard that were also quite productive. The nudibranch season is all but over but there were still a few around and I found some nice examples of *Diaphorodoris luteocincta* in both the yellow and red variety (*reticulata*) and pure white with a yellow edged skirt (*alba*) which are around 10-12mm in length so need additional magnification. ed bubbles do not disturb the subject.

I had a fascinating dive on a reef named the Whelps close to Nare Head which breaks the surface before tumbling to the seabed in a series of



The scallop has felt the first touch of the starfish and stretches its shell wide prior to take off. The scallops can manage this two or three times and then seem to tire making them easy prey for the starfish if they catch up with them again. Nikon D300, Subal ND2 housing, 10-17mm FE zoom, Inon Z240 flash guns, ISO 200 f11 1/30.

walls and ledges. The seabed is heavy sand and shingle and is a good place to find scallops and on this occasion an army of seven armed starfish. We often think of starfish as slow moving beasts, but if you have watched the seven armed variety when it is moving with a purpose then you may be surprised at the turn of speed they display. These guys were hunting the scallops and every so often one would

take off from the seabed and jet away to escape the attack, but of course not all of them were getting away. So I settled down close to a large scallop that was in the path of the hunt and waited for the starfish to approach and see if I could capture some of the action. Scallops have well developed sensory organs and can also 'see' movement and as my particular starfish approached it seemed to



*Although July is normally late in the year for nudibranchs there are still a few about which I think maybe due to the very cold spring that preceded the summer. This is a tiny *Diaphorodoris luteocincta alba*. Nikon D300, Subal ND2 housing, 105mm micro, +10 wet lens, Inon Z240 flash guns, ISO 200 f16 1/125.*

me that the scallop was aware of the danger. The starfish reached out to grasp the scallop and as soon as the first touch was made the scallop stretched open its shell and leapt off the seabed in a cloud of sand. During the first attack the scallops have the advantage as they are covered with



Using a snoot with a wide angle lens when the visibility is less than perfect is a good way to avoid backscatter. There was heavy plankton during this dive which provides a heavy green tint to the water. Nikon D300, Subal ND2 housing, 10-17mm FE zoom, Inon Z240 flash gun and snoot, ISO 200 f11 1/30.

compositions and create the possibility of producing a slightly different shot. It does not work every time of course but you need to know what won't work first. Adding a snoot to a wide angle image can create a very different mood to the shot so it is worth a try to narrow down suitable subjects.

Hopefully the remaining summer months will be equally good and there will be more to report as the season progresses. A good start to the summer normally means that we can expect to see some sub tropical species in the south west waters in August and September. We are already seeing many sun fish on the surface and several fishing boats have already reported leather back turtles off Land's End, although I have yet to see one close inshore, and perhaps we will see some Atlantic trigger fish and other sub-tropical cousins on our local dive sites soon.

sand and the starfish cannot get a firm grip, but once they have moved then the shell is exposed and they are much more vulnerable. The scallops also get tired and after a couple of moves they seem unable to resist much more. I will admit to rescuing my scallop from the third attack and placing it on the reef edge to recover and hopefully fight another day!

When the marine life action was not so exciting I played around a little with snooting in wide angle to hopefully develop some ideas for future dives. Only by experimenting can you persuade yourself to step away from the standard

Mark Webster
www.photec.co.uk

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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**

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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

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Size - Maximum length 15cm i.e. horizontal pictures would be 15 cm wide and verticals would be 15cm.

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