

South West Ramblings 9

by Mark Webster

We have enjoyed a spell of very good weather in June and July reaching heat wave temperatures in some parts of the UK. Down in the south west it has been pleasantly warm but more importantly the high pressure has kept the wind speeds low resulting in calm seas and the opportunity to roam farther afield to explore areas that are not accessible when more normal conditions prevail.

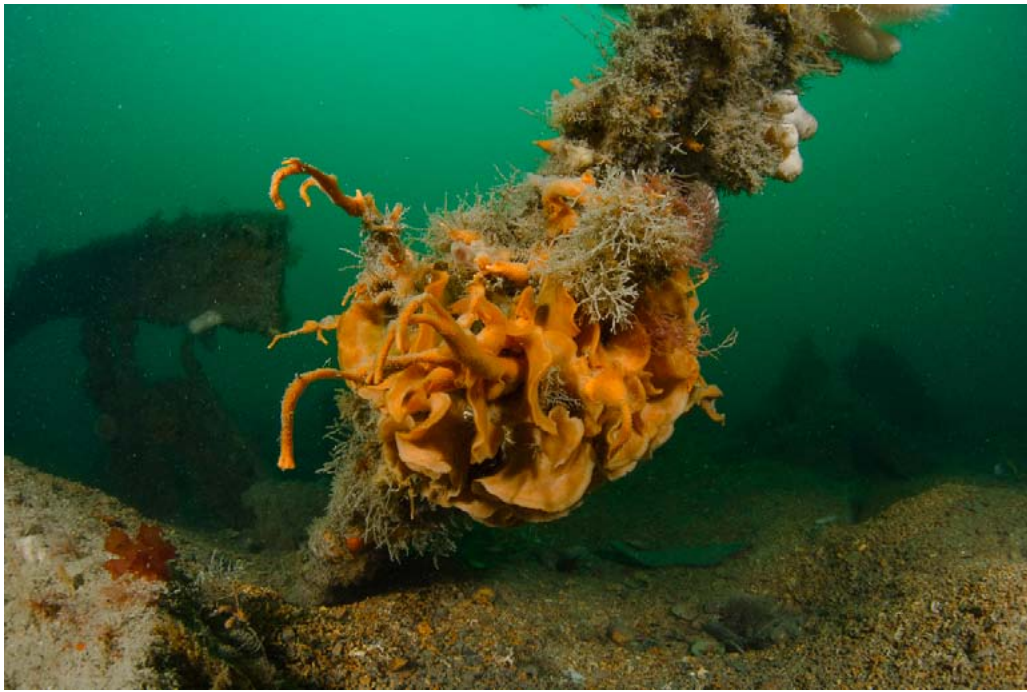
One of these sites is the wreck of the SS Carmarthen which I had last dived at least fifteen years ago, perhaps more. This First World War wreck is located on the south western side of Black Head which is quite a distance from our home base of Falmouth, so needed an early start on a perfect summers day. If you are using a RIB then there is more than one option for launching closer to the wreck location, but our route took us past the notorious Manacles reefs and then further south west around Black Head which can be tricky when the wind is against the tide even on an apparently calm day. As we approached Black Head we were joined by several porpoises that spent a few minutes close to the bow and then played in the wake before

moving on their way, so the signs were good for the day to come! Once on location it is simply a matter of dropping the shot and then waiting patiently for the tide which can be strong here so is best dived on or close to a neap tide.

The Carmarthen was a 4262-ton steamer which sank on 26 July 1917 whilst in transit from Genoa for the Tees. She was torpedoed by U-boat UC-50 which had been laying mines in the vicinity of the Lizard

The wreck of the SS Carmarthen has been well salvaged over the years but three boilers still remain standing 4 or 5m proud of the seabed, one seen in the background of this image. This makes it a little easier to find the wreck on the echo sounder. Nikon D7100, Subal ND7100, 10-17mm FE zoom, Inon Z240 flash guns, ISO200 f9 1/100. Towards the bow area of the Carmarthen the steel ribs are still clearly visible and provide a perfect location for sea fans, soft corals and anemones to perch and catch the nutrients carried by the tides. Nikon D7100, Subal ND7100, 10-17mm FE zoom, Inon Z240 flash guns, ISO200 f9 1/100.





Delicate Ross corals (a colonial bryozoan) have settled on sheltered areas of the wreck. This one also has an additional splash of colour from some finger sponges which are a near perfect match to the orange of the Ross coral. Nikon D7100, Subal ND7100, 10-17mm FE zoom, Inon Z240 flash guns, ISO200 f9 1/125.

when the commander, Kapitanleutnant Seuffer, spotted the Carmarthen rounding the Lizard. The torpedo struck close to the engine room and although her engines continued running she started taking in water fast.

The Carmarthen's captain, Griffith Roberts, thought initially that the ship had struck a mine and ordered his crew to abandon ship. But before the crew was able to leave the ship help arrived in the form of the patrol

trawler St. Hubert whose commander disagreed with abandoning the steamer. He thought there was a good chance of beaching her and called for tugs from Falmouth. Once the tugs had the steamer in tow they made some headway, but all too soon the Carmarthen took on too much water through her damaged hull and ran aground in Eagle Cove a mile to the west of Black Head where she became a total loss.

As Black head is exposed to the

tides this is a slack water dive and we descended just as the tide was abating, which normally means you should still find plenty of fish sheltering behind the larger sections of wreck.

The wreck has been well salvaged over the years but there are still some high points at the bow and stern and there are three boilers close to amidships that stand 4m or so proud from the wreckage. The wreck does not seem to have changed so much since my last visit and we were able to see large sections of it in the relatively good visibility and sunlight even at the maximum depth of 25m or so.

As I had not visited this site in the digital age my main focus was to capture shots of recognizable wreck features with marine life included if it was positioned well and co-operative. The reef around the wreck is well populated with sea fans and soft corals but the wreck itself has only sporadic colonies by comparison, so you have to look for opportunities to add a splash of colour to the wreckage, but there are all the usual fish suspects in attendance – pollack, pouting, cuckoo wrasse and congers and tom pot blennies amongst the wreckage.

Following our dive on the wreck we sheltered for lunch under the sheer cliffs of Black Head at the eastern end of Eagle cove. Here the cliffs plunge to vertically to the seabed

8-10m below and we could clearly see the bottom with the occasional Rhyzostoma and compass jelly fish idly swimming by. The view proved too tempting and having not dived this spot before we decided to explore.

This turned out to be a very pleasant dive chasing the jellyfish and also gave me the opportunity to undertake my good Samaritan act for the day. Swimming along the wall I came to a tumble of large kelp covered rocks and spotted a dog fish seemingly swimming in tight circles around a stand of kelp.

As I got closer I could see that it fact it was hooked on an abandoned fishing line through the side of its mouth and was pretty exhausted by its struggles to escape. So remembering the old diver's adage of "carry a knife and save a life" I drew my dagger and was relieved to find that the line cutter was still sharp enough to cut....I cannot remember the last time I used my knife in anger but it just goes to show that you should carry one and check it periodically.

The dog fish seemed a little shocked by its freedom but after a gentle push from me it swam away a few meters and settled on the sand to recuperate. I thought it would be grateful and let me get close for some good portrait shots but I think that the fish was now a bag of nerves and kept moving a meter or so as I approached



The soft coral colonies on the tide swept offshore sites seem to be particularly lush this year possibly due to the higher water temperatures. We see a variety of colours of dead men's fingers ranging from the pure white variety, through deep red, yellow and this pastel shade of orange. Nikon D7100, Subal ND7100, 10-17mm FE zoom, Inon Z240 flash guns, ISO250 f9 1/30.



Although we might usually regard soft coral colonies as a part of a wide angle composition the polyp details also make attractive wide macro compositions, particularly if you can include some blue water and a hint of sun on the surface as contrast. Nikon D7100, Subal ND7100, 10-17mm FE zoom and 2X teleconverter, Inon Z240 flash guns, ISO250 f11 1/30.



As summer progresses we see far fewer nudibranchs on the reef and I find the best place to look for them is on the kelp. This bright white and yellow Eubranchus farrani was grazing slowly across a kelp frond elevated from the sea bed which has allowed me to capture some open water and natural light behind the subject to improve contrast with the background. Nikon D7100, Subal ND7100, 10-17mm FE zoom and 2X teleconverter, Inon Z240 flash guns, ISO160 f16 1/30.

so I left it to reflect on the experience and narrow escape.

Between these longer excursions we continue to dive our regular offshore sites which are exposed to the strong tides of Falmouth Bay. The mild winter and warm summer so far has seen the water temperature

rise to 17c at depth and close to 20c on the surface on some days. Many familiar sites that have healthy soft corals and anemones seem to have much larger and denser colonies this year which may be a result of these warmer temperatures, but whatever the reason make irresistible wide

angle compositions. The detail in the polyps of the red soft corals (dead men's fingers) also make macro or wide macro compositions with a little blue water behind to add contrast.

The peak of the nudibranch season has now passed and there seemed to be far fewer around this year compared to last which was a bumper season both for numbers and variety, including some rare finds. But there are still a few around if you look carefully and during one dive I found two different species on the

kelp which offered the opportunity to include a little natural light with the subject.

On this occasion my D7100 was armed with a wide macro combination of 10-17mm fish eye and a 2X teleconverter which is a good compromise when you are not chasing a specific subject as it allows both a medium wide composition and true macro at the 17mm end. The first was a Eubranchus farrani with its bright yellow details catching even my failing eyesight (assisted with bi-focal



The best time to find nudibranchs is in early spring as they begin to breed. As summer progresses we see fewer nudibranchs but they are still around if you are prepared to look carefully. I found a pair of Facelina bostoniensis on a large piece of kelp which allowed a low angle of approach with the camera to include an open water background. Nikon D7100, Subal ND7100, 10-17mm FE zoom and 2X teleconverter, Inon Z240 flash guns, ISO250 f14 1/40.

lenses in my mask these days!) which was slowly grazing its way across the kelp frond allowing me plenty of time to set up and catch a few images.

The second was a less obvious pair of Facelina bostoniensis which I only noticed due to the speed (well fast for a nudibranch) they were traversing the kelp. They looked an unattractive pale grey colour until the flash illuminated a much more appealing delicate shade of pink

and orange, but they were more of a challenge with their relative speed over the kelp and the kelp itself moving in the swell.

I mentioned in the previous edition of SWR that we have enjoyed a mass invasion of jellyfish in late spring. The big gatherings have subsided but there are still a few around to provide temptation and distraction on a dive.

In addition to the large



Summer 2014 has been a good season for jellyfish including masses of Moon jellyfish. These are particularly hard to photograph in open water as they are almost totally transparent, but in this case the Moon jellyfish has drifted onto the reef and is in the process of being consumed by jewel anemones, or perhaps it is the other way round? But whoever is the diner it makes an interesting behavioral shot. Nikon D7100, Subal ND7100, 10-17mm FE zoom and 2X teleconverter, Inon Z240 flash guns, ISO160 f10 1/40.

Rhizostoma there have been numerous near transparent Moon jellyfish which are very difficult to photograph well in the water column. Anemones are of course closely related to jellyfish and are often opportunistic feeders, eating whatever may come into contact with them. I came across an example of this when I found a Moon jelly fish being consumed by jewel anemones (or

perhaps it was the other way around?) which made an interesting image as the dome shape of the jellyfish over the jewel anemones almost seemed to magnify them like a convex diopter.

Every summer I continue my keen but so far fruitless search for seahorses on my local dive sites. When I started diving in the mid 1970's I was shown seahorses regularly on at least three locations,



My annual, so far fruitless, searches for sea horses locally will inevitably attract interest from other fish life who are often much more co-operative if they think they are being ignored. This pipefish followed me through the weed for twenty minutes or more and at one point was rubbing his snout against the glass of my macro port. Nikon D7100, Subal ND7100, 105mm micro, Inon Z240 flash guns, ISO100 f25 1/50.

but of course then my focus was not on photography and I just accepted this as a normal thing to see on a shallow dive.

Back then seahorses seemed common and were often found in crab and lobster pots and simply returned to the sea. Several years ago a local diver on his first open water dive stumbled on one in a few meters of water and the instructor with him

captured a picture with his compact to prove it. I was diving the site within 24 hours but of course did not find one!

Sadly the fuse was lit on another burning desire to find one for myself and since then I have been sifting through weed and stands of bootlace and Jap weed without success so far. However, my searches do attract attention from a number of other



Black faced blennies are most often seen on overhanging reef sections, but they will venture away from their territory to investigate and are always inquisitive. This male can possibly see his reflection in the dome port, so perhaps was issuing a challenge to a perceived interloper. Nikon D7100, Subal ND7100, 10-17mm FE zoom and 2X teleconverter, Inon Z240 flash guns, ISO160 f13 1/40.

species lurking in the weed ...pipefish, scorpion fish and various wrasse who are happy to forage in the weed I disturb and pose for pictures in the process, so all is not lost, but surely one day the patient search will pay off!

The summer of 2014 seems to have been remarkable so far for sultry weather and calm seas. I have missed chunks of it due to work commitments

in Norway, but that serves to fire my enthusiasm when I arrive home and have the opportunity to dive. More musings to follow as the summer season progresses to a close.....

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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 144dpi

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

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.