

SouthWest Ramblings

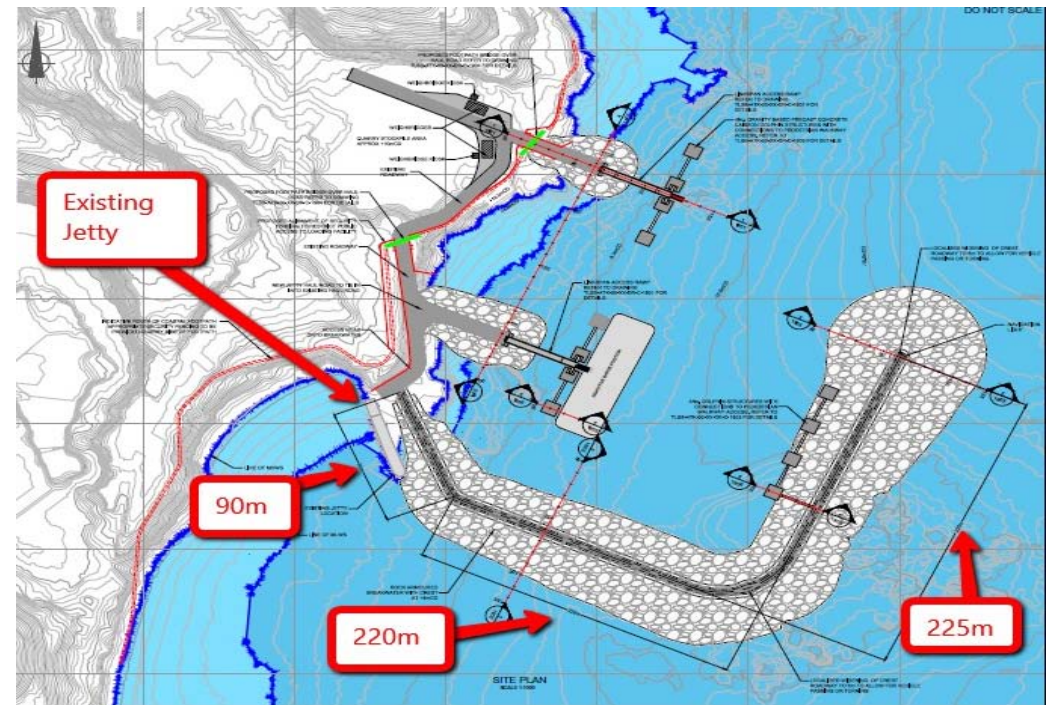
by Mark Webster

This installment from the far south west is more about grumblings and protest rather than gentle ramblings.....read on. I am very fortunate to live in the county of Cornwall which possesses some of the best diving in the United Kingdom and much of this is just a short hop from my front door. One of the best known locations, for divers and underwater photographers, are the collection of reefs known as the Manacles just offshore from the Lizard peninsula. Many divers will be familiar with these treacherous reefs as the graveyard for numerous wrecks, but below the water they also offer the most spectacular array of colourful marine life, which of course is the draw for those of us with a camera. In fact the marine life here is so good that parts of the Manacles have been declared a Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) in order to protect a number of rare and threatened species.

However, in the last six months or so this infamous reef system has come under threat from a development which purports to be part of a green energy project centered in Swansea Bay. The Lizard coast which borders the Manacles area

has a history of quarrying and there are several redundant sites here at Porthkerris, Porthoustock and Dean Quarry on Lowland point, whose new owners are proposing to reopen. The new owners of Dean Quarry are Shire Oak Energy which is one of a group of companies all under the same ownership. One of the subsidiaries, Tidal Lagoon Power, is the development company for the giant tidal lagoon proposed for Swansea Bay. So the plan is to reopen Dean Quarry to supply up to 1.5 million tons of rock per year to build the six mile tidal barrier in Swansea. In order to transport the rock the quarry development plan includes the construction of a 600m breakwater offshore to protect two new jetties all of which would encroach into the MCZ. The first phase of the planning application to rebuild the quarry buildings has already been passed

Vast beds of jewel anemones are common throughout the manacles and provide a riot of vivid colour. Nikon D300, Subal ND2 housing, 10-17mm FE zoom, Inon Z240 flash guns, ISO 200 f9 1/80.



Dean Quarry proposed plans for breakwater and jetties.





Plumose anemones extend to feed in the currents that sweep the Manacles. If you dive during a totally slack water period the anemones will be completely closed. Nikon D7100, Subal ND7100 housing, 10-17mm FE zoom, Inon Z240 flash guns, ISO 250 f8 1/100.

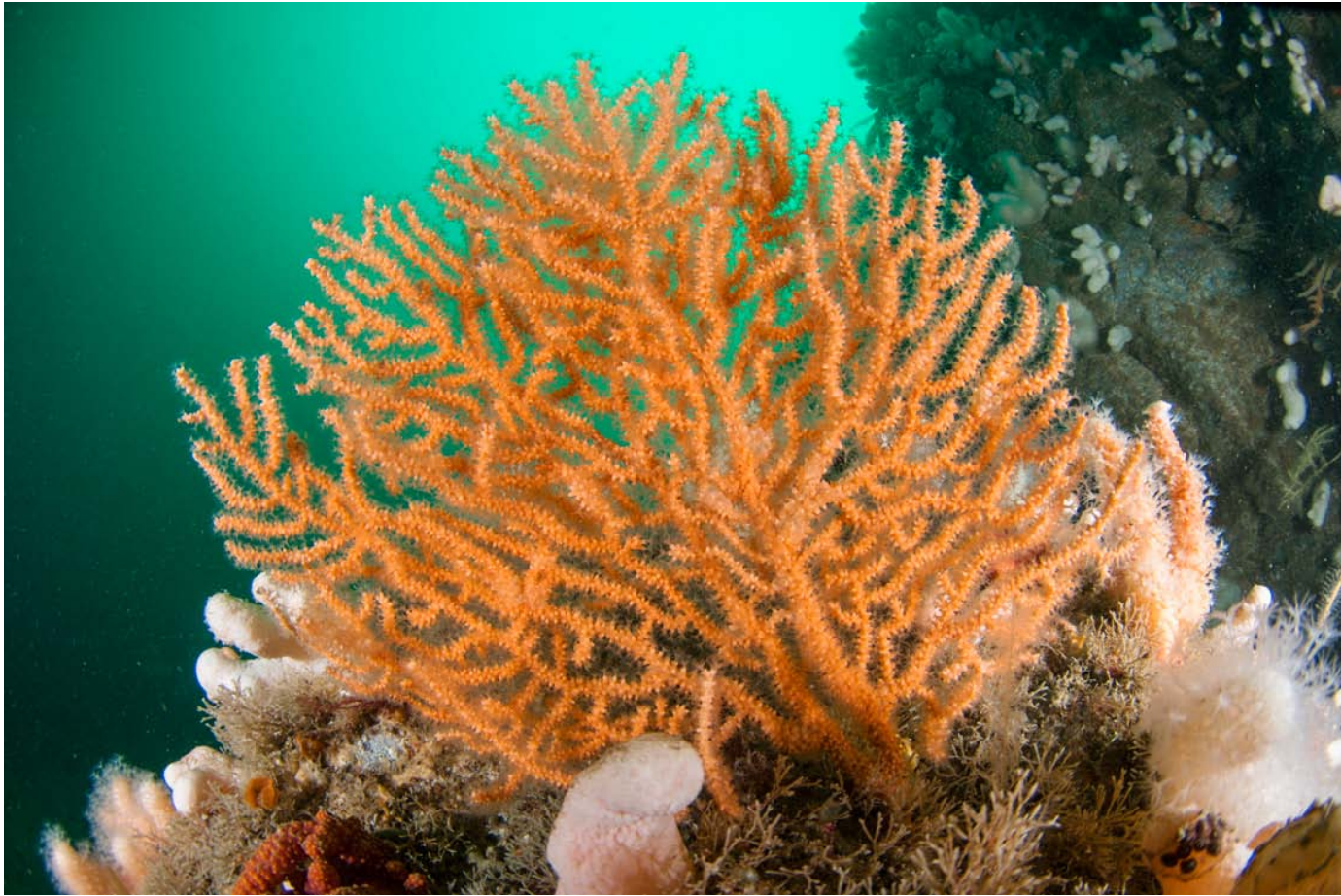


Shear walls and overhanging reefs on the Pen Wyn are covered by jewel anemones in a stunning selection of colours. Nikon D300, Subal ND2 housing, 10-17mm FE zoom, Inon Z240 flash guns, ISO 200 f11 1/200.

and the second phase application will include the damaging breakwater and jetties.

Local opposition has been mobilized since the proposal first emerged and it is now gathering pace and strength with support from organisations such as the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Marine Conservation Society, Natural England, Sea Search etc. The small village of St. Keverne borders the mineral rights boundary of Dean Quarry and has become the focus for a protest movement led by a lobby group - Community Against Dean Super Quarry – which, together with the Porthkerris Dive Centre, has been gathering data and organizing a number of challenges to the claims of Shire Oak Energy that the MCZ and Manacles reef would remain untouched by the construction work and vessel activity. Building the breakwater by depositing thousands of tons of armour rock on the seabed will not only destroy marine life under it but the dust on the rock itself and the disturbed seabed will be carried by tidal currents to the neighbouring reef systems smothering marine life. Once operational the plan is for 9000 ton barges to be maneuvered by tugs in and out of the new dock with the inevitable disturbance from propeller and thruster wash and of course the risk of wrecking which the area is so famous for.

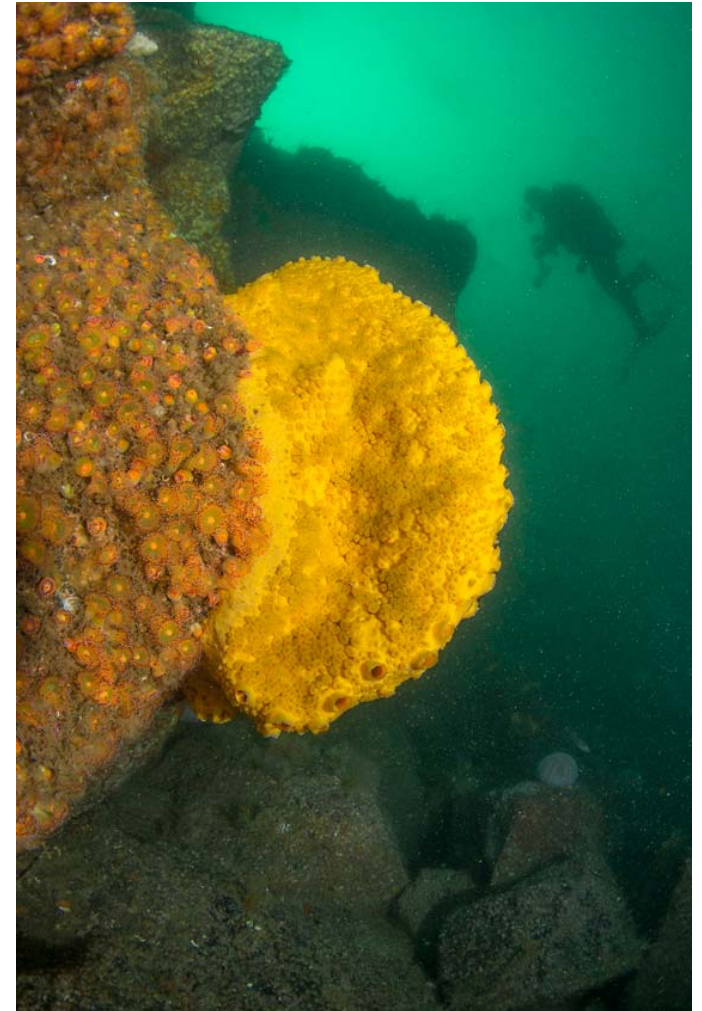
I have been diving from Porthkerris since the mid 1970's when it was the BSAC national beach. Since then it has been in private the ownership and is now home to a well equipped dive centre which has the Manacles as a spectacular dive site on its doorstep. Part of the developer's planning application for the breakwater includes an assessment of the marine life including a, somewhat cursory it seems, subsea survey of the location to convince the planners that no damage will ensue.



The pink sea fan anemone (Amphianthus dohrnii) is a rare species which is specifically protected in the Manacles MCZ. Nikon D7100, Subal ND7100 housing, 105mm micro, Inon Z240 flash guns, ISO 100 f25 1/250.

To combat this stance Mike and Jo Anselmi at Porthkerris Dive Centre have organised a number of their own marine surveys by professional marine biologists accompanied by photographers to reveal the marine life under threat in the MCZ. This gave me the opportunity to support the opposition forces and I gladly joined the team to survey an area mirroring that of the developer's submission with a focus on the threatened species defined by the MCZ.

Our brief was to survey the area and record any species of interest but with a particular focus on those that are protected under the MCZ. There are also a number of species commonly found here which are protected nationally, such as the pink sea fan (Eunicella verrucosa). In two dives on the first day we were able to record at least three of the species protected within this MCZ, the rare sea fan anemone (Amphianthus dohrnii), the spiny



The Manacles boasts a number of sponge species including many large yellow boring sponges that thrive in the strong currents. Nikon D300, Subal ND2 housing, 10-17mm FE zoom, Inon Z240 flash guns, ISO 200 f10 1/40.



Nodules of Maerl (an MCZ protected calcified seaweed) have been recorded throughout the location of the proposed breakwater. Nikon D7100, Subal ND7100 housing, 10-17mm FE zoom, Inon Z240 flash guns, ISO 200 f16 1/50.

lobster (*Palinurus elephas*) and Maerl (a calcified seaweed) within metres of the location of the breakwater. We were also able to confirm that sand cover over the reef areas on the breakwater route would require significant dredging, which the developers had declared unnecessary.

Anyone who has dived on the Manacles will understand why there is such strong motivation to oppose the proposed development. These reefs and pinnacles are high energy

sites exposed to the full force of the tides which can make them tricky to dive as you need to catch periods of slack water or time your dives during neap tides when the current can be more manageable. If you don't know the area then please make sure you acquire the local knowledge or better still dive with Porthkerry Dive Centre. The benefit of these strong currents is the nutrients they carry that feed the prolific colourful sessile marine life and even if you have only



The delicate Ross coral is in fact a colonial bryozoan that can grow to an impressive size if left undisturbed. Nikon D300, Subal ND2 housing, 10-17mm FE zoom, Inon Z240 flash guns, ISO 200 f9 1/40.

come to dive the wrecks you cannot fail to be impressed.

There are rich reefs throughout the Manacles area but perhaps the most spectacular are those in the outer manacles where seabed depths reach 40m and more. The big name reefs are the Vase, Pen Wyn and Raglans which break the surface at low water and drop quickly below the surface with a series of walls, ledges and gullies to the seabed. Raglans sits on the outer edge of the system and resembles a

church steeple when viewed on the echo sounder with sheer walls and narrow ledges and is a thrilling dive in good visibility. These reefs can be dived when there is a little current running as there is always a sheltered face and in fact are at their best with some tidal flow which ensures that the colourful beds of plumose and jewel anemones will be extended to feed. However, make sure you have good boat cover and follow the reef towards the surface when ascending to make



*In March this year we have already had an early invasion of the huge *Rhizostoma* jellyfish which have been cruising through the Manacles on the tides on a daily basis. Nikon D7100, Subal ND7100 housing, 10-17mm FE zoom, natural light, ISO 200 f9 1/160.*

a safety stop in order to minimize the distance you travel on the current when you surface.

The Vase rock is perhaps best known as the location of the wreck of the SS Mohegan which foundered on only her second Atlantic voyage in 1898 with the loss of 106 lives (the Mohegan made her first Atlantic crossing named SS Cleopatra). Many of those lost in the wreck are buried in a mass grave at St Keverne churchyard where there is

also a commemorative stained glass window. The loss of the Mohegan is surrounded in mystery and in fact a recent book (MOHEGAN - A Cornish Titanic by Chris Holwill) claims that the captain actually survived the wreck having deliberately steered a course for the Manacles. Captain Griffith was a shareholder in the financially troubled Atlantic Transport Line and it is claimed the ship was wrecked deliberately for an insurance claim. Griffith fled to



The sheer reef walls of Raglans Reef are covered with jewel anemones where even the starfish have to cling on tight to feed. Nikon D7100, Subal ND7100 housing, 10-17mm FE zoom, Inon Z240 flash guns, ISO 200 f13 1/60

his brother's home in North Wales and subsequently committed suicide when he realised the consequences of his role in the scheme. Although the wreck is well broken up the boilers still stand proud and local dive clubs continue to make interesting finds. The wreck itself has good fish life and supports many of the reef sessile species, but you will be struck by the rich habitat on the reef as soon as you drift off the wreck.

The shallow elevations of all the

reefs are topped by thick kelp which is home to a diverse range of species, but it is once you dip below the kelp line that colour begins to dominate. Hydroids, jewel anemones, plumose anemones and soft corals (white, yellow and red varieties of 'dead men's fingers') cling to any surface exposed to the tide. The protected pink sea fan or gorgonian coral (*Eunicella verrucosa*) is abundant with the largest examples reaching 40-50cm in diameter. Inspect the polyps



The pink sea fan cowrie (Simnia patula) is another rare species that is extremely difficult to find due to its small size and near perfect camouflage on its host. Nikon D100, L&M Titan housing, 105mm micro, Inon Quad flash, ISO 200 f25 1/125.

closely on these sea fans and you will find numerous sea fan nudibranchs (*Tritonia nilsodneri*) and their neat spirals of eggs in the spring time. With a little luck you may also find the rare sea fan anemone (*Amphianthus dohrnii*) which consumes the polyps over a small area of the sea fan and clings to the branch in small colonies. Further luck may also reveal the sea fan cowrie (*Simnia patula*) which also feeds on the polyps and has a smart striped livery. All three species make

excellent macro subjects but you may need an additional wet lens to capture the nudibranchs.

The British spiny lobster, or crawfish, was all but fished out in the late 1970's once commercial fishing fleets targeted them. They are now beginning to make a slow comeback in the region (don't tell the fishermen though!) and we have seen a number of juveniles over the past couple of seasons. Having found one on the first survey is yet further evidence that the



Soft corals (Dead Men's fingers) are abundant on the Manacles reefs with striking colour contrasts between the red and white varieties. Nikon D7100, Subal ND7100 housing, 10-17mm FE zoom, Inon Z240 flash guns, ISO 250 f9 1/30.

MCZ status of the Manacles area is more than justified.

So if this news stirs you to opposition then please visit the websites listed below and add your support to the petitions and comments and if you visit the area to dive then make sure to include the Manacles to sample the spectacular topography and marine life for yourself.

Mark Webster
www.photec.co.uk



Don't settle for 2nd best



Film - No Filter No
White Balance



Digital - No Filter Manual
White Balance



Magic Filter Manual
White Balance

Digital cameras have opened up new possibilities to underwater photographers. For available light photography manual white balance is an invaluable tool for restoring colours. But when you use it without a filter you are not making the most of the technique. You're doing all the hard work without reaping the full rewards. These three photos are all taken of the same wreck in the Red Sea. The left hand image was taken on slide film, which rendered the scene completely blue. The middle image is taken with a digital SLR without a filter, using manual white balance. The white balance has brought out some of the colour of the wreck, but it has also sucked all the blue out of the water behind the wreck, making it almost grey. The right hand image is taken with the same digital camera and lens, but this time using an original Magic Filter. The filter attenuates blue light meaning that the colours of the wreck are brought out and it stands out from the background water, which is recorded as an accurate blue.

www.magic-filters.com