

Lochcarron

by Peter Rowlands

I wish I would ask more questions when I'm told about a possible diving trip. It started with Charlie Hood inviting me on an Iceland jaunt and forgot to tell me the water was 2°C and then Dan Bolt and Terry Griffiths told me about sea loch diving in Scotland but omitted to say how far it was and that it would be shore diving.

And so it was that in April this year I made the 12 hour drive to the top of England and then almost to the top of Scotland to arrive in the village of Lochcarron to rendezvous with Messrs D&T who had been up here several years running and, now that my body is slowly recovering, I can fully understand why.

My favourite film of all time is Local Hero and the star of the movie is the fictional fishing village of Furness with its pub. There are several similarities between 'Furness' and Lochcarron and, believe it or not, I was booked to stay in the pub for 4 nights! What a great start.

The Lochcarron Hotel is a good honest dwelling house that provides a warm welcome with basic, comfortable accommodation, above average pub grub and well kept local beers; if they are still offering pizzas, snap them up. Delicious.

Well fed, watered and slept, the first morning dawned a bit grey and windy. We had decided to concentrate on Lochcarron sites but there are others a little further away which offer a different variety of subjects and landscapes but slightly deeper. The first dive was off the launching slip at Stromeferry into about 15 metres of water with dead mens finger strewn walls and a brittle star carpeted



The slip at Stromeferry. iPhone 6 panorama.

The seabed at 15 metres was carpeted with brittle stars, anemones and dead mens fingers. I even spotted a nudibranch without any help but don't know it's Latin name. Panasonic GX7 in a Nauticam housing, Olympus 8mm F1.8 lens, FIT dome. Available light. Greenwater Magic filter. 1/60th @ F4. ISO 500



sea bed. Actually Strome ferry should really be renamed Strome because the ferry stopped running in 1970 and there is a local tourist must see road sign indicating the direction to the Strome Ferry followed by (no ferry)!

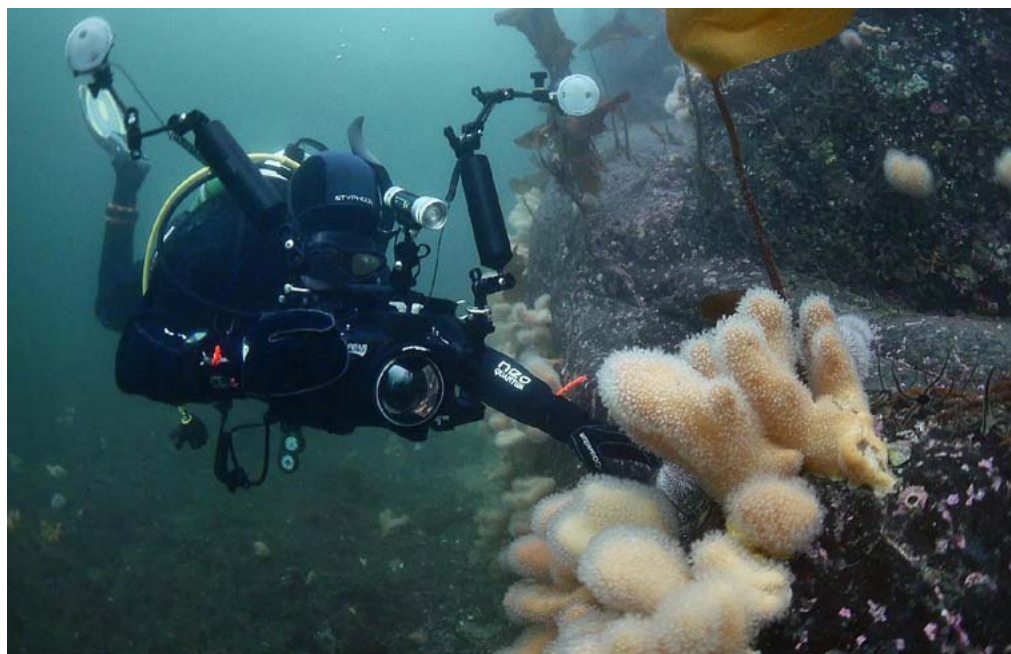
Fortunately the loading slip still remains and provides comparatively easy water entry. Now the terms comparatively easy and shore diving, to me, don't go together; overseas I am a liveaboard fan and in the UK I have the luxury of the good ship MV Magic. Kitting up and walking down to the entry point is no big distance but it is still quite physical and the final struggle, for me, is putting



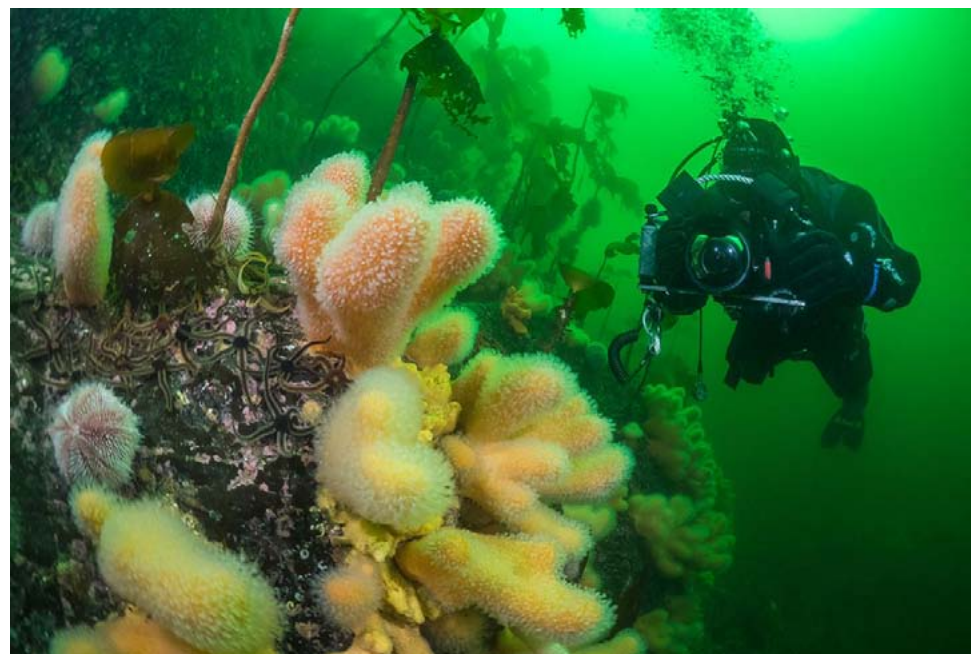
The scenery is beautiful. The outdoor clothing models, less so. iPhone 6 panorama.

Two shots taken at the same time using different techniques and they illustrate very well the different results achieved by shooting with a filter and available light (left) and a strobe lit shot (right)

(Left) My shot of Dan photographing dead mens fingers. Panasonic GX7 in a Nauticam housing, Olympus 8mm F1.8 lens, FIT dome. Available light. Greenwater Magic filter. 1/50th @ F1.8. ISO 1000



(Right) Dan's shot of me shooting the same Dead Mens Fingers. Olympus EM-1 in an Aquatica housing with dual Sea & Sea strobes. 1/80th @ F3.5. ISO640



on my fins. Fortunately I am not blessed with the longest of legs so you would have thought that being nearer to my feet than most would have made it easier but no. The combination of a less elastic body these days clad in a 5mm rigid drysuit and hindered by last night's steak and ale pie with chips meant I had to inelegantly use Dan or Terry as a leaning post. They on the other hand didn't need me. They simply waded into the water and, with a well balanced quick one two movement, were off. If I was to try that unaided I might get one fin on and would probably have to conduct the dive like that or drown in the attempt to don the second one.

All of this physicality fades away as you follow the wall round. The conditions here are very tidal so you must get your timing right or face an exhausting swim if not. The shallows are quite keply down to about 10 metres but then the wall begins and you are greeted with a healthy reef festooned with colourful life. Compared to my usual Devon based sites this was much more like a scaled down version of Port Hardy in Canada. There was a freshness and healthy-ness to everything. That freshness extended to the water temperature which was around 8°C! The trick of warming up your gloves with hot water from a flask helped extend the dive but after 40 minutes my hands were cold but still working.

We were not blessed with the best of viz, I'm told. Usually 10 metres and clear is the norm but we were met with a silty 5 metres at best but still very 'doable'.

The second dive is known as Conservation Bay. Dan and Terry were a bit economical about the 200 yard slog from the car park to the water's edge. In truth I think they are both part mountain goat whereas I am mostly honey monster; however splitting it into two journeys helped fill up the in



Even a prawn portrait is possible with a full frame fisheye lens. For some reason Terry decided to do the dive with just one leg. Panasonic GX7 in a Nauticam housing, Olympus 8mm F1.8 lens, FIT dome. Available light. Greenwater Magic filter. 1/80th @ F2.5. ISO 200.

between dive time and in the end it wasn't as bad as it first looked.

Dive-wise it is not much different to Stromeferry slip because it is just round the corner but there seemed to be much more crustacean life here. Also I am not a good nudibranch spotter but D&T are aficionados and they rave about these sites. They would surface from each dive and most of the initial conversation was mostly in Latin.

The drive back to the hotel nearly always included a stop at the Tea Room where a pot of hot brew had to be accompanied by a plate of something sticky, sugary or chocolaty and preferably all three. The bottles were filled by a local diver who has a compressor (obviously) but I

never actually met him. He had a day job and if he wasn't home the bottles were just left filled in his garden. So trustworthy and refreshing.

With such tidal waters the two dives a day either meant two in the morning or two in the afternoon if you get my drift (pun intended) so this gave plenty of relaxation time to soak in the atmosphere and live at a more leisurely pace. The first two days were grey and windy but the third dawned bright, calm and sunny. Naturally this was when we took all of the land photos which always shows Scotland in its best, but not really normal, light. The surrounding scenery is stunning and fortunately the nearby honey pot of Skye keeps Lochcarron with a feeling of being original, normal



Crustaceans were plentiful. Panasonic GX7 in a Nauticam housing, Olympus 8mm F1.8 lens, FIT dome. Available light. Greenwater Magic filter. 1/80th @ F2. ISO 200.

and, as a result, very charming although I am sure that the winters will be hard and long.

The local shop is right next door to the Hotel and, as local shops do nowadays, they sell most everything you need including half wooden barrels which I needed to buy for my wife as a present for her to plant up with something pretty. It was £14 and I offered a Scottish £20 note. Now Scotland and England are two neighbours with the same currency but differently printed notes. The result is that most shops in England aren't keen to take 'foreign' Scottish notes and vice versa. "Sorry about this," said the man behind the till. I just assumed he meant that he had no £5 notes and would have to give me my £6 change all in £1 coins. It was only when he gave me an English £5 note that I realised what he meant! "That's nae bother" I said in my best Scottish accent and walked out with my barrel.



2 iPhone panoramas. Both spoilt by Dan Bolt.



Leaving Lochcarron was like the final scene from Local Hero which, if you haven't seen the movie, will mean absolutely nothing but, if you have, I look back on my few days here with fond memories, aching limbs and with an urge to ring the local phone box when I got home to find out how everyone is.

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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.

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