

## Diving the Costa Brava and The Medes Islands.

Having planned this trip for some months, it all started to come together when we all met up early in the morning of May 7<sup>th</sup> at Liverpool's John Lennon airport.

Ian Bennett, Steve Mills, Alan Durbin, Rob Edwards, Steve Barnes and Tony Fitz boarded their Easy jet flight and headed for Spain's Costa Brava coast. On landing at Barcelona we were met by Ian, the co-owner of [www.fleetdive.com](http://www.fleetdive.com), and proceeded to load up the seven-seat Chrysler Voyager that comes as part of the package and is there for you as a self-drive.

Having arrived at our marina based villa accommodation we got all of our kit and baggage sorted out and then checked out the 8m RIB that is also a self-drive moored at the rear of the property. The temptation was too much, so within the hour we loaded the RIB and set off to do a shallow reef dive to the north of Rosas town at Cap d'Greus. At a max of 10m this was a very nice start to the trip, with a long reef full of all sorts of critters and a chance to check out everything before the cool stuff started.



Day one was another early start as we headed out of the canal system of the marina at Santa Margarita. Heading south this time, our destination was just short of L'Estartit, a resort town tucked away beneath a towering backdrop of



steep hills. Our first dive at Punta Salines was to reveal what this part of Spain can offer to us divers. This dive started by dropping down an undulating boulder slope with some fantastic soft corals of all colours and many fish species. This dive got even better when we reached a massive arched sea cave with a sandy bottom and some unusual anemone deeper into the

cave. Some of the canyons in this area are big with gorgonians everywhere you look.

After having lunch in the Marina at L'Estartit, we dropped in at Cap d'Oultrera, a natural arch formed out of the cliff face above water and opening up to a boulder field below the waves. Heading round the corner to the seaward side the dive revealed deep gullies and a steep drop-off going down to 38m very quickly. There was a profusion of all the many fish species found in these waters and again gorgonians covered the walls along with colorful soft corals. This area was teeming with orange Anthea fish, common in the waters of the Red Sea and a nice surprise here in the Med.



The next morning we loaded up fresh cylinders and set course for The Medes Islands. The islands are a mile offshore from L'Estartit and are part of a marine reserve. A quick visit into L'Estartit to register at the port office to dive the islands was required and with this sorted we dashed back across the short distance to our first dive of the day at Vaca cave. This dive started with a decent to 18m and a five-minute swim to the entrance. Once into the entrance of this massive sea cave the exit became visible in front of us. Dropping through the cave we exited into a boulder-strewn area, some of which were literally as big as houses.



As we started to explore this area we were joined by some very large grouper. These fish are famed in and around the Medes Islands dive sites and are very inquisitive when they see divers. This site drops off to about 35m. After swimming around the shear walls we made our way back to the boat. All boats have to be on a mooring allocated to you when

registering for the day's diving.

The GPS on The Conqueror (Fleet dives 8m RIB) has all the marks for the sites preloaded.

The second dive of the day saw us dive the famous Dolphin cave, with its bronze dolphin standing at the exit, fixed there some years ago. Again we encountered large grouper and many other fish including octopus. Having returned through

the cave we turned left and swam along a very nice wall. The visibility here went out to over 15 m at times and this made for a stunning dive.



A 45-minute ride brought us back to the marina at Santa Margarita and with the boat put to bed and a quick run up for cylinder fills, all the guys set off for a well earned meal and a drink in one of the many good restaurants to be found nearby.

Day three saw us set off north to yet another recommended area. Centered around the Cala Jon Colls area we dropped the first wave in at La Pisina, a reef starting offshore at about 25m and ascending up and into a gully area inshore and finishing once again in a tall cave. This was a very easy dive with lots to see and little current to worry about.

After lunch in Cala Jon Colls, at the secluded hotel of the same name, our RIB was put on a safe mooring here for us at no charge and returned to the beach on our departure. Very civilized, I must say.

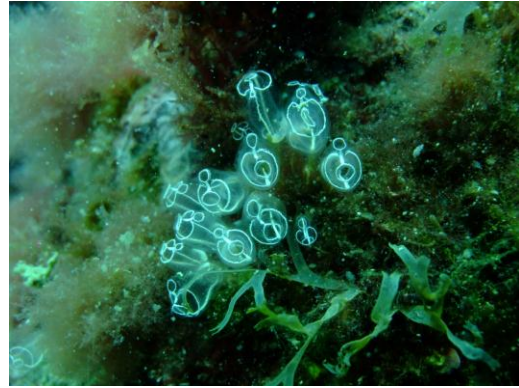
Dive two saw us head back around the headland towards home and clip onto a buoy at El Gat. This site is exposed to swell and quite a lot of local boat traffic, having said that it is well worth a visit. Dropping in on the mooring and descending to 28m we met quite a large “ling” hanging around in a gully. This site, as you swim up a boulder wall, is full of deep cut gullies and reef outcrops. There are fish everywhere and again no shortage of gorgonians and anemones. The reef finally gives out to sheer cliff walls, where we finished the dive and did our safety stops.



Day four of five saw us up with the larks once more and a return to The Medes Islands. On our journey across the bay we took the opportunity to check out some of the marks in the GPS and confirm the Lat and Longs.



Cala Farriol started out quite ordinarily at first as we went along a sloping reef that curved around to the left. At this point the dive came alive with some amazing gorgonians covering the walls. The reef also started to produce a lot of nice fish and there were many nice holes with plenty of critters lurking inside for us to see.



The second dive of the day took us back to Vaca Cave on the Medes Islands. This dive produced the most colourful moray eel seen so far on the trip with stunning blue markings. Vaca Cave again produced the goods with a nice bumble up the rocky slopes of these great islands.

The final day had arrived too soon, but not to worry as it was to prove a belter.

Again we headed north past Rosas harbour to check out a site that would take us further north than we had ventured so far. The first wave went in at a small island, which turned out to be mostly sea grass and not much else. We decided to move further north once more to a seamount called "Massa D'ors". The sonar gave us depths of 66m, some 200mtrs off shore. We dropped in a little closer at 23m and began to drop down a steep incline to around 40m. The visibility here was excellent at around 20m. Working our way back through huge boulder fields and many fish species, we came to a wall covered in gorgonians of all different colours. Here we found scorpion fish with cleaner wrasse in attendance.

The dive ended with some deco stops then a short journey back to Cala Jon Colls for lunch on the beach.



With local advice we headed south to our final dive of the trip.

Trencat 1 and 2 is a reef system off shore in a busy part as far as boat traffic is concerned. That apart, at a depth of 19 m this reef system, with swim throughs and gullies, is a wonderful dive site. Dropping in at Trencat 2 the aim is to

swim west keeping close to the reef and end up at Trencat 1. The place is teeming with life and with depths at the end of the dive at around 9 m; one hour dive times are not out of the question.

I cannot recommend this particular holiday enough. For fans of RIB diving and being able to make your own choice of dive site on what day you prefer, this type of self-drive diving is excellent value for money. Many thanks to Ian and family for all you did for us and a big thanks to Gary for sorting out all the basics in the UK.

Tony Fitz (BSAC Branch 5)