

Mersey life

A year in the life of a dive club

For many UK dive clubs, 2012 was the dive season that 'almost was'. Against a backdrop of hastily rearranged dive trips, opportunistic day dives and 'consolation' trips to inland sites, photographer and BSAC Dive Leader **Elaine White** followed her branch, Merseyside SAC, for 12 months to record a photographic diary of its year.

In early 2012 I was approached by SCUBA with a project – to document a 'typical' year in the life of a BSAC dive club. My club, Merseyside SAC – or Branch 5 as it is also proudly known – is one of the oldest dive clubs in the UK, set up within a year of the British Sub-Aqua Club forming way back in 1953.

Active, passionate about UK diving and ever-resourceful, Branch 5 would certainly make an ideal case study for UK diving... even if the weather wasn't quite willing to play ball.

Unfortunately, as for many clubs, Merseyside's diving throughout 2012 was hampered by the unpredictable weather and the club saw many trips and club dives cancelled or postponed, including trips to Weymouth, Plymouth and Skye. We also had several weekend trips to Anglesey – our dive weekend stalwart – blown or washed out.

But you simply can't keep a good branch down and for a dive club that would be happy to 'dive in a muddy puddle', where there's a will there's always a way... plus plenty of training, planning and socialising to keep us entertained!

Here's how we did it...



JANUARY 2012

...and we start the year with an ending. 2012 started a little bit different this year, holding our annual Dinner Dance in January after it had to be cancelled at the end of 2011 due to major gas problems in the area. 2011 Trainee of the Year Phil Brogan (left) and Alan Durbin, Diver of the Year (right) being congratulated by Alistair Reynolds, Training Officer.

FEBRUARY 2012



Winter practice is snow joke! A trip down to Stoney Cove in February for (left to right) Alan Durbin, Martin Campbell and Jeff Jones, proved more tricky than expected. Nothing to do with the diving, but the roads, covered in snow and thick fog that would have made many turn around and go straight back to bed. But not our boys!

MARCH 2012

🟢 Steve Mills, briefing trainee Alan Higerson



🟢 Alan Higerson carrying out his mask removal drill



🟢 March and the club is asked to be involved in a BSAC audit by the European Underwater Federation, where inspectors observed a Nitrox Workshop and a Gas Blending course, helping to keep the BSAC – EUF Accreditation. EUF auditors Stefan Sholtz and Don McGlinchey being shown the mix gas blending bank in the Boathouse.

Our training pool is literally over the road from our clubhouse and after a short winter lull, the Thursday club night was buzzing with trainees brushing up on their skills, trying to get that Ocean Diver Qualification in time for the up and coming dive season



🟢 The club is always on the look-out for potential new members, offering try dives in the pool on Thursday evenings. Tony Fitzpatrick, 2012 Chairman, taking young Beth in for her first underwater experience



APRIL 2012

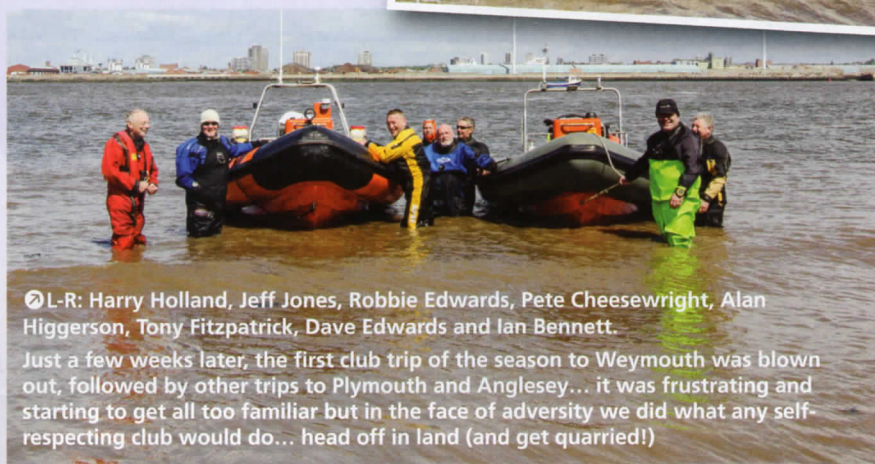
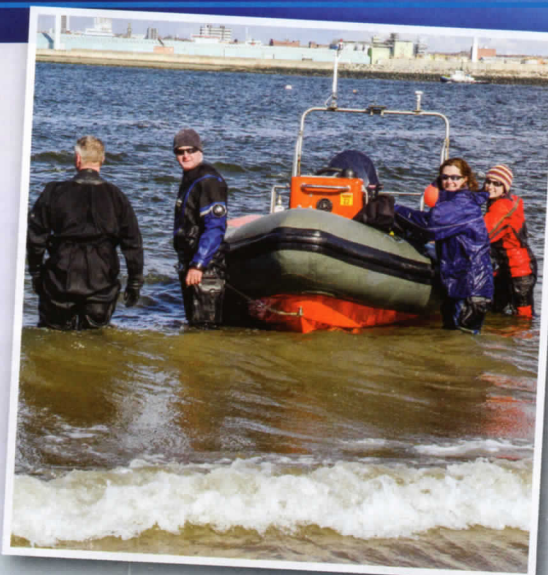
For the last few years April and May had proved to be cracking months weather-wise and as April 2012 arrived, the omens were boding well once again.



✔ Fine tuning and checking any new kit out before the dive season arrives calls for a trip to Capernwray. With ice still on the ground, newly qualified Sports Diver Katie Foulkes makes any final adjustments before her dive

➔ The following weekend and it's here – the first club sea dive of the year. The RIBs are launched in New Brighton, a five-minute drive down the road from the clubhouse

➔ L-R: Alan Durbin, Steve McElroy, Helen Tanzey and Katie Foulkes get ready for the 40 minute steam out to the City of Brussels, in Liverpool Bay



⌚ L-R: Harry Holland, Jeff Jones, Robbie Edwards, Pete Cheesewright, Alan Higgerson, Tony Fitzpatrick, Dave Edwards and Ian Bennett.

Just a few weeks later, the first club trip of the season to Weymouth was blown out, followed by other trips to Plymouth and Anglesey... it was frustrating and starting to get all too familiar but in the face of adversity we did what any self-respecting club would do... head off in land (and get quarried!)

MAY 2012

⬇ Before flying off on a club holiday in the Red Sea, the group decide to have a pre-trip get together, but not wanting to miss out, other members from the branch invite themselves along, turning it into a club social evening of curry, drinks and plenty of dive stories



JULY 2012

➡ Warm weather upon us in July, but not much in the way of sea diving due to the wrong wind directions gives the members chance to get some Dive Leader training in. Heading off to Eccleston Delph Dive Centre, Mike Cleary and Dean Dunning run through the dive plan with Alistair



⬇ No wind at last and it's back out to Liverpool Bay with one of the RIBs for a dive on SS Dublin. With the offshore rig in the background and flat calm water, Stu Langley and Tony Fitz give the final OK before descending down the shotline.



⬆ Returning back to the boat Alan, Martin and Ian wait to get back onboard

➡ End of July and the weather is still behaving, so four of the girls venture down to Swanage for a relaxed weekend of diving. One of the dives was on the Fleur d Lys, where they take a look at the propeller



AUGUST 2012

...and the weather is finally with us, and a great trip to Pembroke gets underway, with the two club boats plus a member's own RIB. Not surprisingly it was a popular trip!



➡ Fun on the RIB as a dive weekend finally gets underway, setting off for a dive on the Lucy (L-R) Harry Holland, Pete Cheesewright, Steve McElroy, Sue Kidds, John Dunn



➡ Ian Bennett checking out a sea urchin



➡ Rowan Joyce all set for his first UK sea dive – the smile says it all!

➡ Nik Carney, who was also on his first UK sea dive, swims through the kelp

SEPTEMBER 2012

Autumn arrives and it's back to good old Capernwray for a fun day's diving.

🕒 Karolina Zaleska and Helen Tanzey doing their buddy checks before their dive



🕒 Karolina can't resist horsing around



OCTOBER 2012

A late season weekend, this time to Weymouth on board Skin Deep. The trip was originally planned for earlier in the year – another one scuppered by the weather – but we managed to re-arrange for this later date

🕒 The viz wasn't the best and the water was very dark – you can just about see Steve on the wreck Moindart

🕒 Steve Boulton, Steve Palmer and Dave Smith enjoy a well-earned cuppa at the end of a day's diving on the Pomeranian



🕒 Jan Heath kitting up for the dive with Steve McElroy



NOVEMBER 2012

Squeezing in yet more training at Capernwray before the year's end



Alan Higgerson – 2012 Trainee of the Year – now keen to get on with his Sports Diver running through navigation skills with Diving Officer Steve McElroy



Club members in-between dives on a bright but very chilly November's day. L-R: Andy Woodside, Sue Kidds, Helen Tanzey, Martin Campbell, Pete Cheesewright, Alan Durbin, Nik Carney, Jeff Jones, John Taylor, and Paul Campbell

DECEMBER 2012

Whether it's diving, training or socialising, there is always something going on at Branch 5 and when you have your very own bar, well it would be rude not to raise a glass or two to a good day!

A typical Thursday night at the clubhouse. We're a friendly bunch... even past member Sue Clayton can't resist coming to see us on a visit from her home in Spain!

Time please – Training Officer Alistair Reynolds about to ring the bell to get the attention of members and call time on another good year in the life of Merseyside SAC. The weather may not have always been with us but the boats were launched, trips were delivered, training programmes completed and the challenges of UK diving not just overcome but thoroughly enjoyed... Here's to 2013!



BSAC
Dive with friends

Based in Wallasey, Wirral near to the shores of the River Mersey, Merseyside SAC was founded back in 1954 as one of the very first dive clubs of BSAC. Well-established with extensive facilities including a boathouse, training pool, two RIBs and its own pub, Merseyside has over 90 members, with more than 70 active divers, from trainees and Ocean Divers through to National Instructors and technical divers. For more information: www.merseydivers.com