

ARRAN TRIP AUGUST

DATES Mon 2/3/4 th august 2021.

[final day ,5th, was cancelled due to heavy rain and thick fog].

DIVE CHARTER Wreckspeditions provided the dive charter for 6 divers [at present with covid restrictions, normally 8 divers max]. Skipper Jason Coles was fully informed and experienced in his knowledge of the sites and we agreed on his best choice, considering the conditions of the day, taking account of our divers' qualifications. [£250, minus refund for the cancelled day]

DIVERS Kathleen, David, Heather, Sue and Jo Beaton [from Dalriada BSAC], Madog couldn't make it in the end.

ACCOMODATION Arran Sleep Huts [c£40 per night] and Middleton Campsite, both are in Lamlash, the main village on Arran and about 4 miles south of Brodick where the ferry takes you in to.

TRAVEL To Ardrossan on the mainland to Brodick on Arran. CalMac ferries booked about one month in advance. £40 -£75 return depending on vehicle size and passengers.

We joined Wreckspeditions for a four-day ABSAC dive trip with two dives each day, it was the first time diving with them. Jason Coles skipper [also a BSAC DL] was incredibly helpful and informative. He took the usual 'trachle' out of RIB diving by helping with heavy lifting and by having the boat designed in such an ergonomic way, particularly getting back into the boat via a rigid ladder and platform. The daily supply of homemade biscuits and hot drinks also helped.

The diving was excellent scenic diving including some creatures I had not seen before such as a swimming 'highland dancer' sea slug, or rarely seen e.g., several swimming feather stars, greater pipefish, and a harbour crab creakily shedding its shell like taking off a bonnet. Also seen were ling and dogfish and sholes of juvenile pollock and larger wrasse, poor cod, leopard spotted gobies and goldsinny. David and Heather spotted octopus and conger eels. Several variants of large scorpion fish and dragonet were spotted and every type of crab: many mating or enjoying a buffet dinner of a jellyfish, large common lobsters and squat lobsters. Nudibranch- polycera and janolus, highland dancers and their delicate coiled eggs. Walls encrusted with elegant anemones but also jewel, plumose, cup corals, daisy and dahlia. Candy striped worms and eyelash worms too. One dive included some old wreckage of the Elida 1890, but we only found a few long rusty 'bits and David found a nail [c1880's]. None of the dives were particularly deep although we did get to 27 metres on the stunning 'Rorairna reef' dive off Pladda island in our quest for rare flame shells. Dives were in the 10-25 metre depth range. The 'Janolus reef' was a flat, square profile, bank, which meant a minute or two of deco was accumulated over a 42 minute, 23 metre dive. 'Fullerton rock' was another notably enjoyable dive with a beautiful wall with crevasses full of marine-life like a block of underwater flats, leading into boulders then sandy bottom alive with crustaceans, pipefish etc. The Marine Protected Area [MPA] provided the 'NO-Take zone' dive which was a revelation because of the size and biodiversity present in the sea-life of this protected area. It was here I saw a dome shaped, warty sea slug [Highland Dancer] about the size of a large hand swimming in no particular direction about two metres above my head, it was upside down with its mantle or 'skirt' hanging underneath it and having a foot/tube, acting like a rudder, a comic and rare sight. We also visited the Holy Isle in Lamlash bay, enroute to Pladda island for the Rorairna reef dive for a toilet/lunch stop. This has been a site of worship since the early Christians and currently an active religious retreat with an atmosphere all its own.

We found Wreckspeditions to be a professional, safety and environment conscious operation who helped to make enjoyable, easy diving. After the first dive Jason had recognised all our dive kit and where to put it on the boat to help organise the diving. We would also recommend a visit to COAST shop/education centre at Lamlash if you are interested in marine life and conservation. COAST are a charity group of volunteers who also supplied the air from their compressor, donations at £5 per fill to COAST [Community of Arran Seabed Trust]. Also thanks to Jo for sharing her extensive knowledge of and enthusiasm for marine life.

Apart from the last diving day, which was cancelled due to fog, we had scorching sunny weather. There are plenty of places to eat and drink, or you can just as easily self-cater.

On the last non-diving day, I explored the beautiful island a bit and there are several interesting places to visit and good shops. Kings Cave was worth the walk with early Christian carvings on the walls there, as were the stone circles visited by Heather. The distillery, cheese shop, outdoor clothing shop and Arran Heritage Museum are good also.

All in all, it was a cracking trip - particularly if you are interested in marine life.

Kathleen, organiser.

Photos and footage to follow.