

ULSAC Trip Planning Meeting, December 2007

Absence:

Nick and Fitz both phoned to say they have ideas but couldn't attend the meeting.
Dan is ill but might want to organise a trip.
Alyn is absent but interested in organising a trip.

Provisional timetable:

Date		Organisers	Destination
April	12-13	Bugs and Bonnie	Portland
	26-27	Suzie	
May	3-5	Raider	
	24-26	Nick	
June	14-15	Fitz	Portland?
	28-29	Ali G and Marcus	West Bay
July	12-13	Ivan	
	26-27	Ali B	
August	9-16	Martin, Jim, Anjali	Mull
	23-24	Anjali, Zoe	Farnes
September	6-7	Dave	
Sept-Oct	?-?	Martin, Jim	Gozo
October	25-26	Free	

Summer Trips:

Martin, Jim and Anjali have organised two 1-week trips:

August 9th – 16th Mull, Scotland

The club used to dive here a lot; it'll be nice to go back for the 50th year. If it's joined to a trip in Clyde, it could become a 2-week trip. However, Martin felt that a 2-week trip now might dissuade people from going to Gozo. We also don't have volunteers to run a trip to Clyde, so the two-week version will be shelved for now. Estimated cost for the week in Mull is £300

Mid-September – mid-October Gozo, off Malta [exact dates will be chosen to miss exams].

Gozo is a smallish, quiet island off Malta. All diving is expected to be by shore-entry but day-charter vessels are available if required.

If Marcus comes on the Gozo trip, we could apply for the BSAC expedition grant. However, it's a lot of paperwork and the deadline is 31st December. Gozo will be all shore diving, although it will be possible to day charter a boat if people want to. Estimated cost is £350

General Discussion:

NB: No members of the boat team were able to attend this meeting, so the following discussion did not include their opinions. The matter will be discussed with the boat team before a final decision is reached.

Please also note that for clarity and brevity I've tried to sort everyone's points from this long discussion by category, not chronology. So the following is not a straight transcript but does contain everyone's points and should be an easier read.¹

¹ Eric Morecombe would say, "All the right words, but not necessarily in the right order".

As discussed in previous committee meetings, towing the boats is often awkward to arrange for trips, due to the considerable time and money it takes to get a towing licence. Our (in)ability to move the boats is a potential limiting factor to prevent us from taking them to dive. As it is, members with a towing licence are often asked to tow for very long distances when tired, which is an obvious safety concern. The trip to the south of France was an extreme example of this.

Nathan's suggested solution is to base the boats closer to potential diving sites, e.g. at a campsite in Portland. By building up a relationship with the site owners, we could get permission to park the boats on pitches there and possibly arrange some sort of regular users' discount. When only one tower is available on a diving weekend, the boats can easily be moved to a nearby site in two short trips. The result is that we can still dive from both boats on a weekend when only one tower is available. When two towers are available the boats can be taken further afield as usual, albeit from a different starting point.

This strategy is also a partial solution to our potential problems at the Boathouse. However, that is not the main purpose of the idea.

Boat maintenance could be a big problem with this approach. The boat team regularly work on both boats between trips; asking them to visit a new site in (e.g.) Portland to make repairs is unreasonable. However, this could be minimised: as each trip will always have at least one tower, if a boat develops a serious fault it can be brought back to the boathouse at the end of the trip. For less urgent work, each boat could be periodically returned to the boathouse by arrangement with the boat team. This strategy seems plausible, but could not accommodate the scenario of both boats requiring urgent work after a weekend when only one tower is available. The boat team's input will be essential here.

Ocean Divers attended most (all?) of our trips this summer. Finding sites suitable for ODs within a relatively restricted area would severely restrict the sites we have to choose from. This could be overcome by having separate trips for ODs and more qualified divers. However, we're primarily a training club and this would limit trainees' opportunities to dive.

Conversely, we have some more experienced members who get few opportunities for more challenging dives. Running separate weekends for ODs and more qualified divers could lead to loss of divers (at all levels) and create the feeling that we're a two-tier club. This could also require trainers to attend put in more time and money. Perhaps by running dedicated OD training weekends, all ODs could be trained to SD level early in the season, thereby increasing flexibility later?

Another alternative is to run some 3-day weekends: stick the ODs (and trainers) in on the first day to get qualified, and then joined by the others.

We could **try running an OD weekend in April**? If timed to avoid undergrad exams, it could be good to qualify the first batch of keen ODs.

Limiting the club's range to have all or most of our diving within driving distance of Portland isn't necessarily a bad thing. The area has a rich variety of diving, and this would give us an in-depth knowledge of the area. However, variety is a bonus and people like specific sites which they might have to forgo. Nathan reminded us that this approach doesn't limit diving to a base: the boats can always be moved. But how often would people bother to make the extra effort to move to a different site?

Gradual migration around the coast has been used in previous years. After each weekend the boats were left in a suitable site to be collected for the next trip. This required careful planning but worked.

A compromise between these approaches could be to do 2-3 consecutive trips in the same area, e.g. one weekend in Portland then the next in West Bay. Boats would then be moved back to the boathouse or on to the next site. This could be tried in April when ODs have exams.

We need to remember that the boats are tools for diving, not ends in themselves. However, if we're seen not to be using the boats ULU could conclude that we need less money for their upkeep.

Michelle and Anjali will check the price of storing a boat at a campsite, and our insurer's conditions for boat storage, respectively.