

ULSAC West Bay Trip Report Form 2007

Date	20 th – 22 th of July 2007	<input type="checkbox"/> Springs <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Neaps
Venue	West Bay	
Marshal	Anjali Shah	
	Michelle Kim (overseeing)	
Number of People	20	
People on the trip	Anjali Shah, Michelle Kim, Marcus Allen, Zoe Wardley, Nathan Long, Mark Bell, Anthony Chaddock, Dan Morris, Vicki Lees, Jer Davey, Sarah Cant, Eric Lucas, Tom Roberts, Ruth Brown, Ali Gaudion, Susie Fisher, Kamila Tomaszewska, Bugs, Sarah Tuck and Shalini Goel.	
Accommodation	Caravans (they also own a campground 5 minutes walk from West Bay harbour – for weekends when torrential rain and storms are not predicted!) www.gorselands.co.uk	
Address	Gorselands, West Bexington-on-sea, Dorchester, West Dorset. DT2 9DJ	
Telephone Number	01308 897 232	
Cost	£150 per 6-person caravan	
Notes	Very friendly owners. Caravan site was 20 minutes drive from West Bay harbour. A big pub, the Bull Inn, which served food was 5 minutes walking distance from the caravan site. There was no phone reception in the caravan park, but it could be obtained 5 minutes up the road and at the pub.	
Launch Site	<p>West Bay slip</p> <p>A £6 million shiny development, which we like a lot. Can launch at all states of the tide. Each boat costs £12 to launch. They have boat/kit washing facilities and a power-wash option for a small charge.</p> <p>Nice concrete area by the slip to keep trailers and kit up. There are many cheap eateries behind the kitting-up area, some of whom were kind enough to fill our water bottles. Toilets were a 5min walk away, past the eateries and straight over the mini-roundabout.</p> <p>The car park is technically short stay (max 3 hours), but they are happy for you to pay for the day in one go, with the purchase of multiple tickets for one vehicle.</p>	
Nearest coastguard	Nearest coastguard is Portland 01305 760 439	
Air Shop	West Bay Diving Services - very friendly, helpful people who filled our tanks, even when late. Please call in advance and warn them of likely timings. They also suggested good, close alternative dive sites.	
Telephone number	01308 421 800	
Van Hire	H & H van hire Kentish town 020 7916 6616 (£135) The ULSAC long-wheeled based transit van.	
MPV hire from ULU	£15 per day and 20 pence per mile	

Dive 1	
Site:	Baygitano wreck
Max depth:	23m
GPS Marks:	Divernet: 50 41.78N, 02 56.08W Dive Dorset: 50 41.76N, 02 55.97W Aerodivers trip report - 50 41.79 N 02 56.07 W Marks for the bow and boilers are in the big GPS.
Website info:	http://www.divernet.com/wrecks/
Brief description:	World War 1 wreck sunk on 18 March 1918. A British 3,703-ton steam collier – 18-23 metres. Quite broken up on gravel seabed. Everyone loved this wreck because we saw hundreds of fish and a few conger eels in the boilers too. One report of a free-swimming conger – so watch out!

Dive 2	
Site:	The Ram
Max depth:	7-16m
GPS Marks:	Dive Dorset: 50 41.95N, 02 45.50W
Website info:	N/A
Brief description:	<p>The majority of the group did not go down the shot line and descended to a sandy bottom at 16 metres. Even on the sandy bottom a few hermit crabs were seen and an undulate ray and a cuttlefish were spotted by the observant Mark Bell.</p> <p>The few who did descend on the shot to 10 metres had a much better time as described by Ruth.</p> <p>The Ram Reef by Ruth Brown</p> <p>This is a fairly large expanse of rocky reef, diminishing to sand and gravel on its seaward side. Depth ranges from around 7 to 16 metres. After a moment of excitement on the boat, when Zoe's O-ring gave way (loud bang + violent hissing = frightened children) we descended the shot line in about 10m of water and started to look around. The reef was flat but rocky and many of the rocks were encrusted with bright yellow sponges. Visibility was reasonable at about 3 metres and there were plenty of fish around - mostly baby bib, too small to brave the shoals on the Baygitano. Other life included lots of big edible crabs, a moray eel peeking out of a hole and a flatfish pretending to be invisible on top of a rock. There was very little current so we swam around for a while in no particular direction, Zoe picked up some shells for the kids and we ascended after 24 minutes. A very pleasant dive.</p>

Dive 3	
Site:	The Baygitano wreck
Max depth:	23 metres
GPS marks:	Divernet: 50 41.78N, 02 56.08W Dive Dorset: 50 41.76N, 02 55.97W Aerodivers trip report - 50 41.79 N 02 56.07 W Marks for the bow and boilers are in the big GPS.
Website info:	http://www.divernet.com/wrecks/
Brief description	As above! Still hundreds of fish and the shot was on the boilers – so more rummaging and staring at the fish-life.

Dive 4	
Site:	High ground
Max depth:	From 5 metres on top, descending to 12 metres
GPS Marks:	50 42.50N; 02 47.80W Mark in the large GPS thanks to Michelle's efforts.
Brief description:	Less than a mile off Eype mouth, this is an extensive shallow, kelpy reef that is a favourite with local angling boats from West Bay. The most spectacular point to dive is the offshore southern boundary of the reef where a drop off occurs. Lots of crabs and lobsters live in the cracks of the drop off and again – quite a lot of fish to be seen. Yet again Mark Bell won the observation award by spotting a John Dory!

General Details
The weather forecasts predicting storms and floods gave us a worrying advance week, but we decided to push ahead and never regretted the decision. The trip was enjoyed by all and practice in diver separation drills, SMB use and learning about deco stops did not distract from the fantastic fish-life on most of the dives. An overall view of the trip is given below.

West Bay 2007 by Jer Davey

Refreshing the Met Office forecast webpage for Dorset on an hourly basis, the hopes of 20 ULSACers were not high for the prospect of diving in West Bay. Severe weather warnings and winds predicted up to force 7 looked set to destroy any chance of diving operations being held out of West Bay.

But perseverance and many crossed fingers took us down to some caravans on the Friday night. Sacrifices were made to Poseidon, in an attempt for him to solve our weather woes and to bring clear seas for us to explore.

Arising at a leisurely 7 o'clock on Saturday, we looked out across the flat calm water at the clear skies- already feeling the beating of the sun's rays upon our faces - had we somehow managed to dodge all of the flooding and storms and produce a glorious weekend for diving?

The answer turned out, to much satisfaction, to be yes.

Saturday's diving saw us adventure onto the Baygitano; a 3,073 tonne steamship that was torpedoed by UC-77 in March 1918 with all but two of the 37 crew members escaping successfully. Today she is quite broken up but still with a huge amount of structure to investigate, in particular the two massive boilers, which house much life. However it is not just the boilers that attract sea life..... the entire wreck is coated in schools and schools of different fish. Bib dance around you as you explore the wreck, whilst large pollack and cod can also be seen in shoals about the place. The inevitable and ever-present wrasse can be seen in high numbers too - in all three of the cuckoo, corkwing and ballan varieties. Above all of these are tonnes of giant conger eels. People were lucky enough to see the entire length of congers and occasional heads and tails poking out from various different parts of the wreck thrilled many a buddy pair - whilst underwater you could almost hear the number of people shrieking each time they saw one!

Saturday afternoon took us out east from West Bay where we attempted to find the Ram Reef. Not too sure whether anyone actually found it but in the main a sandy bottom was explored- although there were plenty of hermit crabs and the occasional plaice or cuttlefish to keep divers happy.

Following such a relaxed start we inevitably had a late finish to the day, which ended in a caravan debrief – something that has been missing from ULSAC trips for some time now!

Sunday started cloudy but soon developed into another glorious day down on the south coast. We couldn't believe our luck with the weather- Poseidon really had smiled upon us. So we made our way back out to the Baygitano for some more revelling amongst the myriad of fish on show. This is such a brilliant wreck and although it is slightly out of range for Ocean Divers- they do not miss out on much by staying a few metres above the wreck.

From the advice of the gents at the air shop we set off in search of a new site just west of our launch point called 'High Ground'. This was found since it appears to be a raised rocky patch (around 6m compared to bottoms around 12m) just off the coast. What a fantastic dive site this turned out to be, with plenty of enormous spider crabs hiding amongst the kelp forests as well as scallops, dogfish and even a John Dory (yes Andy.... a real John Dory). To the south of this rocky outcropping lies a bit of a drop off which leads to another sandy bottom that plays home to plaice and skate supposedly. Definitely a dive site to store in the GPS memory, methinks!

I think we all learnt quite a few things from this trip. We learnt that Mark is desperate to join Britney's mum and go live in a Winnebago. We also learnt that dive computers are good things to have with us when we get on the boat (Tom-Tom) and trying to understand the (sometimes flawed) logic that goes into making them work is a good thing (Wilma). Sun tan cream was decided to be a good thing as Vicki demonstrated with her campaign to look like a negative photo of a panda by the end of the season and Bugs' wife-beater tan line moving into even more epic proportions. One of the main things we learnt is that the Met Office clearly make up all their forecasts and not to believe them at all (although don't quote me on that).

Driving back to London, absolutely shattered after some brilliant diving (and from carrying the RIBs about without their jockey wheels!) no-one could believe how lucky we had been with the weather- especially compared to the July monsoons that seemed to be hitting the rest of the country.

Many thanks go to Anjali for organising the trip and all the boat drivers for putting up with such torrid sea conditions....not!