

NORTHERN UNDERWATER PHOTOGRAPHY GROUP
NUPG NEWSLETTER Issue #18, Apr2006 – May2006
SPRING ISSUE

NUPG Web Site: www.nupg.org.uk

Paul Kay winner of Apr'06 Image comp, Cold Water corals, with a superb shot of a Cup Coral from Ireland.



This Issue:

- Meeting Information
 - Meeting Dates
 - Meeting Reviews
- Reports & Handouts
 - **NUPG Winter 2006 Splash-In**
- Web Links

NUPG 2006 Winter Splash-In Results!!!!!!

Date for your Diary:

NEXT MEETING: AGM Monday May 15th 2006, Corbans, Hale Barns at 1930.

Editor: Tony Gilbert, e-mail: Info@Nupg.Org.uk, for the Editor ☺

MEETING DATES & EVENTS for your diary

Pass on the dates to your friends & colleagues who may fancy joining the club.

The Northern Underwater Photography Group

Contact information, meetings & events.

The NUPG meets regularly throughout the year to increase experience and knowledge of underwater photography. It's fun, informal, informative and fishy!

Date	Meeting place	Time	
Monday May 15 th 2006	Corbans, Hale Barns (A538/J6 M56, towards Altrincham & Hale)	19.30pm - 22.00pm	Annual General Meeting
Summer time	NUPG Summer Splash-In		

To contact or find out about NUPG, meetings and for further information,
See the NUPG Website www.nupg.org.uk

Note: Meetings usually start 1930 and finish at 2200 at the latest.

**NUPG 2006
SUMMER
SPLASH-IN**

**... is coming soon
(22nd July)**

watch this space

**... is coming soon
(22nd July)
watch this space
for details**

MEETING REVIEWS

March 6th 2006

The meeting tonight was quiet with around 14 members attending. We gave our guest speaker a very warm welcome, Jane Morgan, who had travelled up from London, some 4 hours away, with her colleague Gill McDonald. Both Jane & Gill work for DIVE magazine and are also members of BSoUP (British Society of Underwater Photographers).

Having had the food in Corbans a few times now, I must say it is of good quality, and it's worth trying to drop in for a for a bite beforehand, around 615pm and a chit-chat with fellow members, cos when the meeting starts there is usually only a small time to talk.

The image competition tonight was "Sharks, Rays, Dogfish that live on the sea bottom". Tony Gilbert gave a mini dive-destination talk on the Aran Islands. As with most meetings both slide projector and laptop are needed, and this was no exception, however a projector screen was not forthcoming! Luckily, the electronically operated one in the room sufficed, after some fiddling with beer crates to raise the projectors to the height of the screen bottom!

Tony took the meeting, along with Colin, Ken, & Gail, we started with the image competition.

Image Competition: "Sharks, Rays, Dogfish that live of the sea bottom"

Tonight was a first for some time in a while that only slides were posted, 6 to be precise, although Jane's talk images contained a couple of superb shots of guitar rays!

Thanks once again to Gail for doing the counting 😊

3rd: Ken Byrne, Blue spotted lagoon ray, Egyptian Red Sea

2nd: Tony Gilbert, Angel Shark, Lanzarote

1st: Jason Gregory, Dogfish, Mull Scotland

Well done to Jason, and all who entered. As all of these were slides, it's safe to assume they were all shot with Film SLR housed cameras.

1st Jason Gregory.

Jason was the winner and his UK entrant of a gaelic dogfish mulling it over in the Sound of Mull claimed the prize. The dogfish seemed quite at home sitting on the brittlestar bed!





2nd Tony Gilbert

Tony's angel shark was found in 2m of water just 3m off a brilliant white sand beach in Lanzarote. The shark and surrounds blend well together.

There was a (Max Bygraves) story behind it - of course! A snorkeller came down and tried to pull its tale, whilst he continued on resolutely to obtain this dappled full fish shot.

Nikon F90, Sea&Sea NX90 housing, Fuji Provia 100F, Nikon 20mm F2.8D/AF fixed lens, ambient light.

3rd Ken Byrne.

Ken's entry was that of a swimming blue spotted lagoon ray commonly found in the Red Sea, quite poignant for the main talk tonight. It knocked spots off some of the other contestants!



Guest Speaker: J A N E M O R G A N, Red Sea Photography

The Red Sea, a popular destination for many divers and familiar to all who were attending tonight's meeting. Jane however added another angle by showing a superb selection of beautifully crafted images, professionally shown from the laptop. These were mainly from the last 2 years when she graduated from using a Nikon F90/NX90 housing to the current rig, which housed a Nikon D70. Previous to using housed cameras, she owned a MotormarineII, and a few film shots from these 2 systems were shown!

Cleaning Stations

All of the photographic images were subtitled with their camera, lens, settings and whether strobes (single or twin) were used (wish I could remember this sometimes). At the start and end of the talk was a videoclip short of Jane, and she'd broken down the Red Sea into areas:

- ☀ **Gulf of Aqaba**
- ☀ **The North – Sharm / Hurgharda**
- ☀ **The South**
- ☀ **Outlying Islands**

In the Gulf of Aqaba, several countries had Red Sea coastlines Egypt, Israel, Saudi Arabia & Jordan, and the latter is a diving paradise with the Cedar Pride and the Buoy.

A number of the images shown were shot with either a 60mm or 105mm lens, more so with the latter, with many unusual creatures like a frog scorpionfish never seen in this part of the world before. Taba was featured highly for the macro life, and Nuweiba is where a large variety of creatures call in for a wash & brush up, at the house reefs cleaning stations. This is an ideal place to spot frogfish, some of which have names & larger animals such as groupers. The reef here allows the diver-photographer to potter along for a very long time.

Barra Boys & Girls

The North covered Sharm El Sheikh, and Hurghada, specifically the former where it's best to dive during the warmer months around Shark & Yolanda, and Ras Mohammed. It was here, she explained, Alex Mustard obtained his award winning shot of a bohar snapper, and during these months huge amounts of shoaling barracuda & snappers are encountered – as was displayed on many images.

Personally, I usually pass by the next site, but having seen Jane's images, am gonna make a special effort to visit! Anemone City provides a mass of opportunity to photograph clown anemonefish whether as wide-angle subjects with the anemones, or more close up subjects. Her last visit she photographed macro and close-up, obtaining some different imagery of the daily goings on, such as the anemonefish with its mouth open!

Magic Filters in the North

It was during this time Peter Rowlands & Alex Mustard developed the “magic filters”, which are coloured filters that slot between the digital camera and lens. It is suggested they are used for shallower depths to 10m, however Jane & others used them to 30m if the light levels allowed. By using the red filter many of the marine environment & creatures colouration, and the blue water is brought out. Is this cheating Jane asked?

Over to the Hurghada side, the Giannis D provided the foreground for shots using the orange filter, which blackened the background and made the wreck lighter! Jane showed a selection of wreck shots using this filter and a great shot of the stern of the ‘D’.

For more information of Magic Filters, contact Alex Mustard, see recent DIVE issues, and Forums on Wetpixel.com – where we also have a forum – so sign in!

Outliers

Not be outdone and overshadowed, the southern sites were featured heavily, in particular The Brothers, and its Numidia wreck, along with the many oceanic white tips and attendant pilot fish, other specie of sharks. Jane also showed a shot of a hammerhead where part of its “hammer” was in shadow, creating what looked like a chunk out of the shark. This was caused by the flash gun light and the movement of the hammerhead as it went passed. Fury Shoals and the other famous islands were also mentioned.

Marauding Morays

Within the talk there were many references to moray eels, scorpionfish, and she described one such encounter with a collection of 8 grey morays hanging out of one hole! She also showed some of the DIVE front covers she’d been published on, along with other publications, advertisements etc., that have used her material.

Sadly, the show was over only too soon, and it was question time.

Many thanks once more to both Jane & Gill, and let’s hope the same talk goes down well in BSoUP!

Destinations Talk: Aran Islands, Eire, Tony Gilbert

Continuing on from the them of Jan'06 meeting, we stay in Ireland, on its western coastlines, and move up a little further north, again with Nick Pfeiffer at the controls of his hardboat...

Force 9 Gales

Tony presented a short talk (is there such a thing?) on the Aran Islands, which are located a few miles west of Galway and the small town of Rossevaal in Eire. Together Chris Holden and he visited the Aran Islands in August 2004. The original trip was in July with many NUPG members, unfortunately due to the very bad weather at the time, Force 9 Gales, it was called off and those who went over didn't manage to dive. Even in August, there was a considerable amount of rain around the UK & Eire, resulting in floods, including Boscastle.



The Islands

About 12 miles offshore from Galway lie the 3 Aran Islands (Inishsheer – the smallest, Inishmaan – the middle, Inishmore – the biggest).

A smattering of houses, the odd pub, a few restaurants, and a small drizzling of guesthouses, the residents numbering around 1000 across all 3! Wind farms are occasional, traditional fishing undertaken, farming in the more marshy areas, wild flowers abound on the thin grass covered limestone, cattle graze, and the sound of the sea pounding against the towering cliffs, gives this a magical serene place.

Luckily, in the Arans the weather held all week long, with a heavy rain on the Thursday morning. The diving was spectacular and conducted from Lisheen I, Nick Pfeiffer's hard boat, out of Inishmaan (An Cora Pier), where Nick has Aran Islands Dive Centre.

Father Ted rides again!

Tony explained, there were 3 islands, Inishmaan (2x3Km), Inishsheer (1km sq) and Inishmore (about 12km long), and they visited all of them for diving, staying on Inishmaan in a local guesthouse, not 100m away from the pier. The diving topography took its characteristics from the nearby Burren limestone escarpment, with rocks stepping and shelving into the depths. The limestone had created some amazing structures, like Cathoir Synge (Synge's Chair) – a limestone cliff, and there were many wild flowers across the island, some quite rare. The beaches were white and many monuments dated back several thousand years (like ancient castles, brocks and occasional Neolithic graves) and the coastlines twisted contorted shapes of scalloped limestone. Roads were few and vehicles fewer, Inisheer had the wreck of the Plassey, made famous by Father Ted, and local transport was sometimes horse & trap.

Turbo Fed

The diving was some of the best you'll see, all reef diving, and the water was very clear with superb light levels – even at 30m. The sea had created an outstanding underwater topography of swimthroughs, cliffs, pavements, huge caverns, and amongst this were fields of jewel anemones on boulders, Portuguese red blennie, wrasse, john dory, free roaming lobster & crayfish, blennie varieties, tons of crabs, and many walls were jam packed – completely covered in marine life as the currents can race at times, turbo feeding the inhabitants. Luckily Nick was on hand to ensure we dived on slack.

Diving Walls & Eerie Caverns

A typical dive site would start at around 5m, dropping 5m then a shelf at 21m, all awash with a dense topping of kelp, which held many wonders. At 21m a final drop to 30m occurred. At this depth we could see 30m! The drops were vertical walls, with horizontal fissures and large outlying rocks.

Cathoir Synge, Caladh Mor, Gob nFearbhai were such walls, and many of the images showed them covered in deadmans fingers and sponges. An eerie dive was the Glassog Cavern, a huge cavern which goes back some 60m, with many cnidarians and flatties, its outside walls smattered in marine life. He explained they dived it using a reel & line and pony bottles, the water inside cooler and much more still than outside, where scooped rocks could be seen, in the 15m water depth.

Worm Hole Wonders

The remainder of the images showed two of the most exhilarating dives of the trip, The Wormhole, a cut-out of limestone, 20m x 10m in the living rock, open to the sea via an underwater tunnel, which gave way to sparkling sunshine jumping on rich blue water. This is where we spotted grey triggerfish. Glassan East Ledge was a series of towering pinnacles at the edge of Inishmore, within the isthmus between it and Inishmaan. Swirling seaweeds travelling in chaotic directions with the current, depending how far out in the channel.

Such a magical place is worthy of a revisit when time permits, and the food at the nearby restaurant was first class considering the place was far off the beaten track.

April 3rd 2006

As the 6th NUPG year draws to a close, this ultimate meeting of the NUPG year really showed what members are capable of producing, and recently too.

Organised by Colin Samuel and Jason Gregory, and contained the NUPG 2006 Winter Splash-In results, the Image competition of corals, and two destination talks, one on Isle of Lewis, and the other on An Introduction to El Hierro.

The meeting kicked off with news of events and news in general, in particular:

- Reminder of the BSoUP Splash-In during the first weekend of July. See www.bsoup.org (and Editors Note under Paul Webster's Image Comp placing).
- St. Abbs Splash-In, August Bank Holiday weekend.
- NUPG Summer Splash-In, hopefully sometime in July, to be confirmed.
- A 10% discount on digital processing is available to NUPG members at Snappy Snaps, Chester, www.snappysnaps-chester.co.uk. Contact Ken at info@nupg.org.uk for further information.
- Seasearch expeditions this year is allowing non-members (of Seasearch) to sign onto the seasearch boats, and just dive. Lucy handed out Seasearch dates, and also dates for those wanting to join seasearch. This applies to North Wales SeaSearch run by Paul Turkentine, see www.seasearch.org.uk
- Richard & Maureen (of Frogsborn Diving) are running a trip to Cocos Is (see previous NUPG Newsletter editions for Cocos Is. Report from Pat & Roy Cash). The trip is 18-28 Sep 2007 (that's next year), and there are a few places left for those who fancy it. Contact Frogsborn Diving, www.frogsborn.co.uk

Image Competition: "Cold water hard & soft corals"

The subject of hard & soft corals existing in cold water covers many species including jewel anemones. Luckily everyone had decided that it was better to go for Deadmans Fingers, Stoney Corals, Devonshire Cup Corals, Scarlet & Gold Corals or such like, however, there were a couple of "interesting" entries like sagartia anemones and sea fans.

When I looked this up it didn't immediately occur to me that we could also be talking about those corals in places like the Darwin Mounds of NW Scotland, as these types do get closer to the surface in places like Norway.

By far, the UK & Ireland are the easiest and most accessible places to photograph these wonderful creatures, where they may be found practically anywhere around the whole coastlines. Some were from Norway, let's not forget that cold-water coral species also exist in many other parts of the world like British Columbia.

The sheer quality of most of the shots was outstanding, and I am sure it was sometimes difficult to determine which shots would be the winning ones. And those that won had a certain "Devonian Gaelic air" to them...

3rd Paul Webster, Alcyonium glomeratum (red deadmans fingers), Isle of Skye

2nd Mark Thomas, Devonshire Cup Coral, Mull

1st Paul Kay, Devonshire Cup Coral, W.Ireland, probably Kilkeiran Bay / Connemara

1st Paul Kay.

Devonshire Cup Coral, western Ireland, probably Kilkeiran Bay / Connemara

The winner was Paul's superb shot of a coral with its delicate tendrils outstretched, both up and down. This must have been a difficult one to do as the angle is below the level of the subject and has been lit from the top, shot with a 100mm lens.

See Front Cover.



2nd Mark Thomas

**Devonshire Cup
Coral, Mull.**

Quite how Mark had achieved this singular image was interesting in itself, with a slight cleanup of the scanned slide to remove a few of the imperfections of the background.

The shot was taken at F22 on a fast shutter speed, using an F90, 60mm lens, resulting in a black background.

3rd Paul Webster

Alcyonium glomeratum (red deadmans fingers), Isle of Skye.

A wee helping of colourful red & white underwater tartan. I think these species are very difficult to photograph because of the focussing – which of the many polyps do you focus on, what is your depth of field; and depending on which will change the outcome of the image.

The newsletter image doesn't do it justice, but I think Paul managed to focus on most of them!

Taken with Velvia, twin strobes (Canon housed SLR?)



Editors Note:

The Isle of Skye has many fine specimens of red deadmans fingers. One such site we dived was near Neist Point on the far north west corner, called "The Green Lady".

Below the towering cliffs is a small cliff of kelp-topped rocks, to a plateau at 15m, giving way to a slope of mud & rocks. The plateau though has many large boulders, presumably fallen from above. It was here that Steve Smithson and I found and photographed a large boulder completely covered in red deadmans!

If you're into photographing these animals, why not join in the [BSOUP Splash-In \(30th Jun – 1st Jul\)](#), as Plymouth has three close-by top dive sites containing them.

- *Hilsea Pt. Rocks is an outstanding series of ridges from 5-27m, with gullies chocked full of them.*
- *SS Rosehill at 28-30m has many spars completely covered.*
- *HMS Elk (30-35m), its bow completely adorned in glomeratums.*

NUPG 2005/6 Winter Splash-In Competition Results

See report on the Winter Splash-In, and many thanks again to Ken Byrne for organising the event. This year saw an increased number over last year, although one was unable to shoot owing to frozen components on the camera housing! The conditions were ideal, and Ken was quick to point out that the best time to shoot the trout is first in – and in this case it meant breaking the thin layer of ice at Capernwray, where the event was held!

For the judging, up to 3 images were allowed per entrant, and the two films consumed by the film goes during their two dives were also allowed in a bid to even the balance of shots between film & digital.

With conditions on the day, it is not surprising when the images rolled off the projectors there were murmurs from the audience. Could this be Capernwray it looks more like the Red Sea or the Mediterranean? The imagery was glorious providing the photographer many sun filled shots with calm blue water backgrounds and gin clear visibility.

There were about 15 images and ranged from fish, trout & perch, to images of the divers with wrecks or “reef walls”. The mixture was about 75/25% digital/film. One thing was noticeable, that the digital images appeared to be much clearer through the projector software than the slide images, or perhaps it's to do with light intensity of the projector bulbs?

After Gail & Lucy counted them, a hushed expectant audience drew an intake of breath at the announcement of 4 tied 1st place winners – never happened before!!! And here they are:

Ken Byrne	– With a superb shot of a trout side view.
Derek Haslam	– Diver silhouetted in the sun over the African Queen.
Derek Haslam	– Diver investigating Northern Wall.
Mark Thomas	– Diver investigating Northern Wall.

Well done to all the winners and the following pages contain those winning images and I am sure you'll agree they are well deserved for all the hard work.

**So, how about next year people
come on – you too can
make great images!**

Derek Haslam:

Covets another glittering first with a diver investigating the southern facing Northern Wall of Capernwray.

Here, in 2-3m of water, where the water was at its clearest, the green algae carpeting the small shelf, whilst the reed provide extra background.

It is here that Derek was able to shoot Mark (with pixels) and his slave strobe fired.



Derek Haslam:

Sadly Derek couldn't be here tonight to collect his first prize accolade, but instead produced his own accolade of a diver in a sunburst, hovering high over the wreck of the African Queen.

The latter is at 15m, and the diver must be at about 10m or so.

Taken with a Nikon digital SLR with the 10.5mm lens, it's surprising to see a perfect sunburst from a digital shot.



Mark Thomas:

Taken with the 16mm fish-eye on the Nikon F90, gained Mark a mark of “numero uno” position with a “reverse-roles” shot of him and Derek, with the latter pottering along the same walls covered in green algae.



Ken Byrne:

The Old Trout gets it again (that's the fish not Ken)! Ken "Pikeman" Byrne takes a first prize placing with this glistening and inquisitive trout.

Taken with a Nikon D70 at 12mm, on a 12/24mm zoom, the shot was taken in about 2-3m of water near the entry slip.

He was in first with Paul Maddox, breaking the ice, which meant that nothing had been disturbed overnight, hence crystal clear water and shining sunlight on the stone chips.



Destination Talk: Isle of Lewis, Tony Gilbert

See the previous newsletter on the Isle of Lewis Trip Report.

The trip to the Isle of Lewis was superb last year, and luckily the weather mostly held for the NUPG members and other guests of Murdo Mc Donald and his wife Kathy aboard the liveaboard m/v Cuma.

Tony proceeded to show the audience on just what could be photographed around the plethora of small outlying rocks and islets that existed within Loch Roag, on northwest Lewis.

His shots started with a selection of nudibranchs, all of the abundant varieties however, there are so many of these critters around it allows the photographer to select many “targets”. This was closely followed by a colourful selection of starfish, including a specific northern species.

John Dory were spotted, and Paul commented that these were now recorded with the National Aquarium at Plymouth, as these fish are seldom seen this far north!

Many of the dive sites were selected on the diving day based on conditions and the local underwater topography from the echo sounder, and most have not been dived or seldom are.

A selection of shots illustrated the life along a typical wall, which was similar to Skomer MNR site High Point. Even clusters of octopus eggs were dotted around, the sand home to flatties, and the red weeds containing many sea spiders.

There were several muck dives or “bug hunts” as they are sometimes known, and a group of images showed this dive, with a motley collection of creatures coming out of the sand! Long legged spider crabs hanging jauntily off hydroids, crossasters (sunstars) with attendant scorpion spider crabs, and the nearby rocks contained the single spores of jellyfish as well as colourful specimens of cushion stars.

The fish life wasn't left out with cuckoo wrasse and seals, extremely inquisitive. Crustaceans included crayfish, but the weather had reduced the visibility a little, which precluded wide-angle photography. Still, there were a few opportunities, Campaigh Island was one, and fields of large jewel anemones were shot.

Boat life was shown and many photos showed the typical rock cliffs, the conditions, and the divers conditions!

And finally it's not all sea, the land has many rare plants on, and he showed some of these including Wild Orchids & Sundew, both of which were photographed at 2230 at night – whilst the sun had literally just set!

Let's hope this year's trip is just as enthralling, and many from this trip have signed up for the next!

Destination Talk: Introduction to El Hierro, Colin Samuel

After a talk several years ago by Tony G on the Canary island of Lanzarote, Paul & Lucy visited, and were so impressed, they tried a few more islands! El Hierro continues to provide a superb backdrop to warm water photography in laid back quiet, almost forgotten, surroundings. Colin & Gail visited along with Paul & Lucy as a diving group, to experience this wilderness, which turned out to be chocked full of life! Colin's images proceeded to tell a story of the island, its culture and diving in the area they stayed.

The island has many features and is rarely visited in comparison to its large neighbours and was originally Meridian 0 from 2AD to 1883.

La Restinga is a small southern village and harbour, with a sandy beach and a few restaurants – the nightlife is very laid back and practically non-existent. The buildings are a collection of unpainted breezeblocks or so it seemed.

The dive centre is located here. This village has a nice quay in which to conduct **night dives**. Around this area is the **Reserva Marina de Las Calmas**.

El Golfo, as Colin explained, is a very long wide sweeping black lava coastline, and this and the island (of 278Km²) is the westernmost point of Europe. The island was created from magma ridges and El Golfo created as a piece of the island broke off in a landslide in Ice-Age times (50k years ago), which may have reached the American eastern seaboard. This could happen with La Palma, so the scientists tell us.

Some interesting features were **Hotel Punta Grande**, the smallest hotel in the world with 4 rooms & bar containing **Siebe Gorman** helmets. **Juniper trees** prevail along with a 100yr old forest, some been twisted & contorted into strange shapes by the weather. Large prehistoric looking lizards may also be found roaming and were originally raised in captivity, reaching up to 1 metre in length.

The principal produce is pineapples & bananas; the locals are very conscious of conservation and ecological impact on this fragile environment; the island was made a **Reserva de Biosfera** by UNESCO in 2000, and 60% of its territory is protected to preserve its natural beauty and diversity.

The island is reached from Tenerife by a 6hour ferry journey to the principal centre of **Valverde**. They dived with Este and Antonio from the local dive centre at La Restinga, a total group of 12 divers, diving for 5 days. On the 3 non-diving days it was good to hire a car and travel around the island.

A small selection of images of the underwater marine life was shown, many of which are atypical of the Canaries; cuttlefish and dark morays, and nice image of an eagle ray.

An unusual image of a yellow trumpetfish and parrotfish existing within a symbiotic relationship followed them around on an occasion. Other species, damselfish, dusk grouper (mero), scarlet lady shrimps, burrowing anemones. As Colin explained, on showing a mauve coloured sea hare, these were numerous on one dive. We weren't quite sure whether it was the front or the back of it!

If you're looking for somewhere different, slightly off the beaten track, El Hierro is for you!

REPORTS and HANDOUTS

NUPG 2006 Winter Splash-In by Tony Gilbert

Springing into Spring

March is traditionally the start of spring either it's the 1st March or 21st depending on whether you follow meteorological or calendar rules.

There is also another important date within this month, the NUPG Winter Splash-In, and this year it was held on the 4th March at a local northwest quarry, Capernwray.



As the early days of March are generally on the cusp of winter and spring, then any sort of weather can develop, but usually things remain constant in Capernwray.

A sudden ringing in my ears at 6am made me realise that it wasn't the wife bringing me breakfast in bed on a weekend day but the alarm clock next to me, shame. The room was cool as the windows as always are open, and a casual glance outside in the early morning half-light revealed the winter wonderland had roamed far and wide overnight. Unfortunately, it seems that the snow had become very crisp, probably due to the -8C temperature!

The Journey

Never mind, let's get the gear in the car and bang a coffee down. The journey was a strange one, usually it takes an hour and a half, but today it took 2 hours. My buddy for the day was Neil who was travelling independently, so it was very quiet in the car ☹️. After dropping off the Peaks, the Cheshire plain itself was a mass of whiteness and slush the latter caused by gritting and the M6 was 1 lane, with low visibility. In contrast southern Lancashire was raked by fog and it was a comfortable 2C.

At this point I thought to myself there'll be no one there in these conditions!



A Netherworld

Suddenly, just after Preston it was like a passing an invisible border, mist swirled and a golden orb lay tantalisingly behind it, seemingly a limbo land between netherworlds. Was I going to be transported to far distant warm shores?

I was blasted by a blaze of dazzling sunlight in a cool blue crisp sky and white brightness was all around – yeh man I am going to the Caribbean on Coconut Airways... Not On Your Nelly! At this point along the M6 I thought it best to grab a hot chocolate at Forton Services before any more imagination leaked out!

So, for the whole day we had “full on” bright sunshine, surrounded by rolling hills of sparkling white snow, the downside, it was now –6C air temp!

Day full of Promises

Contrary to my thinking, Capernwray on this fine day wasn't empty, it was quite busy, around 200 or so divers and it took me 20 minutes to get in! Many clubs were here training, and then I spotted Ken & Paul, and Ken's car with a sign on it: “NUPG Splash-In”.

There were 7 of us, that's a 100% increase in last year, with Derek & Mark arriving shortly afterwards, and also Clive Field. Neil and I deftly kitted up and it looked to be a very promising day.



Ken duly declared the NUPG 2006 Winter Splash-In “Open” and promptly broke the ice at the entry point!!!

Bright sunshiny day

With the bright spring sunshine above the horizon, yet low enough to create glistening reflections on the Capernwray water, we marvelled at the visibility. It was a good 15-20m just off the slip. Snell's window was everywhere and shooting upwards was a pleasure, into the blue sky and the rock walls. None of this trout stuff for Neil & I as we waved bye to Derek and his fishy friends. We were off to shoot ambient & balanced light and make best use of the superb visibility, clear warm blue water and the bright sunshine. It does just sound like the Caribbean, but alas not. The water temperature was 5C – and this is warm when you compare it to the air temperature!

Our first “port of call” was the dragonfly helicopter and the derrick, and with the visibility as it was both could be seen quite clearly, as we cruised some 3-4m off the bottom. The sunburst through the water creating a bright atmosphere, and all around lay rock ridges, spoil mounds and pieces of wreckage – I didn't know there was so much!

Angle of the Dangle

The angles that can be obtained are limitless and passing divers always provide further opportunities. The dragonfly's silvery livery lends itself well to the flashgun, and both Neil and I were shooting wide-angle, me with a 20mm lens. Sadly, Neil's brand new camera went down, the “mode function” switch became inoperable.

A few shots later, off to the Podsnap minesweeper and at the halfway point between this and the helicopter one could see both! The occasional trout came over investigating, as more shots were taken, this time with “diver & torch” in the composition. The Podsnap is ideal for photography with cream and blue colouration, the bow pointing north, so the sun in the south can easily be picked up in shot, as can the bow railings.

Our journey now went north on a course 340 or thereabouts, with the vis. like it is, it was so easy! The African Queen at the bottom of the “rescue slope” is looking a little worse for wear, yet the new fibreglass motorboat is a nice “target”. But, I was taking Neil to a place rarely visited by divers. I don't think I've ever seen any divers here, and it's the north wall, where dry land meets watery land.

North Wall

The north wall is superb, a cliff drops away some 10m out from the wall; the plateau thus formed is about 5-7m deep. The north wall cliff is brilliant for zebra mussels and those wide-angle shots of massed green weed hanging over cream coloured rocks. The plateau contains a few boulders and mats of pretty green weeds. Here, the water clarity today was gin clear and the reeds next to the north wall itself looked very photogenic. Add to this the dappled sunlight, Snell's window, the wall itself towering out of the water, and sky, you really have the makings of a great composition!

We stayed here for sometime before returning to the rescue slip and exit, after 40 minutes. The rest faired well also, with shots around the helicopter & trout. Snow covered the ground but luckily not too slippery. Neil wasn't making a second dive his camera controls had actually frozen!



Intervals

Whilst Dirk & Mark went in for second dive, I waited out the surface interval and reloaded the film camera.

Meanwhile Ken & Paul readied themselves also for a second dive.

At least Ken's car had defrosted a little, and you can just make out the NUPG Splash-In sign!

Clive & I kitted up, whilst Neil reluctantly packed his gear away. The day's weather was still holding and the visibility underwater was in the main just as good. I needed to wait at least an hour because of diving on Nitrox EAN32, but was eager to get back in now my hands had become accustomed to the colder conditions.

Glassy Calm

Dodging the trainees practising their rescue scenarios, we swam across the mirror calm glasslike and blue water's surface to a green buoy over the far side.

We looked down en route, and could easily see the shelf 10-12m below, until the drop. The south wall, in shadow, was covered in snow.

At the buoy below was the sea king helicopter, making for some great, silhouetted ambient light shots, which was just as well, as Clive's strobe had packed up!

Our plan was to swim back under the water; I had 120bar and a pony, more than ample for the task! The sea king was a yellow sliver of metal in the rich blue water, just waiting to be photographed.



Hopefully the wide-angle lens wouldn't pick out the little action men figures someone had placed on there...

Ambient Herbie

On a northerly route with some east in it, we hit the cannon, a piece of metal shaped like a cannon. It wasn't really good for photography.

A little further on though, just east of the Podsnap, an intact VW "Herbie" beetle car rests on the bottom, nestled between rolling quarry spoil. Clive and I became excited (funny how little things make you excited!) as the ambience was superb and the sun in the right position.

These would make fine atmospheric shots indeed.

We were treated shortly afterwards to yet more thrills n' spills in the clearness, with a Cessna plane on a platform.

To me, it looked like it was about to take off from the ramp of an aircraft carrier – or maybe that was my ice cream cone head thinking that! Anyway, it was a good ambient target, as was the nearby African Queen.



Journey at its End

Even the twisted stumps of large trees made for some interesting subject matter. We'd pitched this dive very well for ambient photography!

I showed Clive my "special" place, the north wall, before we returned, ducking under the 6m training platform, strangely enough, with my "ambient head" on, even this looked like it could work, with light bursting in to what looked like the inside of a "wreck".

Really going to have to get some food I must be hallucinating!

Clowning around in 18m

NUPG 2006 Winter Splash-In - Memories



The intense blue clear water

The intense blue sky and bright sunshine



Snowy Car Park



And Finally...



Derek says:
Your'e not having any of my coffee unless you come along to the next splash-in!

Paul says:
I am not getting out of this dry suit for another 4 hours!

Clive says:
Come on down next year, the cold isn't that bad.

Mark says:
That coffee looks good Derek.

LINKS

If you have any photo-type web links you wish to share, let us know... (Also see previous issue(s) for many others).