

## Expedition Diary

### Friday 05 September 2014

5 ULSAC members and the hired van met at the University of London Union at 17:00 to load the kit stored there before proceeding to the boathouse at Chiswick where the RIB and remainder of the kit was stored. 2 members had travelled ahead to the boathouse to prepare the RIB for transport. The final member was delayed in leaving work and eventually arrived at the boathouse at 19:00. The MPV towing the RIB and carrying 5 people and the van with 3 people started the journey to the planned overnight stop at a hotel in Lancaster. Due to 2 road closures on the M6 motorway we did not arrive until 02:00.

### Saturday 06 September 2014

We set off at 09:30 to complete our journey to Waternish. The long journey was only broken up by the monotony of service station food and coffee however, once past Glasgow and into the Highlands the scenery provided welcome relief. The MPV and RIB finally arrived at 19:30, weary and in need of a good meal which was found at the village pub, the Stein Inn. The van had stopped in Fort William to buy groceries for the week. Unfortunately, the GPS unit being followed by the van team directed them to take the Skye Ferry (which had finished for the day) rather than the Skye Bridge so they took an unwanted 2 hour detour eventually arriving at 22:00.

### Sunday 07 September 2014

The day started with loading and launching the RIB. Due to a rather slow start and how quickly the water level receded during a spring tide, by the time we were ready to launch the end of the slip was above water by a foot. After some deliberation and checking that the depth of water below the slip was sufficient we decided to proceed with launching and accepted that the RIB would take a longer drop to the water than usual (this is not a recommended technique!) We all breathed a collective sigh of relief when after going worryingly vertical the hull came down to rest on the surface of the water. We were then able to set off for our first dive which due to weather was restricted to one of the nearby islands called Lampay. Everyone was pleased to experience visibility in the region of 10m following a dark summer on the south coast. We returned to Waternish for lunch before our second dive on the pinnacle in Loch Bay which was 1nm away on the opposite side of the loch. On arrival back to base we set about mooring the RIB for the night. This was on a buoy approximately 50m from the slip and involved a swim from and to the mooring each day. It was also our diving officer's (and the day's dive manager's) birthday so we celebrated with cake after dinner.

### Monday 08 September 2014

Our aim today was to dive further round the west coast around 8nm from Waternish. We decided it would be more fuel efficient and quicker to drive the RIB round the coast with just 5 people and no kit and send the van and 3 people by road to Meanish pier where we would be able to base ourselves from during the day. We successfully rendezvoused with the van at Meanish and proceeded for our first dive on the wreck of the SS Chadwick in Oisgill Bay. The helpful sketch and advice from Gordon meant that we dropped the shot directly onto the boilers. We returned to Meanish and enjoyed lunch on a rocky outcrop overlooking The Minch with only sheep for company. Our second dive was just the other side of the pier wall on Meanish reef. We were joined on our dive by a local free diver and enjoyed a fabulous reef dive.

**Tuesday 09 September 2014**

We followed the same pattern as the previous day and sent the RIB round the coast to meet the van at Meanish pier. We departed Meanish for our first dive ahead of schedule and arrived at our dive site, the SS Doris, well ahead of the scheduled slack water time. We had been warned of the potential for strong tidal activity in this area due to the convergence of tides coming from different directions. As such we were wary of dropping divers in too far ahead of the calculated slack time. The first pair were eventually dropped in 30 minutes before slack only to find that whilst it was slack when they first descended, after just a few minutes it was clear that the current was picking up. The second and third pairs were able to complete a dive on the wreck albeit a rather currenty one however it was clear that the second cox'n pair would not be able to dive at this site. Instead they were given the opportunity to dive at Meanish reef once again and considering 1 of the pair had not seen the full extent of the reef the previous afternoon they were both happy with the outcome. Following a short lunch break at Meanish, our second dive was the reef located on the south side of Oisgill Bay which was protected from the main south to north tidal flow.

**Wednesday 10 September 2014**

Day 4 was to be the furthest we ventured from Waternish. We were aiming to dive in the vicinity of the group of rocks called "Macleods Maidens" which were a further 9nm south of Meanish pier. As such, to save on time and fuel in making return trips between the first and second dives we opted to carry lunch and tanks for our second dives on the RIB with us. Our first dive was a site called "Conger Crevice", not too difficult guessing what we were likely to see there and we were not disappointed. For lunch we had been told about a beautiful white sandy beach very close to our dive site (apparently the only one in western Scotland!) which would be an agreeable place to go ashore. After a period of creeping along the coastline in search of the beach we eventually spotted it behind a cluster of boulders. The beach itself was indeed a beautiful white sandy beach surrounded by cliffs and even with a waterfall. We could all have happily spent the afternoon sunbathing there had the urge to dive not been so great. For the second dive we headed to the site of the SS Urlana. This was described as a very broken up wreck (plates, scattered wreckage and a boiler) amongst kelp and boulders directly in front of a large visible rock. The first pair were deployed but surfaced after 13 minutes having not found any trace of the wreck. Pairs 2 and 3 were dropped further out to sea and again aborted early with no wreck in sight. The last pair were dropped in to the south of the visible rock and told to search for the wreck by swimming south along the 10m contour. After 20 minutes of searching the pair spotted a rusty plate and subsequently the large intact boiler of the SS Urlana. Success in the end but that was not the end of the days diving. Gordon from our hosts Dive and Sea the Hebrides had kindly offered to take us out for a night dive on the Loch Bay pinnacle on his boat the "Elena C". We waited for the sun to set at 21:00 and headed out armed with glow sticks. The dive itself was spectacular with huge amounts of life active on the pinnacle and bioluminescence keeping everyone entertained.

**Thursday 11 September 2014**

This was our last diving day in Waternish and having not arrived back to shore from our night dive until 23:30 the day's dive manager decided we would have a relatively easy day logistically and dive locally as we did on the first day. First up was a planned drift dive at Ard Beag. The plan was to drop in and keep the reef to our left in the drift until we get taken to the sheltered side of the wall. We were told to avoid going over the top of the reef as we would be taken off the reef and onto a featureless bottom. 3 pairs dropped in at the same time to enable the cox to keep track of all 3 together however all 3 pairs were taken over the top of the reef by the current which was quick but not uncomfortably so. Once on the sheltered side there was a seabed of shells and crustaceans to entertain us. As we were about to head out for our second dive we crossed paths

with Gordon and Aileen who had just returned from a wildlife photography trip, Aileen told us that they had been watching minke whales just off Waternish Point which was only 4nm away. We agreed that this was an opportunity not to be missed so we delayed our second dive and headed out to the point. When we arrived we turned off our engine and echo as directed and sat and waited. We saw many pods of harbour porpoise and a few seals and eventually were fortunate enough to see the minke whales coming up for air. We saw 3 to 4 in total in flat calm seas, a really special moment. We then headed to Clett Island where we were going to dive the northern tip where there is a submerged pinnacle. This proved to be an interesting and enjoyable last dive for all.

**Friday 12 September 2014**

Today was the start of our long journey back to London but not before a small stop off. We left Waternish at 09:00 and drove to Kyle of Lochalsh from where we launched the RIB and squeezed in a dive on the HMS Port Napier. After a period of playing "spot the wreck" we all enjoyed hour long dives on this spectacular wreck. Having recovered the RIB and packed up we eventually set off for our overnight stop in Carlisle at 15:30, eventually arriving at 23:00.

**Saturday 13 September 2014**

Dedicated as a travel day, the group left Carlisle at 08:30 for the journey back to London eventually arriving at the boathouse in Chiswick at 15:00. As we had not had access to a tap in Kyle of Lochalsh we proceeded to wash the RIB and all the dive kit. We finally arrived back at the University of London Union at 16:00. Our expedition was over.