

UNIVERSITY OF LONDON SAC BSAC 0069



Isle of Skye 2014 – Expedition Report



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Michelle Kim, Expedition Mentor

With thanks to:-

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Introduction

Purpose

ULSAC0069 has been a University BSAC club since 1958. The club is in a transitional phase, having recently lost a few of its core experienced members. The few remaining Advanced Divers and instructors have been struggling to up-skill the junior members in order to future-proof the club. There was an urgent need to support junior members in becoming boat handlers, dive managers, practical rescue managers, Dive Leaders and Advanced Divers in order to run dive trips safely and effectively. This has required a huge amount of commitment from the remaining instructors and Advanced Divers, and a dedication to training of the upcoming Dive Leaders and Dive Leader trainees to take ownership of their club.

For the purpose of up-skilling members and in order to create a healthy BSAC branch with future leaders, it was decided to organise a BSAC expedition for late summer 2014. Following on from the success of a BSAC expedition to Guernsey in 2011 and an adventurous trip to Croatia in 2014, ULSAC gained the confidence to plan and co-ordinate a challenging expedition. It was decided that the destination that would allow ULSAC to invest most in the clubs ability to be an independent UK diving branch, using its own RIB, would be the Isle of Skye in Scotland. This gave us the motivation to run two boat handling courses to enable expedition members to learn and experience driving the club RIB. The primary purpose of this expedition to the Isle of Skye was to explore unknown dive sites to the club, albeit regularly dived, and to also locate new and interesting scenic dives that are not described in diving literature. The aims of the expedition were:

- To explore a challenging dive destination that was unknown to trip members.
- To conduct a week of challenging diving that would give members of the expedition the opportunity to dive manage, increasing members' competencies and confidence in this crucial skill set. This trip provided divers from Sports Diver through to First Class the opportunity to develop themselves. The diving was primarily safe but challenging diving in a dive location that was completely new to all team members.
- To identify and explore previously undived scenic sites.
- To enhance the diving skills of trip members under more adventurous conditions than they were accustomed to, increase their confidence not just with respect to their diving but also in working as a team to make such a complex expedition successful.
- To assist 1 trainee First Class Diver, 4 trainee advanced divers, 4 trainee Dive Leaders progressing towards their next diver grade.
- Cascade skills from First Class Diver level through to Sports Diver with a view to this translating back to their branch.
- To be self-sufficient in terms of boats, food, accommodation and other equipment.
- Promote expeditionary diving and diving in the Isle of Skye as a dive location to the wider diving community.

Location

The Isle of Skye is a remote and isolated dive location, free from the usual shipping channels of busier ports. Initial research indicated that the Isle of Skye was a perfect site for exploratory diving and is remote and unspoilt. Marine life that was seen on the trip included minke whales, dolphins, porpoises, seals, corkwing wrasse, conger eels, octopuses, lobsters, crawfish, jellyfish, crabs among others. The Isle of Skye is known for

having beautiful and breath-takingly stunning scenic diving, but the sites also have good visibility, in part thanks to the strong currents around the island. This has created dive sites with diverse marine life and clear waters, with the opportunity of exhilarating drift dives. However, the fast currents mean that the diving was challenging, with strong currents meaning that certain sites including wrecks must be dived during slack water. These conditions required careful and thorough dive planning.

Our base for the expedition was in the small village of Waternish (Stein) on the west coast of Skye overlooking the Little Minch which separates Skye and the mainland from the Outer Hebrides. We selected this location simply because we do not own our own compressor and thus needed easy access to a filling station. A simple online search for dive centres in Skye quickly shows there is only one (Dive and Sea the Hebrides) and that it conveniently also provides self-catering accommodation.

Expedition Management

Planning of the expedition was led by Alison Niewiarowska with guidance from expedition mentor Michelle Kim. The entire team met several weeks before the trip to thoroughly plan possible dive sites and logistics and tasks were shared equally between members. Overall management of tasks was carried out by Alison Niewiarowska. Alison Niewiarowska assigned dive managers (DMs) for each days diving, utilising the more experienced team members to act as assistant dive managers in order to guide the newer DMs.

The following rota was created showing each team members' roles and responsibilities during the week.

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Ali N	DM	L	C	WU	B	DM
Andy	C	B	DM	B	DM	
Ali G	ADM	C	WU	C	ADM	
Michelle	WU	ADM	C	C		ADM
Hannah	B	DM	WU	ADM	L	
Karen	WU	C	L	WU		
Henry	L	WU	B	DM		
Natalie	C	WU	ADM	L		

Dive Manager	DM
Assistant Dive Manager	ADM
Refuel Boat	B
Pack Lunch/Put Lunch Away	L
Cooking	C
Washing Up	WU

Pre-expedition Planning Meeting

A planning meeting was held on Saturday 10th August 2014 in London. This was an opportunity for the whole team to get involved in selecting, researching and planning dive sites. The group was split into 2, with one group focussing on chart work, and the other on dive site research, logistics management and risk assessment. The groups rotated between these 2 areas.

Following conclusion of the meeting, a detailed list of actions and owners was circulated.

Who	Action
Dive Managers:- Hannah Holdcroft Vedika Mehra Henry Mosey	Send the expedition leader a full written brief (based on SEEDS) within two weeks, an email with more details of major points to consider will follow shortly.

Ali Niewiarowska Andy Niewiarowski	
² Michelle Kim Expedition Mentor	Update expedition plan with corrections. Tows boat, drives van and MPV. Boat Cox'n.
⁴ Ali Gaudion	Check First Aid kit, replace expired items, and add additional items appropriate to remote site as discussed. Tows boat, drives van and MPV. Boat Cox'n.
⁵ Ali Niewiarowska Expedition Leader	Circulate kit list. Ensure all tasks are delegated and keep track they are done. Dive manages first and last day of diving. Writes an article for SCUBA on the expedition for publication. Drives van.
Natalie Reeder Boat co-ordinator	Liaise with Dave Pearce (ULSAC Boat Officer) to check the RIB in a ready condition for a week's outing. Check the grease gun functioning and the life jackets at Chiswick primed and ready to use. Ensures all correct boat kit is loaded into van and MPV and brought home after trip.
¹ Eunsook Park Head Chef	Puts together a food cooking rota and washing up rota for the week. Puts together a shopping list and a menu list for the week. Send drafts to Hannah H. Has already booked secondary accommodation.
Henry Mosey Expedition Kit Officer	Checks Andy's compiled kit list for boat and club kit. Ensures correct kit is loaded into van and MPV and brought home after trip. Ensures club kit is signed out to specific people and kit numbers are recorded. Ensures kit is signed back in. Prints off all trip paperwork, SOLAS sheets, dive management sheets, dive day schedules (list of all paperwork on kit list attached). Dive manages one day's diving.
³ Andy Niewiarowski Expedition Treasurer	Collected deposits, booked dive centre, paid dive centre, paid secondary accommodation. Dive manages one day's diving. Drives minibus, drives van. Check if dive centre has nitrox and accommodation has 3G/wifi.
¹ Vedika Mehra Dive Site Information Coordinator	Records information about dive sites dived for trip reporting. Includes collecting all dive management sheets after each day and typing them up post-trip. Dive manages one day's diving.
Hannah Holdcroft Expedition Training Officer	Ensures training needs of trip members are met. Particularly boat handling skills, dive site location skills. Mentors Eunsook with food duties and Karen with van booking. Dive manages one day's diving. Drives minibus, drives van.
Karen Ho Expedition Website Co-ordinator	Maintains a daily blog on the trip and takes photos for blog and for trip reports. Books van for the trip (with help from Hannah).

¹Pulled out within 10 days of trip, jobs reassigned

²Michelle took over organising food shopping list and cooking rota

³Andy took over as dive site information co-ordinator, collecting and transcribing dive management sheets and an additional day of dive management

⁴Ali G took over booking the hire van from Karen

⁵Ali N took over printing the expedition paperwork as Henry did not have access to a printer

Logistics

Dive Platform

We took one of ULSAC's RIBs, Rascal. She is a 6.5m vessel that can hold a maximum of 10 single-tank divers with kit. She has a 4-stroke 140hp engine, which is reliable and we had no problems. We carried standard safety and back-up equipment and radios in case of problems. Using our own RIB gave us complete independence and flexibility to find and explore dive sites around Skye.

Travel

The expedition used two vehicles, a commercially hired short-wheel based van (from H and H Van Hire) and a Ford Tourneo multi-person vehicle (MPV) hired from the University of London Union.

Transport was always going to be the extraordinary cost for the trip given the remote location of Skye and the total cost for transport was £1,368. Due to the cancellation of two people from the trip it would have been useful to have hired a smaller van, but unfortunately the van hire company could not accommodate a change in van size at such late notice.

Towing of the boat was done using the MPV. One of the drivers has held a towing licence for more than 3 years and so was able to supervise one of the other drivers with a provisional towing licence, as the provisional driver's insurance allowed this. The van was driven by 3 individuals who rotated driving, and the van carried all of the cylinders and diving equipment.

Accommodation

Our accommodation for the week was provided by Dive and Sea the Hebrides in the form of a house attached to the dive centre. There were 3 bunk rooms (2 twin rooms and 1 with 6 beds), a kitchen, dining area, living room with fire, 2 toilet/shower rooms and 1 separate toilet. The accommodation provided everything required to support the team during this expedition.

We also spent 2 nights staying in motorway service station hotels on the M6 on the way to and from Skye.

Food

The accommodation we stayed at in Waternish had a full-sized kitchen which we used to self-cater. Local shops were well stocked and within 15 minutes drive from the accommodation. Breakfast and lunch were prepared individually with dinner being cooked on a rota basis. On our final evening we ate at the local pub.

Air and Fuel

Fuel for the vehicles and the RIB was bought at local petrol stations. Atholl Service Station was approximately 15 minutes from our accommodation and our base of operations in Waternish. Fuel runs were organised on a rota basis between the vehicle drivers.

Air was commercially available from the Dive & Sea the Hebrides, based in Waternish. The dive centre was able to provide fills for all of our tanks including two 7L twin sets (one of which was 300bar). Dive & Sea the Hebrides also provided a mooring for Rascal for the week.

Launching and Recovery

We launched and recovered from the public slipway in Stein. We researched slipways further along the west coast including those at Meanish and Struan, but did not end up using them to launch from. The RIB was moored on a mooring buoy provided by Dive & Sea the Hebrides. The trailer was stored in the free public car park next to the slipway.

The slipway at Stein is covered at all but 1 hour either side of low water. On our launch day (Saturday 6th September) a slow start and a lack of appreciation of how quickly the water would recede on a spring tide meant that when it came to launch time the end of the slip was a foot above the water. After a few minutes of discussion we decided to go ahead with launching which ended up being a very tense affair as the RIB slid off the trailer and went remarkably vertical before the stern hit the water – we all breathed a sigh of relief when the bow flopped down and it was safely on the surface.

Diving Base

We had 3 diving bases during the 6 diving days of the expedition.

Days 1 and 5 – Stein



- Yellow Slipway – usable at all states of tide (exposed LW +/- 1 hour)
- Red Mooring buoy for RIB overnight
- Blue Accommodation, gas fills, toilets
- Green Free car park, trailer stored here



Days 2, 3 and 4 – Meanish Pier



- Yellow Steps - usable all states
- Orange Grassy area for lunch/surface interval

Day 6 – Kyle of Lochalsh



- Yellow Slipway – usable all states
- Blue Lochalsh hotel – they allowed us to use their toilets
- Green Lochalsh hotel car park where cars and trailer were stored (ask hotel)



How it Went

Planning Resources

Appendix A - Expedition Planning Resources contains details of information sources used. Our host, Gordon McKay from Dive and Sea the Hebrides was incredibly helpful in providing us with information on sites and tides, and we are very grateful for that help.

Team Members

Unfortunately 2 of the original 10 expedition members had to withdraw from the trip due to personal reasons. The first withdrawal was 10 days prior to departure and the second was 7 days prior. The 2 available spaces were advertised on the ULSAC mailing list and on the BSAC London Region facebook page but unfortunately they were not able to be filled.

Appendix B – Expedition Team Members contains details of the 8 members of the expedition.

Dates

The expedition began on Friday 05th September and finished on Saturday 13th September 2014, a total of 9 days.

Appendix C - Expedition Timetable contains an overview of the expedition.

Appendix D - Expedition Diving Summary contains details of who did what on which day.

Appendix E - Expedition Diary contains principal events from each day.

Costs

Appendix F - Expedition Financial Summary contains an overview of the expedition.

Budgeted cost was £508 per person (not including personal equipment hire), and actual costs came out at and average of £544 per person inclusive of equipment hire.

Every effort was made to reduce the cost of the expedition. Unfortunately the two late cancellations resulted in the variable expedition costs being split between 8 people instead of 10, thus increasing the cost for those that attended. A £200 deposit had been collected from every individual to cover non-refundable fixed costs which were van hire, dive centre accommodation, air fills, mooring, and hotel accommodation on the travel days so for these fixed costs the impact on the 8 who attended was minimised.

Weather

Appendix G - Expedition Weather contains a summary of the forecast before we left and a record of the weather encountered, summarised in retrospect. We experienced good weather for the whole expedition.

Dive Sites

Appendix H - Expedition Dive Sites contains full details of the sites visited.

Appendix I - General and Marine Life Photographs contains a selection of photographs.

Reporting

Expedition Reporting

During the expedition we hoped to report our experiences on the ULSAC website expedition 'blog', which can be found at <http://blog.ulsac.net/>. We aimed to use personal laptops with wi-fi or mobile phone coverage to allow us to keep this up-to-date but we had not anticipated the complete lack of any signal in the area. The only commercially available wi-fi was in the local pub, the Stein Inn, although unfortunately this was for residents only and we were not permitted to use it. The dive centre allowed us to use their office wi-fi for emergency work reasons for some of our team members. The blog was updated on our return to London.

The expedition had a dedicated media co-ordinator whose aim is to promote Skye as a diving destination. As well as our blog, the full trip report will be made available on the ULSAC and St Albans SAC websites www.ulsac.net and www.sasac.co.uk and the Expedition Report will be made available to BSAC.

We have also contacted SCUBA magazine regarding running an article. In anticipation of this article, all 8 members have written up one or two of the 12 dives as a dive article and this will be compiled by Alison Niewiarowska.

Expedition Criteria

Criterion	Result
3.1. What level of diver is the expedition aimed at? <i>(Answer) Dive Leader</i>	1 FCD, 1 AD, 3 DLs, 3 SDs
3.2. How many divers are in the group? <i>(A) 8 to 12</i>	10 divers signed up to the trip, only 8 attended as 2 cancelled within 10 days of the expedition and could not be replaced in time.
3.3. How many different BSAC branches are involved? <i>(A) 2</i>	7 members from ULSAC and 1 member from St Albans (who is a secondary member of ULSAC) attended the expedition.
3.4. Potential for cascading the diving experience to others. Percentage of the party in any of the following roles: Regional Coach, Area Coach, REDS Co-ordinator, Branch Diving Officer, Branch Instructor (any grade), Branch Expeditions Officer: <i>(A) 60 - 80%</i>	1 National Instructor (Michelle Kim), 1 Regional Coach (Ali Gaudion), 1 Diving Officer (Alison Niewiarowska), 1 branch instructor (Hannah Holdcroft) and 2 assistant instructors attended the trip. 75 % of the expedition members.
3.5. Given that at least one member of the expedition must be a First Class Diver, how many additional First Class Divers will be present on the expedition	Only one FCD attended this expedition.
3.6. What is the potential for improvement of Advanced Divers who could aspire to a higher level of diving? What percentage of Advanced Divers does the expedition comprise?: <i>(A) 10 - 30%</i>	Ali Gaudion is an advanced diver (13%).
3.7. What is the potential for improvement of Dive Leaders who could aspire to a higher level of diving? What percentage of Dive Leaders does the expedition comprise? <i>(A) 30 - 50%</i>	There were 3 Dive Leaders on this expedition (38%).
3.8. How long is the expedition? <i>(A) More than 8 days</i>	The expedition ran from the 5 th of September to the 13 th of September with 6 days of diving.
3.9. What level of independence of leadership will the expedition have? <i>(A) Total self leadership, e.g. RIB diving, own boat</i>	All diving was carried out by ourselves on the club RIB with the exception of one night dive, which was the third dive of that day.

<p>3.10. What are the primary aims of the expedition? (e.g. Archaeology, Environmental Issues & Marine Biology, Scientific study, wreck discovery?) (A) Challenging diving at undived/rarely dived sites</p>	<p>We dived in the Isle of Skye, which is a remote dive site. We were only the second group at the dive centre that summer. We also didn't see a single other dive group at the Isle of Skye, and so this is a rarely dived location.</p>
<p>3.11. What range of diving styles will the expedition employ? (A) Either mixed gas or rebreather diving or deeper diving (>30m)</p>	<p>We were expecting some of the dive sites to be deeper than 30m but found that the deepest diving we did was to 24.4m.</p>
<p>3.12. What diving techniques will the expedition employ? The following types are examples: wreck diving, extended range, drift diving, wall diving, offshore diving (>12 nautical miles), diving in an enclosed environment, diving in a remote location? Specify additional particular techniques as appropriate. (A) 5 or more</p>	<p>We dived on several wrecks, did drift diving, did wall diving, dived in Port Napier which has several swim through, dived in a remote location and did a night dive.</p>
<p>3.13. At what level is the expedition expected to be reported once the expedition is complete? (A) Presentations at National level (DOC, NEC Dive Show, LIDS) or magazine article in DIVE or DIVER or media coverage (e.g. TV, Radio, Newspaper)</p>	<p>We have written a blog and are also drafting an article for the SCUBA magazine.</p>

Supporting evidence

Supporting evidence for the expedition consists of:

1. **Attachment 1 – Expedition Dive Log**
2. **Attachment 2 – Expedition Financial Receipts**

Review

Cascade of Skills

Dive Management Focus

4 team members acted as Dive Manager (DM) over the 6 diving days. The pre-requisite in order to act as an expedition dive manager was to have completed lessons DP1 and DP2 from the BSAC Dive Leader syllabus.

Alison Niewiarowska, Dive Leader, day 1 and 6

Previous DM experience: recently completed AP2 over May bank holiday running a small boat branch trip to Anglesey. Has run a mixture of small boat and hard boat weekends.

Ali was the most experienced of the dive managers and this showed through her diligent planning and dynamic dive managing as well as the guidance and support she provided to the other dive managers. Where Ali has further developed her dive managing skills is in the areas of delegation and managing her team where she identified that a “one size fits all” approach does not always lead to success and it is necessary to continually adapt to changing circumstance.

She commented:

“One of the most valuable things I have learnt is how best to manage my human resources. My personal nature is to treat all individuals equally and so during pre-trip planning meetings I allowed people to volunteer for tasks and I was keen that everyone helped out equally. However, I soon learnt that this is not an appropriate management strategy and it is far better to assess team members and their skills and to delegate appropriate tasks.”

“This was the most difficult skill I had to personally develop and I had to learn to assess how team members were coping with tasks, and to adapt my plan and reassign tasks depending on the success. An example of this was one team member volunteered to book the van for the trip, but it very quickly became apparent that this individual was overwhelmed by the multi-tasking that was required to complete this process. The individual became quickly stressed by the task and I assessed the situation and realised that it was more productive for the group, and better for the individual, if the task was reassigned to a more experienced team member.”

Andy Niewiarowski, Sport Diver, day 3 and 5

Previous DM experience: completed DP1 in August on a training day at an inland site, completed DP2 organising a hard boat trip over August bank holiday.

Andy had only recently completed the Dive Planning and Management course in August and had never been involved in organising a small boat trip. He threw himself into the task with great enthusiasm and determination and came out with the confidence and motivation to continue organising small boat diving.

He commented:

"I was given to opportunity to dive manage 2 days of the expedition days under the guidance of experienced divers. As the diving was at an unknown location to the club, and I'd only recently attended a dive planning and management course, I found the dive managing very challenging but extremely rewarding."

"I learned valuable information about chart work, site location, diving conditions, safety and management. Members of our club rarely go to unknown sites, so such opportunities are scarce."

"I'll use that excellent experience to plan future club trips, and it has encouraged me to further extend my experience of dive management and share that experience with others in the branch."

Henry Mosey, Dive Leader, day 4

Previous DM experience: DP1 on a training day at an inland site, DP2 planned for Portland but relocated to inland site due to bad weather.

Henry had come into the expedition having never dive managed a trip to the coast or involving boats. He gained appreciation of the importance of delegation.

He commented:

"The expedition to the Isle of Skye was a fun, interesting and very rewarding experience. The trip consisted of unknown dive sites which added a level of challenge and adventure to the entirety. This was particularly evident during my appointment as Dive Manager for a day in which a multitude of new considerations had to be addressed. Planning during the night beforehand involved utilising local knowledge, charts, dive site articles and many other resources in order to create a clear picture of what we could expect."

"It was the first time I have had to take into account the use of boats and this adds another level of complexity to the planning process. Dive managing on a trip more complex in nature than I am used to taught me the importance of delegation. It is hardly possible to take care of every detail on a dive trip and so giving out responsibility to those around you allows for enhanced control of any given situation as you are not bogged down in the specifics."

"I feel that the diving environment is a great place to practice and develop managerial skills; especially on an expedition which requires significant daily problem solving."

Hannah Holdcroft, Dive Leader, day 2

Previous DM experience: organised 3 hard boat weekends in the UK.

Hannah had never organised a trip using small boats before and learnt that site location when you have to do it yourself can be a tricky and time-consuming task and this needs to be factored into the timelines. She also acknowledged the importance of local knowledge particularly in areas where it is difficult to predict the tidal flow.

She commented:

“Dive managing an unknown site I learned how it can be challenging just recognising whether or not you are in the right place as it is unfamiliar and you’re trying to work out which land marks are the land marks that have been described to you. Also I found that you need to add in extra time to make sure that if there are any delays, such as going to the wrong place, you don’t miss slack and also that you need to arrive at a site particularly early just in case the slack time is slightly earlier than you’d anticipated.”

“I also found that local knowledge of both the site for site location and for slack times is invaluable as what we’d calculated as slack time based on information from charts and online was incorrect and instead it was at a completely different time according to local knowledge.”

Boat Handling Focus

Boat handling in ULSAC in recent years has been almost exclusively done by a small group of very experienced people. These people are also the most comfortable at organising small boat diving and this has meant that while the club has new dive managers coming through, they have generally restricted themselves to commercial boat trips. In the lead up to this expedition we ran 2 boat handling courses, one a year in advance, which was combined with a Diver Cox’n Award (DCA), and one 2 months before the expedition. 5 of the expedition members attended one of these courses (although 1 subsequently withdrew from the expedition) and one further member attended both, obtaining DCA on the first course and boat handling instructor on the second. Following the withdrawal of one boat handler this left the expedition with 4 new boat handlers and 2 boat handling instructors.

In order to best develop the new boat handlers we adopted a system where 2 of them would be boaties for a whole day and this would alternate. The 2 new boaties would buddy the boat handling instructors allowing them to maximise time for boat handling development. Testimonials from each of the 4 new boat handlers are included below. As a result of the expedition 3 out of the 4 are now at the point where they can safely drive a boat for a diving wave without supervision, taking full responsibility for getting to and locating the dive site, dropping off and picking up divers and getting us back to base with associated coming alongside/shelving shore manoeuvres. The final boat handler is nearly there but just has a little more to learn around decision making particularly when operating in shallow water where there is danger of damaging the boat.

Below are a selection of comments from the 4 individuals:

“I went on my first club RIB trip about 6 months ago, during which I very much enjoyed RIB diving, but thought it looked very difficult to drive boats, and didn’t see any opportunity to learn boat handling skills in the near future. However, to encourage up-skilling of newer member of the club, expedition members ran a boat handling course prior to the expedition, which I eagerly attended. During the expedition, I was given the opportunity to handle the club RIB under the guidance of experienced instructors. Throughout the week, I gained the experience and confidence to handle the boat independently and eventually took full responsibility for a full diving session. This experience has given me the enthusiasm to offer to help as a boat handler for future club trips, some of which involve training new club members over the coming months.

“Over the week of the expedition in Skye, I developed skills related to boat handling, site location and dive managing at an unknown site. I now feel confident to be in charge of a RIB without supervision, driving it around, dropping and picking up divers and mooring it. I have also learnt

how to use the echo sounder to locate a wreck or other dive site and the signs to look for on the echo that indicate wrecks, kelp or rocks; along with locating the dive site from other land marks around it; and how to shot a dive site based on these signs.”

“I went on the boat handling course in July in earnest, to be ready to get hands on experience on driving the club RIB in Skye. I found the boat handling course interesting, exciting and exhilarating but also very hard work. I found that on the boat handling course while driving the RIB, I tended to be quite good on close manoeuvres when instructed to do one, but when it came to planning and deciding a course of action in response to a situation, I tended to be apprehensive and indecisive and find it difficult to decide between two courses of action. I was very keen after the course to get the opportunity to work on the weakness and looked forward to the Skye trip.”

“The Skye expedition also gave me the opportunity to gain some experience driving one of the club’s boats. I went on the Boat Handling course last summer but this is the first time since then I’ve been on a trip where we have really used them, owing to a shortage of experienced boaties/towers in the branch. The length of the expedition meant I had enough time to practise the things I had forgotten and gain experience of important skills such as mooring, dropping off/picking up divers, locating dive sites and putting in a shot line. I found this really useful and I now feel much more confident about using the club boats on trips in the future.”

“On the Skye trip my boat handling skills improved vastly with the extra hours I was able to drive the RIB. I found I got more confident at driving at high speed and my ability to come alongside a platform improved to the point where I felt confident to do it without a boat instructor to guide me. I also found that my ability to drop off divers and pick up divers improved as well, but I am aware the sea state on the trip was extremely calm and so I most likely need more practice with supervision in less calm conditions. The one aspect that I still need to work on, and found most challenging, was working under pressure and this was most evident with shotting a site. I find that with two available courses to take, I will hesitate before making a decision and this means I lose valuable time with which I could line myself up and make it easier for myself. So in short, I need to be more confident in my own decision making skills, which would give me more time in which to line up and carry out my manoeuvres. Going on this week long expedition with two boat handling instructors was a golden opportunity to get hours of experience handling the RIB, and not an opportunity that comes along very often in a busy BSAC student branch. I am indebted to the two instructors for their patience and guidance and their willingness to freely share their knowledge and give up their time to teach. This for me acutely summarises the true spirit of BSAC club diving and sharing of skills.”

Personal Skills Focus

By its nature an expedition of this kind lends itself to a number of personal development opportunities and these were acknowledged by the team members. Some comments from individuals are below.

“As a new diver, the expedition gave me the opportunity to dive consecutively for 6 days – the most I’ve ever done in a single trip. This gave me ample opportunity to gain more confidence in the water, RIB diving and diving as part of a small team.”

“The diving itself was also challenging as I experienced a number of new environments including a drift dive, a night dive and various minefields of jellyfish. It was definitely a great opportunity to practice my diving skills in these new situations. I am now much more confident in leading dives in such situations and now have a better idea of hazards which can be included in my brief.”

“This experience has been invaluable to me and has helped me develop these skills which are not only critical for my diving development but also to my professional working life as well.”

“I have been able to experience UK diving with more challenging conditions and of different types such as drift and night diving.”

“As well as being an extremely fun trip, the Skye expedition was a great opportunity to upskill and do some more challenging diving. I now feel more confident in leading drift dives and entering more intact wrecks such as the Port Napier. My favourite new experience was the night dive we did from the hard boat – we rarely get the opportunity to do night dives in the branch and my previous experience of them was limited to a very shallow shore dive we did a couple of years ago on a trip to Cornwall.”

One of the participants has recently become an Advanced Instructor (AI) and found the expedition to be one continuous adhoc teaching opportunity. She comments:

“We had a planning session before the expedition where I got to take people through using charts, planning routes using multiple waypoints, site selection and general work on getting all of the logistics together for an expedition of this type. On the expedition itself I was able to consolidate my mentoring skills overseeing two new dive managers in running a day of diving from a small boat. I only recently became a boat handling instructor and with 4 trainee boat handlers on the expedition I was really able to consolidate my instructing skills in this area, learning when to intervene, when not to and building in some AI techniques such as helping one boat handler to visualise a run to drop off divers on a shot line in tricky conditions. We had an interesting experience on day 1 with the tide going out so fast that we were left with a 1m drop off the end of the slipway and a boat to launch. While we did launch the boat by pushing it off the trailer over the end of the slipway, this situation taught me to think things through and to work together to come up with a solution to a problem. The next step for me is First Class Diver and in terms of the personal development of working as part of a team to make an expedition happen I feel I gained a huge amount of confidence in my ability to make challenging diving happen.”

Expedition Leader's Review

My previous experience of running trips has been organising 3 weekend trips and 3 bank holiday weekend trips. One of these bank holiday weekend trips was to an unknown site to the club, Anglesey, so I felt that I was ready to take the step of leading a week long expedition to an unknown site. I knew that this was going to be challenging for me and the team but I was confident that the support I had from the whole team, but especially from the experienced members of the team, Ali Gaudion and Michelle Kim, meant the expedition would be successful. I knew that the site was remote and the week was going to be extremely busy and so I felt it crucial to do as much preparation and planning as possible before the expedition. To that end, the

group discussed the expedition regularly, culminating in a day-long trip planning meeting on Sunday the 10th of August.

I realised early on that I would not be able to do every task by myself and decided that the only way to manage the expedition efficiently was to delegate. For example, before the trip planning meeting, I researched dive sites using internet resources but asked Michelle Kim to purchase charts for Skye and locate the sites on the chart and fill out SOLAS sheets for every site. At the day of the trip planning meeting, we then double checked all the co-ordinates in order to teach the more junior members of the club how to use the chart and plot waypoints, and confirm the coordinates. I assigned many other tasks, to all members, at the trip planning meeting. As two members of the team dropped out at short notice I had to assign their tasks shortly before the trip, which showed me the importance of being dynamic and flexible even when plans are already in place.

The expedition was a valuable learning experience for me. I learned about boat handling, dive managing and started learning new things about myself and expedition managing. For example, on the very first morning, I learned that expeditions will not always run to plan, and I tend to be overcautious in unknown situations. An example of this was when we tried to launch the boat off a slipway that had uncovered during low water to expose a half-meter drop. Owing partly to my inexperience, I felt we should wait several hours until the water level rose, particularly as it was the first day, but our First Class Diver was confident we could still launch successfully. Michelle justified her decision and explained her plan thoroughly, so I decided that the team could rise to the challenge. I learnt that to be an exceptional expedition leader you have to be creative, tenacious and decisive and inspire confidence in your team even when they don't initially agree with you. Of course you have to have years of experience and really know what you are doing to be able to carry out such feats, but it made me realise that we were truly on an adventurous trip.

The expedition was on the whole a great success, particularly considering the experience of the collective group. We drove up to Skye, which is an extremely long way with no incidents. This might not seem like an achievement for most clubs, but with the majority of trip members under 25 and unable to drive rented vehicles, this was something we had been concerned about before running the trip. We successfully went diving twice everyday and even three times on one day. We were successfully able to combine challenging dive management and site location, while allowing new boat handlers to increase their boat handling skills and shot dive sites for the first time. We also allowed relatively new dive leaders to manage diving for a day which increased their skill set vastly. This was one of the harder aspects of running the expedition, allowing newer members of the club to take responsibility, knowing that it could impact the day's diving experience for everyone else if something went wrong, whilst allowing the newer members the freedom to make decisions.

On the whole, we enjoyed high quality diving but there were a couple of issues, including missing slack on the SS Doris. This was unfortunate, as we had taken the time to arrive on site early and waited for 45 minutes for what we thought was the slack time. Unfortunately, we missed slack because of the unpredictable spring tides and our unfamiliarity with the site. We also found it challenging shooting the SS Urlana with only one pair of divers finding the wreck. The final issue was predicting local currents on an island like Skye can be challenging for drift dives and so our drift dive on the Ard Beag did not go as anticipated and was a little fast for the experience of some of the divers. On the whole I think that 3 dives out of 12 not going exactly to plan was not bad considering that the majority of team members were

concentrating on learning new skills, for some dive managing, for some boat handling and spotting sites, and all in an unfamiliar location.

I have learnt a great deal and will certainly be keen to run another expedition as I found it a thoroughly enjoyable trip and it definitely fulfilled the purpose of up-skilling club members.

Expedition Mentor's Review

The objective of this expedition to cascade as much skill and knowledge to the less experienced club members was clear from the conception of the expedition and thus every element of planning and execution of the expedition was inevitably going to be a team effort. Having said that it was still vital that the group had a competent leader to manage the various personalities and to ensure that all the bases had been covered. This is where Ali Niewiarowska, as the expedition leader was highly effective. I have worked closely with Ali before, during and after the expedition and have found her to be a receptive, highly capable and dependable individual. Throughout she has taken it upon herself to drive the team forward through her role model behaviour and acting as a mentor herself to more junior members of the team. This is exactly the kind of leadership behaviour that ULSAC desperately needs.

Overall, the whole team was pro-active and co-operative throughout the process. The planning meeting was very productive with everyone throwing themselves into all aspects of what is involved in conducting a multi-day diving expedition independently using a small boat. Whilst in Skye, the delegation of roles and responsibilities ensured everyone was involved and that the workload was spread evenly. The atmosphere throughout the week was high, although I'm sure this was helped by the calm weather and smooth seas, this would not have been the case had the diving not been high quality, exciting and enjoyable.

The fact that the whole week ran smoothly without any major issues is a testament to the amount of planning and preparation that was done beforehand and those who attended have now gained vital knowledge and experience in all aspects of organising small boat diving from planning and selecting appropriate sites, locating and searching for sites, deploying and recovering shot lines, safely operating a RIB on a dive site as well as getting to and from shore. The intention is that they will be able to use this experience as a blueprint to organise branch small boat diving in the future.

Things we might have done differently

On the whole the expedition went exceptionally smoothly. There was 1 minor diving incident to note, which was a loss of buoyancy by one diver from 15m on a night dive with no ill effects. This was attributed to not monitoring depth often enough and the increased difficulty in maintaining a constant depth in the dark.

It is fair to say that we could and should have avoided the complication around launching the boat on a dried out slipway if we had been paying more attention to the receding tide and not planned to launch around low water.

We missed slack on one site (SS Doris) where the first pair got the end of slack but no other pairs did. This was not due to arriving at the site late as we had arrived 1 hour before calculated slack, it was more due to lack of knowledge of local tides and what to expect the surface conditions to look like during a slack window where the water never really stopped flowing. Having observed the surface conditions once slack was over we now know that we had actually arrived on slack and should we return we would know what to look for.

On one dive 3 out of the 4 buddy pairs failed to find the intended dive site (SS Urlana). The nature of the seabed (large kelp covered boulders) and the nature of the wreck (extensively broken up and spread over a large distance) made this a tricky one to locate. In hindsight we might have decided to take on a structured underwater search from the very beginning rather than just for the final buddy pair which should have resulted in more of the team finding the wreck.

Appendices

- Appendix A - Expedition Planning Resources
- Appendix B - Expedition Participants
- Appendix C - Expedition Timetable
- Appendix D - Expedition Diving Summary
- Appendix E - Expedition Diary
- Appendix F - Expedition Financial Summary
- Appendix G - Expedition Weather
- Appendix H - Expedition Dive Sites
- Appendix I - General and Marine Life Photographs