

ON AN 'ORSE

The Burton club were up in Oban and had collected a sack full of scallops, but we decided to leave then in the sea until tomorrow.

So, big Ron, Jim and I swam to the southerly buoy in Kerrera Sound and tied the sack on.

The next day we swam out to the buoy and were astonished to find that the sack was in shreds and the scallops gone!

We realised that the buoy had rocked during the night and the shells of the scallops had cut the sack against the buoy until they fell out, so the scallops were all seventy feet below on the sea bed!

We got a new sack and decided to dive and recollect the wayward scallops.

Down below, we found a very productive patch of shellfish and soon had them in the sack.

Suddenly Big Ron and I saw a lobster under a rock. We began to coax it out when to our surprise we were covered with a cloud of mud!

We looked up, and to our amazement Jim was going by, **on a horse!**

The horse was a "Mobo-horse" a metal toy that someone had thrown in to dispose of it.

Jim had it between his legs and he was propelling himself with a galloping motion, stirring up the bottom sediment in the process!

We didn't get the lobster.



Don

Shark Diving at Blue Planet Aquarium, Chester

I was diving with the Hull University Sub-Aqua Club (HUSAC) in the Blue Planet Aquarium in Chester, just round the corner from Ellesmere Port (BSAC HQ stomping ground) in mid-February.

We arrived at the aquarium in a university minibus at about 2.30pm. We were all given the chance to look around the aquarium with the price included in the dive. I had visited the aquarium six years earlier without diving and it was good to see it again. It is a very good aquarium, possibly second best only to The Deep.

After an hour and a half we were led behind the scenes to the quarantine area just next to the main tank. We filled out the paperwork before going for a briefing. The staff were well practised and highly efficient, though everyone relaxed at the briefing. A dive guide talked us through the shark species and explained the unfamiliar signals to us. As well as hand signals they also used large steel bolts as an audible signal. We were told the tank was thirty six by twenty metres in width and length and about four and a half metres deep at the deepest point. Water temperature was about 23°C. There were thirty five sharks and rays in the tank encompassing six

species, plus other life including moray eels and trigger fish.

I was first in. I climbed into my gear with three other visiting divers. In the water was the dive leader and two safety divers. Our equipment configuration was interesting. We were not allowed any fins in the tank in case we accidentally kicked any of the fish. Instead we were hugely over weighted and told to walk along the bottom of the tank. The dive leader was also over weighted but the safety divers wore fins and actively swam with the group. Unfortunately, cameras were banned from being in the water.

We walked down what the dive leader called a shallow slope and I called a small cliff into a sandy area to get our weights right. I was wearing about fifteen kilos, about nine more than I usually wore in a wetsuit. Once we were happy, we walked in the ten metre visibility into the main area just by the ocean tunnel with the spectators, who were family and friends (or in this case HUSAC members waiting their turn) watching on. We knelt down in the sand and watched as the large sharks swam just inches over our heads. The biggest was a fully grown female sand tiger shark about twelve feet long! Other species in-

cluded lemon sharks, nurse sharks and southern rays about five feet across.

We walked further along. I casually looked over a rocky outcrop and, to my surprise, a southern ray made a beeline straight for my head! It wasn't aggressive, it had just made a very definite decision as to where it wanted to go. There was no question to who had right of way! I ducked as it swam over me. It went all dark like a canopy covering me.

We knelt on a ledge in front of a window and watched the world swim by. After a few minutes we moved off the ledge and more or less back where we were before. I was careful not to stand on a nurse shark which had accommodated itself just underneath an overhang.

I knelt on the sand and then felt a reasonably powerful nudge against my thigh. Thinking it was the diver behind me and ignored it. Then it happened again. I looked down to see a moray eel about five or six feet long writhing in the sand and rock scratching its skin. I just happened to be in the way. I tried to ignore it and focus on the sharks, thinking of all the stories I had been told about how sharp a moray's teeth were! As we stood up to leave the moray briefly followed me and

was just inches away from my legs. I was worried about standing on it!

After thirty three minutes we left the tank having been down to a maximum depth of about three metres. It was a fantastic experience. Watching the massive animals swim just inches away from you was inspiring. I think it is unlikely they will come so close on a wild dive, even on a site frequented by divers. Their effortless grace as they swam through the water was magical. If anyone has ever seen a sand tiger shark, all of their teeth are exposed and they aren't the most friendly-looking sharks you can find, but that just added to my respect of underwater animals and, even though we were in an aquarium, it reminded me that the sea is not human territory, but the territory of the native species.

A truly memorable experience.

Matt Newsome



A male sand tiger shark swimming over me (in the blue wetsuit).