

Malta Trip Report - June 2010

The Divers

Kev Wilde
Les Dixon
Mark Dixon

The Non Divers

Arlene Wilde
Lynn Dixon
Claire Dixon
Paul and Catherine Chambers-Dixon

The idea of a trip to Malta was suggested while we were sat in the Steampacket in South Shields enjoying a beer after a day's diving on Allan Lopez's SpellbinderII. It was decided that we would spend a week in Bugibba/St Paul's Bay area during the school half term as it was to be a family holiday.

The accommodation and flights were booked well in advance and finally the day arrived.

We all met up in Stockport at the Britannia Hotel for our overnight stay and the next morning set off to the car park to park the cars and get the coach to Manchester Airport.

We had a pleasant flight to Malta after a short delay at Manchester and arrived at our hotel in Bugibba, which was quite satisfactory.

The next day we found a dive centre near Bugibba square called Buddies Dive Cove and booked our diving as their prices seemed quite good. We arranged for three days diving with Kev diving Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday while Mark and Les were to dive Tuesday, Thursday and Friday. Kev had arranged to go sightseeing on Friday and wanted to do a deeper dive on Wednesday.

Reg, our laid back French dive guide, picked us up from our hotel on Tuesday morning. He took us to the dive centre where we got our kit sorted and loaded onto the truck then we set off to Valletta accompanied by Debbie the other guide and three Dutch guys.

After a white-knuckle ride in the dive centre truck through the rush hour traffic we arrived at the dive site. Reg gave us a briefing and we got ready to dive HMS Maori. It was an easy entry down some steps and into the water. We all descended down the sandy sloping shore and the first thing we saw was a big yellow nudibranch. We followed Reg and eventually came to the wreck.

The Maori was bombed on February 14th 1942 whilst in Valletta Harbour, receiving a direct hit to the engine room, which killed one person. Fortunately the rest of the crew were not on board. It is of historical importance as it helped crack the code to sink the Bismark. Originally it blocked a major shipping lane so was towed out of the way, but it broke into two. Only one section is now diveable, which is heavily broken up. The guns were removed, but the rings they were mounted on can still be seen, as can some torpedoes. It is buried deeply by sand and the bridge is the only part still to remain intact. The sand is easily stirred up, but the swim through is never the less

straightforward. Despite the lack of visibility for Maltese waters this still makes a good dive. There are lots of fireworms, a John Dory, eels and octopus on and around the wreck and in the sand nearby sea horses are found.

The second dive of the day was on the Carolita barge A shore dive off Manoel Island with very easy access. The depth varies from 6 to 28 meters as the wreck is lying on a sloping bottom. The wreck is in a very sheltered location and therefore is ideal when the prevailing North West wind is very strong. In 1942, this cargo vessel was moored at the submarine depot and probably mistaken for a submarine in the dark, she was hit by a torpedo at her stern and sunk immediately. The visibility on this dive was poor especially at the deepest part.

While we were diving Arlene, Lynn and Claire caught the bus to Rabat to do some sightseeing on a horse drawn carriage around Mdina then stopped off at a craft village afterwards.

On Wednesday, Kev went to Cirkewwa with Debbie from the dive centre to dive the P29 patrol boat and the Rozi where he saw some grouper and a moray eel. Both boats were purposefully sunk for the benefit of divers. The Rozi, a 40m tug boat, was sunk in 1991 and the P29 a 51m Condor class patrol boat lying upright at 33m was scuttled in September 2007. The visibility on these dives were 30m plus. The rest of the group had a nice day relaxing around the pool and strolling around Bugibba.

On Thursday the three divers were picked up early to catch the ferry to Gozo then were driven to the dive site called The Blue Hole and The Inland Sea. Entering the water at the Inland Sea, the first part of the dive passes through an arch in the rock where the deep blue clear water is the attraction. After this you follow the reef round, which is on a steep wall that falls away to the sea floor at 60 metres. The reef is covered in life, including some larger fish, such as tuna. Further around the wall there is a small cavern. You then come to the Blue Hole, a sinkhole in the limestone, through which you can enter to do a safety stop then surface from. The walk back is hard work across rough limestone and back to the Inland Sea, but well worth it as the dive is awesome.

The area is very popular with divers and tourists on boat trips. There is a good café at the Inland Sea site that we used between dives.

Arlene and Lynn also went to Gozo on a later ferry and enjoyed a guided trip around the island in a taxi and had lunch.

Mark and Les went on a boat dive on Friday to Comino where we dived The P31 minesweeper which was purposefully sunk in September 2009 at 20m to the sea bed. The visibility was so good you could see the wreck from the boat. We swam along the wreck from bow to stern looking under the hull then ascended over the stern and swam forward through the wreck exploring the equipment left on board. We then swam around the forward end going in and out of the bridge. We then went to The Blue Lagoon which is a very popular tourist spot for our surface interval. For our second dive we dropped in from the boat and ventured through a large hole at the reef surrounding the lagoon and descended to about ten metres. As we followed the wall of the reef there were lots of nooks and crannies to investigate until we found the entrance to Alex's Cave (named after a local diving character years ago). There were interesting rock formations as we entered and then the cave dog-legged to the left. We kept on the bottom at about 14 metres until we reached the end and then came out at 10 metres. After making the dog leg a torch was essential to appreciate the beauty and crevices containing small crayfish and shrimps - a lovely sight as the torch beam picked up their eyes. During the dive the boat changed position to be sited near 'mushroom rock' that looks like a huge mushroom as it breaks the surface. Again there were cracks and crevices to keep us interested until it was time to surface.

On Friday Kev and Arlene went to Valletta sightseeing and on Saturday Mark, Claire, Paul and Catherine went on a trip to a water park where the girls swam with dolphins.

In the evening the square was buzzing as England were playing their first game in the world cup. The atmosphere was good for our last night.

To sum up the whole holiday went well and we all had a thoroughly great time. Good weather. Good food. Good company and most of all good dives. Looking forward to our next trip when hopefully more club members will join us.

[Click this link to view the photos](#)