

RIGHT UP YOUR FJORD - DIVING NORWAY

Now for something completely different – diving in your dry suit in green water, but unlike UK diving something's missing- why are we not planning our dives around slack water, why is the viz averaging 15-20 metres, why if this is Norway are we not shoveling snow off our kit and why are the wrecks in such good condition ?

Surely this can't be diving in Norway ? well I can assure you it is so if you are interested, read on and all will be revealed-

I set up this regional trip in 2007 and with 4 members from DSAC signed up along with a few other divers I know from RAF Wittering and Warrington SAC. The trip took place in late June/ early July 2008.



Getting to Norway

We departed from Stanstead airport on the Friday evening to Bergen. Norwegian.no offers 55kg of luggage allowance as standard for about £100 return. This works out at 2 X 20 kg as hold baggage and 15 kg cabin baggage. You don't need to take lead weights or cylinders as they are already on the boat.

Our Home for the Week – Gaelic Rose

The Gaelic Rose's home port is Oban, but spends 6 weeks each summer in Norway and runs week long liveaboard charters for British divers. So the first advantage of diving Norway is that we had a UK skipper who understood how British divers like to dive. Conversely we had a typical UK skipper so we knew what to expect.

We started planning this trip in 2007 and took into account the type and depth of diving everyone wanted to do so that everyone got the most out of the trip. The requests were for wrecks, depth, trimix, softnolime for Roy and the love of his life- miss inspiration, oh and two veggies.

The net result was a floating gas blending station complete with a Haskell pump and a rather varied larder.



Extracts From The Trip Diary

Saturday

We head north out of Bergen. The skipper tells me I'm responsible for planning the weeks diving but have to minimize the Gaelic' Rose's carbon footprint as he has not passed on any fuel surcharges. (skipper-speak for don't take liberties with my profit margin)

Dive 1- a shake down dive on Spring, a wreck resting on a wall with the bow at 6 metres and the stern at 52 metres.

Saturday evening. We moor up in Rongevær Inlet for the night and after our evening meal the group go walkabout.

Sunday

Dive 2 -The Haarkon. Discovered late 2007. Sits relatively up right on a flat sea bed . Max depth was 44 metres. Lots of features still intact and a rather interesting theory exists on why she sank.

We steam slowly north to Krakhellasund where the scenery is amazing. After a 6 hour surface interval we dive late in the afternoon.



Dive 3- Solvang 2 which sank in the mid 1990's. This wreck sits upright in 25 metres. I have unfinished business on this wreck as I started surveying and researching her history in 2007 as part of my NAS 2 project work. Everyone had a relaxed dive whilst I managed to complete my surveying, assisted by Mark in return for Bacardi.

We steam east up the Songgefjord. We passed the QE2 coming out of the fjord about tea time but the QE2 skipper seemed to know what he was doing and did not crash into me whilst I was at the wheel. Then I noticed the echo sounder could not see the bottom. On checking the chart datum, the bottom was 1,250 metres below the boat.

We moor up in Vadhiem, just in time to discover the pub had closed for the night. At least we stocked up on duty free at Stanstead as a back up plan.

Monday

Dive 4 & 5, The Oldenburg. This wreck lies on a 40 degree list from the bow at about 25 metres to the stern at 72 metres. Air divers can easily dive the upper part of this large wreck from the bow to the bridge. Most of us went tri-mixing so we could see this wreck in all it's glory.

Some opt to do 2 dives on this wreck, again a long surface interval and some walkabout is the order of the day with a shallower dive two in the late afternoon.

That evening, we steam away from Vadheim up Songgefjord to Brekke. We even manage to make it to the local pub that evening.

Tuesday

Dive 6- The Inge Seks (this is a ship wreck- honest) So you think the Oldenburg was a good dive ? Well go ask Roy and Karl what they thought of the Inge Seks. This is another large wreck lying on an angle on the side of a spectacular fjord. Again it was a case of pick your depth, starting at about 30 metres down to 60 metres.

Time to move on- again another large surface interval and time to plan a shallow second dive

Dive 7- Havda The maximum depth on this wreck is about 24 metres to the seabed.

That evening we moor up in Midge Bay and that evening I take everyone to see an abandoned WW2 German observation post and artillery battery that strategically monitored the fjord below. This observation post has not been renovated for the benefit of tourists, but still retains many interesting features.

Wednesday

Time to go diving again. We are only a short distance from Krakhellasund and drop down to the Songestien, a pinnacle in the centre of the fjord that the Ferndale managed to bump into during WW2. The next day the German support vessel Parat came to assist the Ferndale But sunk just behind the Ferndale. The nett result is two wrecks in one dive.

Dive 8- The Ferndale & Parat. The bow of the Ferndale is at 10 metres with the stern at 45 metres. Yes you've guessed it- pick your depth. However, from the stern of the Ferndale and about 15 metres away, you can see the Parat. The Parat's bow is in about 52 metres and 61 metres to the propeller. You can decompress on the pinnacle just above the bow of the Ferndale. The marine life is profuse with anemones, crustaceans, star fish and even nudibranch and pipe fish if you look closely.



We are now heading south back towards Bergen but the diving is far from over.

Late that afternoon, we dive again.

Dive 9 – The Frankenwald. This WW2 wreck sits upright on the seabed. It's about 25 metres to the deck and 38 metres to the seabed. This wreck is largely intact and looks like a text book tour of a typical wreck, where you can see the bridge, the engine room, deck machinery, hand rails, The rudder, the steering mechanism & anchors etc. If you want to know how to identify the key parts of a wreck, this is the one to dive and learn all about it.



We moor up not far from the Frankenwald in a picturesque little fishing village that just happens to have a bar. I should point out at this stage of the article that alcohol is so expensive in Norway that no one could afford more than two rinks per day and therefore no divers were more than mildly merry after pub o'clock on this trip.

Thursday

Dive 10- We decide to dive the Frankenwald again the following morning.

We spend a leisurely 6 hours steaming around the fjords and call in at a village for a few hours before moving onto the final dive site.

Dive 11 – The Server This massive cargo ship sank in January 2007 after running aground on some rocks during a storm. I was privileged to be one of the very first divers allowed onto the wreck after she was declared safe in 2007. The site is actually the bridge and the stern section. The sealed cargo holds were cut away just in front of the bridge and towed away in 2007 for cargo salvage.



What has been left behind is a formidable sized section of wreck with some very 21st century accessories to be seen in the cabins and on the sea bed. The way the marine growth has colonized the wreck within 18 months makes the Scylla look positively sterile by comparison. Maximum depth is about 24 metres.

That evening we head back to Bergen and moor up for the night. There are plenty of bars and places to eat within walking distance.

Friday

We depart to the airport in the afternoon to catch the early evening flight home.

Background Information.

I won't try and dispel the myth that Norway is expensive. Several club members are probably re-mortgaging their homes having hit the bars on the Friday evening and then after some elementary maths, noticed they were paying on average £7-8 per drink. The next shock was the English take away we had (fish and chips to you) which cost about £12 per portion. However, for any fellow divers who worship the chocolate god I can confirm that Norwegian chocolate is to die for and is no more expensive than in the UK.

The price of the liveaboard was £650 for the week (including 3 meals a day) plus the cost of any oxygen and helium used for mixed gas diving. The return flight was £100 with airport transfers at about £8 each way.

What you choose to spend on local food and alcohol is an individual decision. I recommend you bring your duty free allowance of alcohol from the UK. The cost of snack type food (chocolate, crisps, chocolate, fruit, chocolate etc) is about the same as the UK.

The weather was a mixture of sunshine and a few overcast days. We came home with a sun tan (as I do every time I visit Norway in July).

Water temperature averaged 9 degrees C, so if you dive the UK in April and May you should be OK at this temperature.

2009 I have chartered the Gaelic Rose for a Week out of Bergen from 25th July to 1st August and have 7 places available on a first come first served basis. Subject to who wants to join the 2009 trip will dictate the dive plan. However the minimum qualification to do this trip justice has to be dive leader with at least a 40 metre depth rating and ideally on a twin set unless you bring a buddy who dives on the same tank configuration.

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