



# Mouthpiece

## Lockdown Edition

Summer 2020

### e-Committee Update

Plagiarising the famous line from Life of Brian you might ask "What has the Committee ever done for us?". Arguably facing the greatest challenge to humanity, as well as to Bracknell BSAC, the committee has swung into action.

Meetings immediately went virtual, using Zoom video conferencing, and frequency upped from monthly to weekly at times, attempting to track the fast pace of change.



Key themes have been 1) will the sports centre / pool close and if so what do we do instead, 2) how

do we maintain cohesion amongst our members during lockdown and 3) what's our strategy with dives and dive bookings.

Alan, the DO, has been particularly busy talking with dive boat operators so that we can help keep them in business whilst protecting the club financially.



### This Issue...

- e-Committee Update
- Deep Thoughts
- Skiver Divers
- Last Dive at NDAC
- Life on the Front Line
- Life Without Diving
- The VSPQ Performance Table
- Lockdown Beards
- Virtual Scuba Training
- Another Life:
  - IDB20
  - Fishing for Ghosts





## Skiver Divers

It was a fresh Monday morning in the middle of February when One-Dive Mike suggested it was time to blow off the cobwebs at Wraysbury. Who knew that it was going to be one of the first dives of the season and also one of the last for many months to come!

Wraysbury was very quiet at 09:30. Ray was already kitted up when Mike & Nic arrived, an instructor was taking a single student through dry suit training and the café was serving breakfast. Nothing stirred but the tea, quite different from the manic summer weekends we were looking forward to.

Extreme undersuits were donned to cope with the 6°C water, shallow entry and weight check, then off we go. Visibility of at least 2m but this is out and back, 15 minutes at a maximum 9 metres. So far this is my best dive of the year.

Nic discovers that the boot lip of his car is higher than expected as he backs his twin 12's down onto the floor and it drags him in afterwards. Ray and Mike laugh, take photos and eventually help.

It seems that having braved the elements, and it is now lunchtime, The Perseverance is calling. A roaring log fire, hot lunch and cold beer is the best combination along with more dive planning for the expected season ahead. If only we had known then what we know now!

## DEEP THOUGHTS

At times like these life gets put into perspective. Does it really matter whether we have A-clamp or DIN when I am queuing 30 minutes just hoping to buy some loo roll.

Life without diving seemed unthinkable a few months ago, now we just hope for life.

People in our club, our friends, are doing amazing things. Sewing for the NHS, supporting the hospital canteen workers, running on-line scuba training and exams.

Our fellow divers are donating their dive deposits to the boat operators and crews who are mostly self-employed with little government support even though their livelihoods have been suspended in a Safety Stop of indeterminate duration.

And every club member has their personal struggle with infection, isolation, work or lack of, childcare or family division.

It will get better. We will return to diving. The club will return. But things will never be quite the same again.

# Last Dive at NDAC

**Andy Hodgson**

Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> March and I should've been diving off Portland. Lockdown had started on the Friday but Bendy and I managed to get a dive at NDAC the day it closed its doors.

As my engineering business is primarily based around infection control we have remained active. I have been busy darting around the country from the NHS at one end to scientific research customers at the other end. It's been a fascinating experience to see how the whole system is working to provide care at the coal face and the work, behind closed doors, towards prevention.

It is also interesting to see how biased the media reporting has been on funding and supplies. None of our customers are experiencing major issues, but of course it has been challenging.

My biggest challenge has been the weekends. Nearly 50% of my dive season weekends are taken up with...diving! The other 50% is going out and about with my wife Carol plus a bit of

socialising thrown in. Occasionally I will do some DIY and gardening. Painting and decorating is normally sub-contracted, DIY gets started but rarely finished. The car gets cleaned by the local Albanian gypsies.

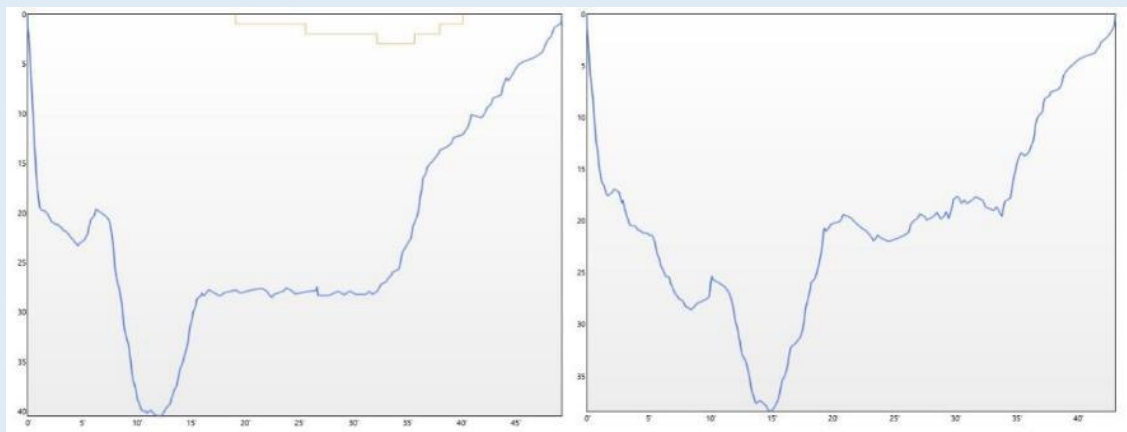
But that has all changed. I've been rubbing down, filling in, painting, gardening, planting, cleaning windows, washing cars, weeding patios, cleaning the oven and DRINKING A LOT!

The dive gear was all serviced over winter, so I've not been able to fettle away much. However, I have enjoyed spending time with Carol. We have spent many hours just enjoying nature and some peace and quiet in the garden.

My thoughts are to those who are isolated at home or possibly stuck in crowded households with little or no private open space.

In reality we are very lucky.

*Dive 1 @ 40m / Dive 2 @ 35m*



# Life on the Front Line

## Felicity Townsend

*Felicity is a Healthcare Account Manager at Compass Group, the largest contract foodservice company in the world with over 600k employees.*

When Covid19 hit, the whole country went in turmoil. Whilst our restaurants in offices in the City, our schools, event arenas and stadia all closed their doors, our Healthcare business went into overdrive.

Whilst instant thoughts about our hospital heroes during the pandemic naturally go to the nurses and doctors on the frontline - and rightly so - the often unsung, forgotten heroes are the dedicated, cleaners, porters, caterers and security teams who also do such a vital role in the hospitals. These are often minimum wage staff, without the benefit of generous Public Sector terms and conditions.

Suddenly our hospitals were mobbed with Covid patients and nowhere to put them. However, our teams were always ready to work, frequently going into what were really daunting environments, working alongside the Doctors and Nurses. Often scared or anxious to work in these infected areas, in some cases having lost colleagues to Covid, they didn't let us down. They worked endless extra shifts to help cope with all the extra work and were becoming exhausted. Managers (including Felicity - Ed) that were not normally site-based also turned out to help in the hospitals, often after a full shift of their day job!

Then the cavalry arrived! Our colleagues from our event business, now closed, instead of being furloughed came to help in our



Healthcare sectors. Those who are usually serving VIP's in the stadium and arena boxes, the tennis fans at Wimbledon or the rugby crowds at Twickenham, were now cleaning wards or serving food alongside their Healthcare colleagues. Phew! We now had more staff than we knew what to do with!

Compass really looked after the Teams during this time. With no time to go shopping, even if there was anything on the shelves when they got there, every team member received a gift box of food supplies from Compass, along with some very precious toilet rolls! Those self-isolating at home, had it delivered to their door. This was followed up with Easter Eggs and Treat Boxes to keep them smiling. Everyone was provided with free meals at work and a bonus was paid to everyone who worked in Healthcare during the peak of the pandemic, as a thank you for their commitment and dedication.

Compass were at the forefront of Covid planning, working with Public Health England on revised cleaning practices and in the setup of Nightingale Hospitals. They also donated all the food stocks from their thousands of closed sites to local food banks and charities. They really looked after and supported their people during these very strange times, and I have to say I am proud to work for them.

# Lockdown Beards

So who's wearing it best?

We've seen some wonderful lockdown beards over recent weeks, particularly from the men, and here are just a few to admire!



The "Captain Birds Eye"

Classic facial fuzz from a salty sea dog!



The "Bond Villain"

From deep in his Bracknell lair, surrounded by screens and with a cat on his lap!



The "Father Christmas"

From one-shave Mike we get everyone's favourite winter whiskers!



Disqualified!

Sorry but this most magnificent entry has been disqualified from the competition as rumour has it he made a 20 year head start!

# VSPQ League Table

Since the lockdown Bracknell Sub Aqua Club have been running a weekly Virtual Scuba Pub Quiz at 8.30pm on a Thursday night.

Each week 20-30 club members click on the Zoom link with a different QuizMaster or QuizMistress setting the questions.



It is fair to say that either the questions have been very difficult, or we are all pretty dumb, however they have not been high scoring rounds. If it was an Ocean Diver exam we all would have failed!

Typically six rounds of six questions over 40 minutes with topics such as the inevitable Geography, Music, General Knowledge and thankfully some on diving, scuba and marine. Mostly it's a lot of fun and a chance to spend some socially distanced time with friends.

- Claire leads with 5 wins
- Martin & Alison, Andy & Carol have 2 wins

And one win each goes to Alan & Louise and Felicity!

Do not vote if you are reading on-demand as your vote won't be counted and you may still be charged 😞

# Virtual Scuba Training

When the lockdown occurred, the club was very busy with a hectic calendar of diver training. Suddenly the pool was shut down along with the classroom/meeting space. Then the lakes shut followed by every hotel and B&B. Finally the dive boats stopped, all of which made it very difficult to continue diving or training!

Or would it?

With our highly IT enabled club members, a dedicated band of Instructors and Trainees have been rigorously pursuing their Ocean Diver and Sports Diver qualifications virtually.

OK not all of it but all the theory has moved online over the last two months. Led by Martin Hamilton (the determined Training Officer), and ably assisted by two ex-DOs, Andy Hodgson and Jeff Reed, evenings and weekends have been filled with remote lectures.

The BSAC training slide decks have been shared via Zoom or Webex with engaging commentary and lively debate.

Having completed the entire Ocean Diver or Sports Diver syllabus, trainees have then taken their exams virtually as well. Official BSAC qualification questions were read out

live with each student invigilated on camera whilst they wrote down their answers. Answer sheets were then held up to the webcam for marking and the whole process recorded!



Congratulations to all the students who have passed with flying colours.

The final challenge is getting the practical training completed - this can't really be done virtually! The challenge for the club and the Instructor Team is to finalise the sheltered water training as soon as either the swimming pool or the local diving lakes safely reopen.

Ideally students would have a weekend offshore and a club boat has been nominated for this purpose later in the year. But the biggest challenge are the rescue skills for the Sports Diver trainees - how do you give rescue breaths whilst maintaining social distancing? Answers on a postcard please!

# Another Life:

March 23<sup>rd</sup> 2020 saw the start of lockdown in the UK, over 2 months ago, and yet everything has changed. In the month before lockdown we saw two social highlights of the year: Ice Divers' Ball and the Ghost Fishing UK talk. If only we'd known what was coming!



## Bracknell's ghost guest

Members, guests and friends of Bracknell BSAC 434 enjoyed a great evening listening to Rich Walker from the charity Ghost Fishing UK. Attendees learned about Ghost Fishing's important work and the training involved. The club presented Rich with a cheque, as Ghost Fishing UK is Bracknell's charity of the year.