



an annual fixture for the club every year since then.

“On the first trip we had seals, wrecks, good visibility and a brilliant skipper who gave us two slackwater dives a day,” says Micky. “Now it’s even better, because we know our way around the reefs and wrecks. Andy the skipper is finding new sites every year.

“Our group is a mixture. We have whole families, some couples and individuals. We have one couple with children who share the diving. Most of us stay in Sovereign’s B&B, and the families tend to rent houses. For evening meals, when we’re not eating in the pub or at the chip-shop, we have a barbecue at one of the families’ rented houses.”

The Farne Islands provide plenty of opportunities for good scenery and marine life without having to go deep.

“We tend to stay in the 9 to 35m depths, with 90% of the dives on nitrox. We like to spend our time diving, not decompressing,” says Micky.

“We love all types of diving, especially with the seals. The Crumstone is a favourite that always seems to deliver seals and abundant marine life. I think we were the first club to do a night dive on the islands – on the Blue Caps.”

The Farne Islands also have a fair number of wrecks that fit into the above-35m depth range, the most famous being the *Somali*, a 6809-ton steamship bombed and sunk in 1941.

“The *Somali* is good for what you might find. There are lots of bottles. I did my 1000th dive on it,” says Micky.

He sums up what many feel about their favourite British diving holidays: “British diving is challenging and adventurous, but it’s not just the diving,

it’s the *craic*, the friendship and having a great skipper who makes it all worthwhile. While I can still dive, I’ll continue to return.”

✳ **Potters Bar Sub Aqua Club BSAC** ([www.pbsac.org.uk](http://www.pbsac.org.uk)); **Sovereign Diving** ([www.sovereigndiving.co.uk](http://www.sovereigndiving.co.uk))

## Scotland

### WORLD-BEATING POTENTIAL

Popular locations in Scotland include the Moray Firth; the entire West Coast, with liveaboards ranging as far out as St Kilda; and, of course, Scapa Flow.

Edinburgh University Sub Aqua Club has been returning to Skye for club holidays with Dive and Sea the Hebrides for longer than member Dougal Sharp can remember.

“I first saw Skye advertised as an upcoming expedition in 1995, when I was just a trainee. I had never been, but I had heard others in our club raving about it. I was last there in June last year and will be there again in May.

“Skye is always popular, and many of the more experienced divers participate year after year.”

The dive centre has self-catering bunkhouse accommodation. “We do our own cooking. If it weren’t plentiful I would be either kelp-flogged or thrown overboard!” says Dougal.

Three hundred metres along the road is the Stein Inn. As would any diver who has been there, he says: “It’s a great pub with amazing views and beer.”

There is diving for everyone, bearing in mind that Skye is not a location for dedicated wreckies. “There is such a mix



of diving, wrecks, scenic, slow and fast drifts, marine life, deep, shallow – we do the lot!” says Dougal.

“Of wrecks, I love the *Doris* and the *Chadwick* because of the marine life and the dramatic location.” Both these small steamships ran aground, the *Chadwick* in 1892, the *Doris* in 1909.

For a scenic dive Dougal recommends Conger Crevice, a wall with a crack at the bottom, normally dived on slack.

“Last year we did it as a four-knot drift. We needed an experienced group. I had been waiting to do it again for eight years! We saw otters, porpoises and minke whales, and went swimming with basking sharks every day, all in 25° sunshine with flat calm seas and

**Top:** Stern anchor hawse pipe detached from the hull of the popular *Somali* wreck, Northumberland.  
**Centre:** Micky Greenwood and Potter’s Bar SAC keep coming back to Seahouses.  
**Above:** Sunstar on Skye.





**Above:** Secondary 5.9in gun on the *Kronprinz Wilhelm* at Scapa Flow.

**Top right:** Pete Cittern (left) and other members of Clifton SAC are St Kilda devotees.

**Above right:** Skye cuckoo wrasse.

**Below:** Highland cattle view divers with bored indifference.

**Bottom:** Edinburgh University SAC members often take their holidays in Skye.

15m visibility,” says Dougal. “They don’t believe me at work when I say I’ve been to Skye for a holiday – my face and hands are always dark brown.”

Dougal isn’t the first of our enthusiasts to comment on the personal friendships built. “Gordon and Aileen have become great friends over the years. It’s Dive and Sea the Hebrides’ 21st anniversary this year, so we’re planning the mother of all expeditions, with many older members of the club returning.”

The ultimate scenic diving destination off Scotland is St Kilda, where Pete Cittern returned for the third time last year with Clifton Sub Aqua Club.

“Previous trips had been on *Jean de la Lune* in 1995 and *Salutay* in 2001,” says

Pete. “In 2006 we couldn’t get a slot to suit us on *Salutay*, so we booked with Northern Light Charters. We had been with it to Mull the year before. It was a popular trip, so we booked two of its boats, *Hjalmar Bjorge* and *Elizabeth G.*”

The club sets up several week-long trips a year. “I like to do lots of the Scottish stuff, usually liveaboard because it enables the diving I want to do,” says Pete. “Try doing St Kilda shore-based!”

“As some of us are getting older and like our comforts, we appreciate the ‘luxury’ liveaboards like NLC provide.”

“For scenic dives I like arches, slots and anything with a big drop-off – hence St Kilda.”

Well offshore, the number of days on location can be uncertain. “The weather was very kind to us, so we took the fairweather route, straight out between Barra and South Uist then on to St Kilda, diving later in the afternoon,” says Pete.

Deteriorating weather was forecast for the end of the week, so they headed back a day early, diving Whale Rock on the way. “It was a fabulous dive with lots of life on walls, canyons and caves.

“We didn’t have time to explore it fully. It was Mark the skipper’s idea to do it – he’d seen it on the chart and wondered what it was like.”

Their next dive, on the *Chadwick*, was one that will “forever be remembered for the bell that got away”, says Pete.

“As we finished, two of our divers said they had seen the uncovered bell, and they left it there! Shortly afterwards, Dive and Sea the Hebrides’ boat came round the point and they were straight down for it.” (*DIVER* News, September 2006).

Pete likes a mix of new and old diving. “I’m thinking of scaling down the Scottish stuff for a year or two, but I said that last year and have signed up for Shetland this year.

“We’re taking *Jean Elaine* across from Scapa Flow.” It seems that everyone has either been to Scapa, is about to go or wants to go. Keen to dive the German fleet, Andy Baker found Orkney Island Charters and mv *Bounteous Sea* online.

“It’s one of the best UK liveaboards we’ve stayed on,” says Andy. “Over the past three years we’ve been four times.” Unfortunately, OIC recently sold up.

Most Scapa dive boats give options for accommodation ranging from B&B to liveaboard, with various degrees of catering. Andy goes for liveaboards: “An absolutely huge breakfast is provided and we have the option of preparing our own dinners or going into town,” he says.

Most Scapa Flow enthusiasts would agree with his thoughts on the diving: “The battleships always amaze anyone for the sheer scale. The guns of the *Kronprinz Wilhelm* are spectacular.” And of the cruisers, he remarks: “The *Köln* has pretty much everything you could want from a wreck.”

While our other UK diving holiday-makers are clubs or groups of friends, Andy and wife Colleen have set up Poseidon Adventures, a small business to run dive trips. “We fill places by advertising on our website and by word of mouth. The Scapa Flow trip fills itself purely on reputation.” Best diving in the UK? It could be a contender for the best diving in the world,” reckons Andy.

✳ **Edinburgh University Sub Aqua Club BSAC** ([www.eusac.co.uk](http://www.eusac.co.uk)); **Clifton Sub Aqua Club BSAC** ([www.cs-ac.org](http://www.cs-ac.org)); **Poseidon Adventures** ([www.poseidonadventures.co.uk](http://www.poseidonadventures.co.uk)); **Dive and Sea the Hebrides** ([www.dive-and-sea-the-hebrides.co.uk](http://www.dive-and-sea-the-hebrides.co.uk)); **Scapa Flow Charters, mv *Jean Elaine*** ([www.jeanelaine.co.uk](http://www.jeanelaine.co.uk)); **Northern Light Charters** ([www.northernlight-uk.com](http://www.northernlight-uk.com))

