

The Official Idiot's Guide to Dive Planning

(Otherwise known as the Official Guide
to Dive Planning for those Idiots
brave enough to organise a trip!)

A CUSAC publication

Gareth Roberts
Diving Officer 2003-2004

This guide is designed to help those club members who would like to organise trips, but who aren't too sure how to go about it. Hopefully it will enable people to quickly check that they are planning a trip properly, and will also encourage club members who haven't organised a trip before to give it a go! Any queries or issues which are not covered in this guide can be directed to either the Diving Officer, or indeed to any seasoned club member who has experience at organising trips.

Where do I start?

Trips are organised for all sorts of reasons. It could be that someone requires formal training in order to help them gain certain qualifications, or that someone has purchased a new piece of kit and wants to try it out. On the other hand, it could be that a certain group of people wish to dive a certain wreck, or want to take the RIB out to explore a new area. The best reason to go on a trip is to simply go diving, just for fun!

The purpose of the trip will therefore decide a lot about the dive site itself and the type of divers who will be participating. For instance, you would not plan a trip to take a group of novice divers offshore to do a wreck in 35m of water! Yet on the other hand, a group of experienced divers probably wouldn't choose to go on a shallow shore dive, unless there was training to be undertaken.

You should therefore tailor your trip so that the group of divers suits the site, and the site suits the group of divers.

What next?

Once you've decided your dive objectives, you can start to look into more detail at the dive site itself, the diver grades the trip will cater for, and indeed the number of people you will be able to take. A flexible location, like a training quarry, can offer diving for novices through to very experienced divers, due to the depth ranges and facilities available. The only limiting factor here would probably be transport.

A day's hardboat diving, however, is limited by the fact that the maximum number of persons allowed on the boat is 12. Likewise, the club RIB can only cope with a maximum of 8 divers onboard, including the Cox.

You may have transport issues to contend with. The large Union minibuses can only cope with 10 people and their kit, so if you are unable to get hold of a bus, you need to make sure that people have access to private transport.

The earlier you start thinking about these issues, the easier it will be to plan your trip!

Groundwork

Start early; you should be giving yourself at least a couple of weeks to organise everything! Talk to the more experienced members of the club to get ideas about how to best organise a trip, and perhaps more importantly, how not to organise one!

- Decide on your dive objective, and from that the location you'll be using, how many people will be going, and of what grade. Use magazines and books to help you find the relevant information about a site, or if it's one the club regularly uses, speak to one of the more experienced divers in the club. There is plenty of information on the Internet as well, including the BSAC website, divechannel.com and divernet.com. Make sure that you have a contingency plan of alternative sites in case your primary site is blown out etc.
- Inform the Diving Officer of your intentions. He/she will want to know where you are going, what you intend to do, who is planning to go, and their experience level.
- Find experienced divers willing to act as Dive Marshall / Deputy Dive Marshall.
- Unless there is enough interest for two trips to run, try not to clash with any other planned trips. It would also prove extremely difficult to obtain two Union minibuses for one weekend.
- If you need a Union minibus for a trip, you will need to ask the Chair to book one for you. The buses can only be booked a calendar month in advance; however, competition for the buses is fierce, so make sure you give the Chair at least five weeks notice, or else they may not be able to get a bus for you.

- Advertise the trip at least a month before it takes place. Instructors especially need a lot of notice if they are needed for a trip. Send out an e-mail over diver-l@cf.ac.uk; announce it at the Wednesday meeting; or have a chat to people in the pub! Make sure that you state the minimum diver grade the trip is catered for, so that everyone is clear about who is allowed to go. Other useful information to include would be destination, duration and probable costs.
- If you are going for a weeked (or longer), make sure you book the accommodation early. Ensure you let everyone know if they need to bring certain items of equipment, such as sleeping bags to bunkhouses etc. Contact the Treasurer if you need to send a cheque as a deposit for the accommodation.
- Bookings for hardboats are starting to get silly, with people booking weekends a year or more in advance. If you are thinking of booking a hardboat weekend, start very early to make sure that the skipper is available. Again, speak to the Treasurer if you require a cheque as a deposit.
- If the club RIB is to be used, make sure you adhere to the rules as laid out in the Boat Protocol document (download from website). Inform the DO or Boat Officer of your intentions, and that you have enough qualified and experienced coxes for your trip.
- Unless it's a quarry trip, you will need to consult tidetables and charts to plan your diving properly, which is critical for RIB and shore diving. Hardboat skippers check these details themselves and will inform you if a particular site is unsuitable due to tide and/or weather. If you don't know how to use charts and tidetables properly, ask a senior diver, who will be more than happy to help. Check out tide timetables.

Before the trip

- Double-check with the DO that he/she is happy with your plan. They will want to make sure that all participants are fully-paid up members of both the club and BSAC, and are properly qualified and /or experienced to take part in the proposed dives. Submit a copy of the Dive Planner (download from the website) to the DO so that they have all necessary information to hand.
- Keep all participants informed and updated frequently, otherwise you will be bombarded with e-mails asking the same questions! Liaise with the Webmaster, who will update the Diary page with information about your trip.
- If a Union minibus is to be used, you will need to liaise with the Chair in order for them to sort out the paperwork with the Union.
- The Equipment Officers need to be notified in good time regarding how much kit you want to borrow, so that they have time to ensure your request can be facilitated. It is traditional for those members participating in a trip to help fill the tanks up at the lock-up, due to the boring nature of the job! You could always use this as an opportunity to teach people about compressor operation!
- Inform all participants of any particular items they should bring on the trip, whether it be for accommodation (e.g. sleeping bags) or for diving (hoses for drysuits etc.). Remind people of the need for warm weatherproof clothes in winter, and about hats and sunscreen in summer! People also need to be told if they need to bring food along, or if there will be facilities to purchase food at the site. Sorting out the little details early will stop them from becoming major headaches later on!
- Check the availability of local air stations if you need to fill tanks. Some divers may want a nitrox fill, so advise them if this is, or is not, available
- Nearer to the date of the trip, make sure that everyone knows where and when they are to meet. We usually use the back of the Union for most trips, but however you do it, just make sure that everyone knows. Consider giving out your phone number as trip organiser in case anyone has problems meeting you at the allotted time and place
- A few days before the trip, make sure that the Dive Marshall meets up with the DO so that the relevant Next of Kin files can be taken on the trip. You should also make sure you print out some copies of the Dive Marshalling Sheets for use on site
- If it's a hardboat trip, liaise with the skipper to make sure that the trip is still on
- Check weather forecasts, offshore shipping forecast and inshore shipping forecast, in the days before the planned trip to build up a picture of what the weather is likely to be like
- Review the plan, and if need be, change it. If you do change the plan, inform the DO, as well as all the trip participants
- Contact everyone just before the trip to check everything is OK

During the trip

- Make sure that everyone is where they should be and that they have everything they should have!
- Check weather forecasts, offshore shipping forecast and inshore shipping forecast to make sure that it is still worth travelling to the site
- If it's a hardboat trip, contact the skipper to make sure that it's still on.
- Check you have all the relevant safety equipment and that it is all working properly
- Inform the Coastguard of your intentions. If using the RIB, you need to make sure that the cox complies with the new SOLAS regulations – see the Boat Protocol document for more information
- Make sure that the Dive Marshall takes over the dive operation side of things, and help them make sure that everyone is briefed about the site, safety points, dive pairs etc
- If staying somewhere for a weekend trip, consider booking ahead if you intend to eat out. Many places will not appreciate 12 divers suddenly turning up without warning, and it may affect the service you receive!

At the end of the day

- Work out the final bill and collect money from people before they go home!
- Settle up with the skipper if you haven't done so already, and thank him for his help. You may wish to chat with him about a return visit.
- Collect all the Marshalling Sheets so that they can be presented to the DO upon your return. If any training took place, remember to prepare a little report so the Training Officer can update the records accordingly
- Check everyone had a good time!
- Consider writing a trip report about the trip, and maybe even about your planning experiences. Send this to the Webmaster so that it can put it on the website

Hopefully, all your hard work will have paid off, everyone will have enjoyed the trip, and you'll have achieved any specific objectives you had. If everything went well, you may consider organising, or helping someone else, to organise another trip soon!