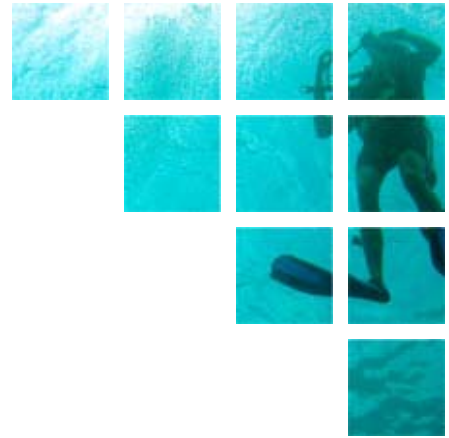


TRIP REPORT



issue 3

lanzarote october 2004

We only managed to fit in one trip to Lanzarote in 2004, instead of the usual three, the year being as busy as a really rather busy thing.

The thought of a week's easy diving in warm, clear waters was very appealing and we were also looking forward to catching up with some old friends on the island.

An uneventful outward flight with Britannia Airways arrived late on the Thursday night, although we did arrive nearly an hour ahead of schedule.



• the spoils!

Nick and Steve set the scene for the week with a little flutter on the in-flight scratch cards. A cynical Danny watched and played his "Humbug" role to the hilt in proclaiming the chances of winning anything (the top prize was £5000) as less than a "snowball in hell's" chance.

With their £4 spent, Nick and Steve went a-scratching and promptly won £7 in cash. A further two cards won a further £2, so they put a quid in and bought a bottle of Scotch between them, effectively for £4.

Daniel was unrepentant and sat listening to the in-flight entertainment with one headphone for the rest of the flight.

We pitched up at our Apartments, the Lomo Blanco and got a swift couple of beers in before retiring.

We still haven't been given a proper translation for the Lomo Blanco – some say it means "Wild Coast", we prefer to think of it as the "White Pig" – if anyone knows any better then please do let us know.

OK, Lomo means pork, but "White Pork" – come on that's no name for apartments!

Friday 15th October

Friday came and we scheduled a couple of easy pleasure dives to get everyone in the mood.

We were due to meet Andy at MA Diving for his Advanced Open Water Course and thought that everyone would benefit from a nice easy bumble around.

Our first dive was on Playa Chica Reef to a maximum depth of about 18 metres. The underwater visibility was good – better than we've seen for a few visits and due no doubt to the fact that Lanzarote had a very settled and hot summer.

For our second dive, we elected to dive the harbour wall, reaching a maximum depth of no more than 10 metres; this again gave us a gentle dive to get the diving juices flowing.

We bumped into Captain Womble, also there with a group and were to see them on quite a few dives throughout the rest of the week.



• crap vis. spoiled the week

We quickly settled into the MA Diving routine, although were we loath to move any kit after being "bawled out" by Debs. their latest Brit. instructor who, having a bad day, threw a wobbler when some weight belts she had prepared for a Discover Scuba session had moved a few inches.

Well, from then on, and with a customer service "can't do" attitude like that, what else could Debs' nickname be, but "Cliff".

For those of you scratching your heads, there are an equal number of you who know exactly who and what we mean!

Saturday 16th October

We ventured a bit further out of town on the Saturday and dived the Temple Hall.

Ordinarily the Temple Hall proves to be a highlight of the week, being a large cargo vessel that has broken in two, the foremost part submerged and a lovely dive in only 8 to 10 metres of water.

As things were, it was a spring tide and a low one at that, so the movement of the water meant that there was a lot of sand and sediment swilling around and gave us a taste of home!



When the water did settle and clear, we still managed to pick out the features of the foredeck – capstans, winches, doorways, anchors, chains and other ships paraphernalia.

For our second dive of the day we split up and one group went with Danny to play underwater navigation in the harbour, while Nick and Steve went off to find the Cathedral.

This is a great dive, with a large cavern in about 32 metres of water (hence the name) and usually with a pair of resident, very mumpy looking groupers.



Inside the Cathedral, your exhaled bubbles collect in the apex of the cavern's roof and form an air pocket. Nick spent a while photographing this as a reflection (see above).

The image looks like a puddle of water in some rocks, but it's the opposite – a puddle of air with a reflection of a curious fish in it. Something a bit unusual.

All the exhaled bubbles filter through the rock strata and then emerge through the sand above the Cathedral on the reef in about 18 metres of water.

Sunday 17th October

A day of rest, MA Diving don't dive on Sundays, but we have an arrangement with them to dive if we want, which we usually do!

We met at the dive centre with Jesper, a Dutch DM candidate and dived the Old Harbour, accessible from the main parking area near the old town.

This was the place last year that seahorses were found in one small spot just left of the entry point in about 12 metres of water.

Sadly, this time, there were absent, but others were found elsewhere later in the week.

The Old Harbour is a very pretty dive with a reef extending down beyond 30 metres if that's what you want. We stayed at 20 metres or less and followed the reef back around towards the harbour and jetty.

At the turn point, Danny found small cave which appeared to have a fresh water spring at the back. Also lurking within, was a black Moray, which took a bit of photographing as it was in the pitch black and was largely by guesswork.

The rest of the day we had free and some of us went to visit Cesar Manrique's foundation near Tahiche in the middle of the island.



Cesar Manrique's art has influenced many of the Canary Islands, but none more so than Lanzarote, the island he made his home.

Many examples can be seen at road junctions and other public places, such as the airport and a lot of the architecture of the island also bears his influencing hand.

He died in a car accident (some reports say he was drunk) in 1992, but his legacy lives on and his foundation, housed in what was once his home, is a somewhat surreal journey through his life's work.

Monday 18th October

We had planned the harbour wrecks on the Monday morning, and although a bit blowy, conditions were very diveable.

We did have the distinct joy of a short boat trip with Jorge, or "two speeds" as we like to think of him (these being "flat out" or "stopped").

It seems though that he has mellowed a bit and we had a very gentle run to the wrecks. With their usual excellent visibility (normally over 20 metres), the wrecks make a great dive, with one boat on the reef lip in 22 metres of water and the remaining wrecks in about 35 metres.

For our second dive, we retraced our route along the Old Harbour Wall in advance of our proposed night dive there later in the evening.

Again, no seahorses, despite a good deal of looking. Having said that, even if you are looking right at them, they are incredibly difficult to spot and are masters of disguise, as Nick was to find out later in the week!

There was however a shoal of juvenile Barracuda which were lazily circling near the exit point and made themselves available for a few pictures – very nice!

Our night dive was to the same venue, the Old Harbour with the breezy conditions making the entry and exit exciting.

The dive gave us octopus, rays and cuttlefish along with the other usual suspects. This is an excellent site for a night dive as it provides a good range of reef and rocks amongst which the various marine life can hunt and hide.

Tuesday 19th October

The morning brought us to a new dive site. Situated part way between Puerto del Carmen and Puerto Calero, the dive consists of two large fishing vessels sunk in about 28 metres of water just off the end of a finger-shaped reef.

The interesting part of the dive crops up even before you get wet – the entry and exit points are down a steep set of steps – hence the name we gave them of the “90 Step Wrecks”.



The dive itself involved a rather good entry of “throw yourself in” and then put fins on followed by a 100 metre surface swim.

Then there’s a drop into about 12 metres of water and a swim out from the shore to the wrecks.

Debs. was a bit “directionally challenged” and took us on a 10 minute tour of the sand but we eventually found the boats and gave them a good tour. There were lots of Parrotfish and Bream circling the wrecks together with the usual Turkish Wrasse, resplendent in all their multi-hued finery.

The trek back up the steps dulled the conversation and the consensus was that the wrecks were a bit new and bland (à la HMS Scylla), but that they would be a good dive once the marine life had fully colonised them.

Following a lazy lunch at the pizzeria across the road from the dive centre (an excellent pizza and a coke for about £3) we went hunting for the seahorses again.

A pair had been spotted on the ropes in the harbour on the night dive, and knowing where they were hiding, there was a fair chance of getting some pictures this time.



Despite spending a good amount of time scouring the ropes in question, neither Nick nor Steve could locate them and it took the eagle eye of Debs., who happened to be passing by, to point one seahorse out.

The Long-Snouted Seahorse is perhaps one of the oddest creatures in the sea and looks extremely fragile, swaying in the current while attached by looping its tail around a frond on the ropes.

However, a bit of persistence paid off and the requisite image was secured – phew!

The planned night dive was shelved as it was a bit rough for one of the junior divers that MA Diving were looking to take out, so a dawn dive was put in the book for the following morning.

Wednesday 20th October

Nick wished he had joined Danny and Steve for the early dive – not only did they say it was fantastic, but while they were out diving and Nick sleeping in the apartment, an unwanted visitor helped him/herself to Nick’s watch, camera and some cash.

Not so much the loss of the items that irritated (some things were found dumped over a wall across the road anyway later in the day), but the fact that it was such a bloody cheek!

Luckily, nothing irreplaceable was lost and other than an interesting half hour spent with the Guardia Civil reporting the theft, nothing to spoil the diving.



Our friend Russell’s translation at the cop shop was a laugh though.

Trying to help by translating into Spanish the events of the morning, Russell had been hard to understand in English, so we’re still not really sure what the police officer was told!

God knows what offence they have recorded!

With the last day of diving ahead, we ventured from Playa Chica on past the Cathedral and to a site called Grouper Run, so named for a pair of large Grouper that tend to hang around there.

We hit a maximum depth of 37 metres and indeed found the Grouper along with a large Atlantic Stingray we’d seen earlier in the week.

On the return journey, we passed the Cathedral and came up along the reef edge in 18 metres and followed this with the mild current back to the end of the finger of volcanic rock that marks Playa Chica again.

Again, we saw Richard from New Dawn Dive Centre, strangely swimming into the current with a group of weary looking divers who then proceeded to the anchor

chains where they hung on like flags in the breeze before ascending.

We headed back into the shallows and around the jetty before exiting up the steps by Bar Playa.

We had no idea where we wanted to go for an afternoon dive. Our original plan had been to drive to Mala for the day, but logistics got in the way and we thought that we would have to shelve that plan.

As it turned out, the tables turned and we were given a van from the dive centre and sent on our way, north about a 40 minute drive past the capital Arrecife to Mala, a mostly German nudist colony, but blessed also with some very good dive sites.



● Danny getting wrecked

After a bit of tracking down, we found the car park and kitted up before making our way down through the prostrate, large and white bodies sprawled on the rocks and sand.

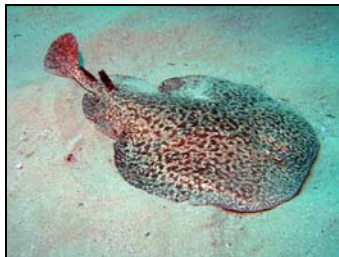
The entry in Mala is from the rocks and into 6 metres of water before heading out where depths around 20 to 30 metres can easily be found.

The underwater visibility at Mala is fantastic – up to 25 metres due to the rocky bottom.

We were followed for most of the dive by a shoal of inquisitive Bream who tailed us like a group of aquatic puppy dogs.

It enabled some good close-up pictures to be taken of these normally skittish fish.

We also found a beautiful Marbled Electric Ray nestled in the sand.



● have I hidden the flex?

After a bit of flicking to get the sand off, we managed a few pictures before the Ray, with a few flaps of its "wings" completely buried itself in two seconds flat, disappearing completely from view.

Not a common sight in Lanzarote, this was a good spot and provided an excellent end to the week's diving, which although was easy and stress-free, nonetheless hugely enjoyable.

Steve celebrated his 200th dive in customary style and then we had the spectacle of Danny trying to get a group shot using the self-timer on the camera.

Every time he set it running and swam over to the group, the stones pinning the housing on to the rocky plateau moved and the shot was spoiled.

It took a good few goes before a passable shot was obtained, but it was bloody funny watching the underwater circus unfold.

The exit at Mala is interesting if nothing else, with a selection of overweight Germans swimming nude no more than 3 metres above your head as you make your way to the steps.

Not sure which is more off-putting – the ladies or the men ...

Our last night out took us to the old town in Puerto del Carmen.

We sampled the local Tapas Bar (again) which does excellent food and is patronised by the locals, so it must be good!



● walking the puppies

Steve was on a mission to get the bar's occupants to dance and the score ended up 1-1 we think.

One girl had her feet nailed emphatically to the floor and no amount of persuading would work – the girl was not for dancing!

At one point, Steve was spotted twirling around the town square in the rain, so he did have some success.

Needless to say, there was quite a bit of drink taken – Steve thought he'd spent €200 in one fell swoop but then found most of it in one of the many pockets of his combat shorts the following morning.

As for everyone else, we think they had a good time – we're not sure about some but it's a fairly safe bet we'd say.



● three very "knowing" looks!

Even if they didn't have a good time, their double-entry book-keeping is pretty up to date now.

The following morning, some heads were cloudy, some clear - but luckily, Danny had his negotiating head on and sorted out our use of the room for an extra 4 hours (our flight back wasn't until nearly midnight).

The negotiations took over 4 hours, but boy, we'd say they were worth it!

If ever the UN are short ...