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# Ballinskelligs 1993

My first trip to Ireland was in May 1993 on a club trip organised by Glen Whatley. We travelled by ferry from Swansea to Ringaskiddy, the port for Cork, then drove via a long winding coast road to Ballinskelligs at the South west end of County Kerry. The ferry trip was somewhat uncomfortable. We settled into the bar and got well oiled, only to discover that it closed at midnight and we then had to find somewhere to sleep as the ship did not dock until 0730 next morning. Needless to say, we had not booked cabins and all the comfortable sofas and seats had long since been bagged by more seasoned travellers. I spent a very uncomfortable night on a seat outside the restaurant. I vowed never again to travel this way, but of course we did exactly the same thing next time. We stayed in a nice Bungalow provided as part of the package by Sean Feehan, just up the road from his house and a couple of miles from the jetty. The family that owned the property lived in a granny annex for the summer. We took it in turns to cook, our fisherman friend providing meals on several evenings. We also ate out a few times at the local pubs (mostly Guinness, bacon and potato Sean was very laid back and most days we did not set out for the first dive until 1300 hours which meant that we often returned from the second dive as it was getting dark. The water was very clear and the sites were excellent, we saw many things we had not experienced before. However, the enduring memory for me was our first dive on the pinnacle at Great Skellig, We sat at 40M in crystal clear water looking up an awesome wall of jewel anemones and able to see the boat at the surface. We seemed to find Crayfish, lobsters and crabs on every dive but regrettably they were protected and we could only look, not take.

The weather was very unpredictable, it could be sunny and warm one minute and wet and stormy the next, a couple of times it got really rough but settled down again before we got back to port. On our way home we left early and spent the night at the Youth Hostel in Cork so that we could do the town. Regrettably, I got some sort of tummy bug and spent a miserable night in a bunk bed while the others hit the clubs. The ferry trip home was a daytime affair so we were able to get more comfortable, still a very boring 10 hours on a far from smooth sea though. All in all it was a memorable week, and we all fell in love with the country.

On this trip we dived at, most sites more than once:

Horse Island 21M 29mins	Hogs Head 21M 43 mins	Scariff Island 24M 24mins
Bolus Head 32M 43mins	Great Skellig East - 42M 43mins	Great Skellig West 27M 37mins

The group consisted of Paul Bosely ( a guest from the Challaborough Club) Roger Morgan, Rob Peters, Glen Whatley (the organiser), Mike Patterson, Martin Tarrant, Tony Reeves, Dick Hanlon me plus a fisherman friend of Glen's whose name escapes me after all these years.

## **Pictures from Ireland 1993**



Our dive group



Colourful Anemones



Paul Bosely, my buddy for most of the week as he was also a photographer and no one else wanted to dive with us.



View of Ringaskiddy from the ferry.



Cuckoo Wrasse with an urchin



Dog Fish, we saw lots of these and they were great entertainment



Something for the pot



Our home for the week. You can see my Peugeot 405 in the driveway

Great Skellig from the boat. This rock is about 12 miles off shore and had a resident colony of monks for many years.

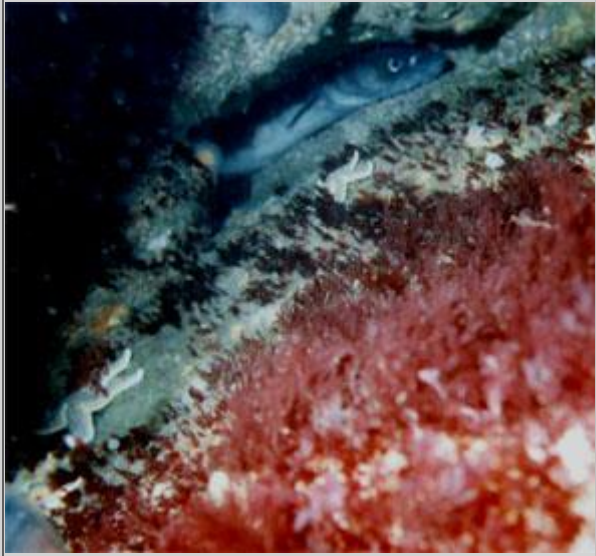


The jetty at Ballinskelligs. As you can see from the boat leaning against the wall, the tidal rise/fall was considerable and made dive timing tricky





A John Dory, not often seen and hard to photograph as they are almost transparent



A Ling hidden under a rock. This was taken at 40M on Great Skelling



One of my other regular dive buddies, Martin Tarrant



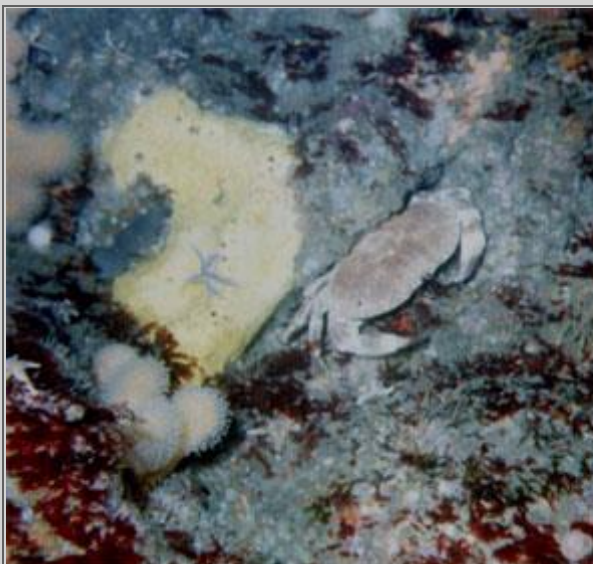
Jewel Anemones and an octopus disappearing into a crevice



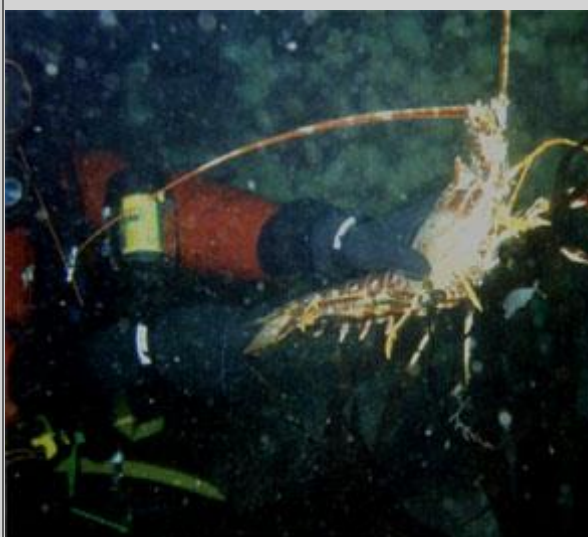
A better picture of an Octopus



A view on the coast road round Dingle bay on our way home



A crab, also left behind



A decent sized Crayfish, we did put it back.

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## Ballinskelligs 1996

Our second trip to Ireland was also to Ballinskelligs with Seam Feehan. regrettably, I have yet to find any photographs from this holiday, cannot believe I did not take any so they must still be hidden somewhere. This makes it difficult to bring to mind those who attended and what we saw so the only detail is from my log book. The weather was absolutely foul for most of the week. we only got out on 3 days and managed 5 dives in total. If this had been my first experience of diving in Ireland, i doubt we would ever have returned. The trip over was nearly as chaotic as the first. Our leader left it too late to book cabins but at least we knew we had to locate a suitable sleeping spot before we hit the bars. I think I slept in the bouncy castle. We nearly wrecked one of our vehicles on the way down, Someone (who shall remain nameless) managed to fill up the Nissan Patrol we had borrowed with petrol rather than diesel, something only spotted when we got to Swansea! .Fortunately it did not seem to come to any harm, at least during the remainder of our trip.

Sean took pity on us after a couple of days without any diving and arranged a dry dive in the decompression chamber at Valentia island. We went down to 60M (200feet) and experienced a heavy dose of the narcs. Some



of the computers were not impressed with this treatment, the Suunto's just switched off at 55M, not very helpful. The Alladin's did slightly better by going into depth/time mode; which is why I have always used Alladin dive computers since. When we 'surfaced' at the prescribed rate for the chamber tables, the computers still functioning considered we had ascended too fast and without sufficient deco time. So they went back in the pot while we went to bar for a Guinness.

These were the only 5 dives we managed during the week. over 3 days. The other days were simply not diveable. Great Skellig still impressed but not so much as in 1993. we did however see seals on a couple of occasions.

Scariff island 22M 32mins	Lambs Head - 20M 32mins	Little Skellig - 30M 32mins
Great Skellig - 42M 30mins	Little Skellig - 23M 37mins	

I have no complete list of those who took part in this trip, the ones I am sure of are Rob Peters, Roger Morgan, Martin Tarrant, Alan Scrace, Glen Whatley and Dick Hanlon. Nor can I find any pictures of this trip to jog my memory.

**Update November 2018** – Whilst clearing out the loft I found a box full of old photographs which included a set taken during this holiday. No diving pictures but they do serve to remind how foul the weather was at times and they have triggered my memory about a few things. The main one being the trip out to the Skelligs which was an impromptu decision made whilst we were on our way to another site. Our party was divided across two boats as Sean Feeneys larger boat was not available (cannot remember why). Visibility was very poor as were the sea conditions (look at the photos) and instruments were essential to navigate the 12 miles of open ocean; the next stop being somewhere in North America. Our boat did not have a GPS and it was distinctly worrying when we lost sight of our lead boat. However, eventually the visibility did improve enough to be able to see the Skelligs on the horizon. The sea state was still very rough but we did find a sheltered spot on both Great & Little Skellig to dive. The island covered in sea birds is Little Skellig. Years later I saw the Skelligs feature in an episode of Star wars.













# Castle Gregory - 2002

Our third and to date (2007) last trip to Ireland was to Waterworld at Castle Gregory in Dingle in September 2002. This is a bit farther round the West Coast from Ballinskelligs but offered a new range of sites based on the Mahares Islands. Six of us took part, Ken Blay, Richard Vivian, Martin Tarrant, Richard Honnor, Caroline Honnor and myself. I did all the bookings and included cabins so it was our most comfortable crossing yet. We stayed at Waterworlds lodge at Castle Gregory which is only a stones throw from the jetty. Food and accommodation were very good and we managed to do a lot of exploring of the Dingle area including the Connor Pass. Sadly the diving was not as exciting as we had hoped. The weather was unsettled and windy crating strong swells so viz was poor. We did not manage to do the premiere site at Brandon Cliffs and frankly the other sites were only average. I was disappointed as we had delayed the trip to September in the hope of better weather after our 1996 experience.

I did take some photos but so far I have not been able to find them and my log book info is sparse, not even naming the actual sites we dived, just the depth/time. Three things I do remember. Firstly, the Rib was enormous and had very large diameter tubes. This made it a real effort to climb back in. Made even more difficult in my case as I was recovering from broken ribs and a strapped up knee following a motorcycle accident in August 2002. Secondly, Richard and Caroline saw a blue shark, with a picture as proof. Thirdly, Richard Vivian decided to liven things up whilst I was taking a picture of a Conger by sticking a piece of kelp up its bum. Ken was assisting by removing some rubbish to give me a clearer view. Next moment. the conger flew past the pair of us in a welter of bubbles and debris, never to be seen again. I dropped the camera, Ken dropped his mask and Richard lay on the bottom roaring his head off. In retrospect, the most memorable event of the trip even though I never did get the picture..

**Regrettably no Pictures from Ireland this time**

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