



CRAMMED IN CONGER CREVICE – a conveyor belt of life

Skye set in the Hebridean Archipelago is a large island with large peninsulas stretching out like fingers both north and south. In the north of this island these peninsulas have huge rocky ridges down their centre creating huge sea-cliffs that plummet into the rich clear gulfstream waters. On the west coast out of Loch Bracadale is my favourite diving area. Wild and remote, 2 miles offshore with stunning cliffs and the pinnacles of Macleod's Maidens behind us, we arrive at the dive-site Conger crevice, on the outermost edge of a treacherous expanse of skerries, much of which lies just below sea-level. The great Atlantic swell washes this rocky outcrop with the rich ocean currents that make this site spectacular and a favourite playground for both Atlantic and common seals. The magnetically eerie call of this restless ocean grabs me while I hear the echoing laughter and chatter of the long past voices that this rich sea has sustained for hundreds of years, yet leaving no human mark on this powerful place. This site of hard basaltic black rock is one of few not fished by the intrepid local fisherman 'Donnie Dangerous' feared by lobbies throughout the Minch. But not Conger Crevice, this safe haven keeps its secrets for divers alone, and throws out all carefully laid fishing gear into a tangled mess in the deep. I like this site its got spirit!

It can be dived as a drift or on slack, but today we go for the less vigorous option. Slack is reliable so we get kitted and drop in to make the most of the silent beauty below. Entering close to the 2m scoured black rock face, we descend quickly into the silence of this amazingly clear site. Contrasting with the dark rock, the clear aqua coloured sea and magnificent vis is more akin to tropical waters, with the enormous kelp fanning the sunlight down the sheer cliff face below us. With the view of vibrant soft corals and abundantly awesome anemones our anticipation builds and encourages exploration. WOW is simply all I can breath through my DV! The colour is simply incredible. Orange and white plumose anemones fully open and gorging on the plankton rich waters, dahlia anemones in palette of colours only a kid would wildly paint, sizes varying from teacup to dinner plate. Sparkling jewel anemones in turquoise, purple, pink, lime green, canary yellow along with the tiny Devonshire cup corals set firmly on the wall. A sheer face of absolute colour cover, and that's just the wall! White, yellow and orange dead men's fingers, point deeper below. At about 18 metres runs a horizontal crevice, like a supermarket shelf, deep and dark a safe haven for a crammed conveyor belt of sea-life. Trying to refocus my eyes into the crack after the assault of colourful life above, we swim slowly along watching ling, intrepid conger eels some broken from fighting, lobsters so big they should have tattoos on their muscular claws, and edible crabs that raise the question who would dare! Around us swim the inevitable cheeky cuckoo wrasse, ballan wrasse, pollack, and mackerel with their reflective stripes glinting in the sun. Below us at 22 m is the hard rocky black bottom. No sand, it's washed away with the tide, no silt it's too remote for pollution, and now we understand the excellent vis and this rare conveyor belt of life. Thank goodness for places that fisherman just can't beat despite all their technology (sorry Donnie,... he's a mate). Once it would all have been like this! And looking up above us we clearly see the boat and a reminder that as the shelf runs out so does time and after a very fast 58 minutes we reluctantly start our ascent to the surface. Perhaps a seal might play with us near the surface, I glance about hopefully as we do 2 mins safety stop. No luck, a tiny disappointment really but

some days can be perfect! As we break the surface the boat is right there waiting on us, a wee swim back to reality of the world where we belong.

Kit off and a cup of hot chocolate to ponder, the last divers on the ladder, we plan lunch at anchor by a tiny white beach nearby, and then onto the afternoons dive. The SS Urlana, or Big Mac's Mermaids, or Macleod's Maidens?..... decisions, decisions so many dives in the same vicinity. So of we cruise watching the horizon. Basking shark and minke whale are common at this site, feeding on the plankton rich uprising of tide where they slam into a wall as the 50m contour rises abruptly to the 20 meters right by where we have just dived. Not for us today but its easy to see why this site is described as 'just like St Kilda without the time or sea-legs required.' It really is a world class site with an extra special diving edge!

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