



## **SS DORIS – near twisted waters.**

Heading up the coast with, 200m high cliffs for most of its length indented with tiny gulleys leading into huge wild glens, inky deep blue water only metres from shore, we approach the distinctive landmark of Nest Point. As the promontory, drops from sheer cliff all around to a low finger-like hook it curls into the Minch twisting the water into a small whirlpool just off the point. It's easy to see why this coast needs a lighthouse and certainly not the most forgiving shore to run aground on. You can imagine the fear and panic Captain Arentz, his family and crew felt as their boat the SS Doris, 85 m long and 1381 gross tonnes rammed crunching onto the jagged rocky galleys while on passage from Liverpool to Stettin in Poland almost 100 years ago. An accident caused not as imagined from the whirlpool, gale and storm; but a fatal combination of navigational and tidal error in thick fog, in a calm and gentle oily swell! Aground in a precarious position, perched off the rocky promontory, with the bow buckled and the first hold flooded, 100 metres of deep water too close behind them, there predicament was desperate. With little prospect of immediate assistance in this remote location there was only one option. Abandon ship! The 14 crew and passengers escaped unharmed in lifeboats, however within two weeks the sea claimed the vessel dragging her, a very short distance back off the rocks into her final resting place. Only metres offshore and crammed tightly within a steep gulley she is a most fabulously scenic wreck dive. Slack tide is essential for this dive and often only happens twice daily! Care must be taken regarding the direction of tidal flow after slack to avoid entering the whirlpool. With experience and careful planning though it is a relatively easy dive.

We enter at the neck of the gulley in which she lies and descend through amazingly coloured kelp, into a gulley cloaked in soft colour. Swimming down this rocky passage, we see the first signs of wreckage at 8 m lying on the coarse white sandy seabed. As girders stretch out before us, good visibility allows a clear view of the main body of the wreckage, with piles of rusty orange steel plates stretching down to about 19m and slammed tightly into the gulley wall by the tide. To the west side out on the sand lies the boiler, winches and more steel plating. Within the boiler there is a host of cheeky wrasse sheltering from the tide; a very scenic photo in the glinting sunbeams. Going back to the main wreckage we follow it down the slope to about 25m the bulk of wreckage thins out, but we pursue it a bit further to find the enormous main propeller standing upright embedded into the sea. Its little wonder these powerful propeller's while underway, drove this vessel onto the rocks causing so much damage. Even at this depth sunlight stabbing through the water spotlights the shoaling fish that spin around the propeller creating the elusion of its movement. A magnificent picture missed, ..... perhaps another day! On the coarse white sand lies the spare 4 bladed propeller. We swim back up the wreckage where there are a lot more pieces scattered about, rudders, prop shafts, keel strips, and engine parts. To avoid surfacing in a turbulent tide we take time to appreciate the life on this wreck. Shoaling fish all around it, soft coral and dead men's fingers cloaking it, octopus hiding from the tide, and the more casual dogfish cruising about casually checking us out. We plan to surface within the gulley where often grey seals tumble effortlessly in the swell; they must be amused at my less graceful efforts in their world. Not a wreck junkie's haven, this scenic wreck is an exciting dive, and like most other sites on Skye must still have secrets yet to be discovered.