



REACH FOR THE SKYE

SIMON VOLPE TAKES US ON A TOUR OF THE SITES OF SKYE

SKYE LINE

Skye, part of the Hebrides in Scotland, is a beautiful island containing an enormous variety of differing scenic features. The Cuillin mountain, range as an example, owes its dramatic twisted form to volcanic activity, which affected the whole of western Scotland at one time.

The same rugged beauty extends below the water line - and, as divers we are privileged to be able to bear witness to this. Skye divides into six peninsular, which are separated by sea lochs forty-eight miles long and measuring 6,782 square miles - there will always be plenty to explore.

Tidal streams around Skye are comparatively weak, but this a generalisation which should not be taken too literally. The underwater visibility is excellent, and the absence of dense population has ensued that man's presence has not punished the environment.

THE CHADWICK

It was on a voyage from Glasgow to St Petersburg when the steamship Chadwick, constructed from iron, was driven ashore by heavy seas under the cliffs at Rubha Ban, at the north end of Oisgill Bay.

The wreck site of the Chadwick is very challenging, as it is very exposed to adverse weather and sea conditions. That said, we found a meteorological pause and dropped to the seabed at twenty metres. The tide was still running quite fiercely, so time and skill had to be used to find large enough sections of the wreck to shelter behind - as a welcome respite from its unrelenting force.

THE CHADWICK

Location: Inner Hebrides Isle of Skye west side at Clanneacha 57.27.05N 06.47W

Sank: 2 July 1892.

Hull dimensions: 76.2x10.66x5.48m

Port of registry: London

Owned by: Chadwick SS Co Ltd

Flagged: UK. **Gross tonnage:** 1463

Cargo: Coal and other unspecified items

Built in 1882 by Swan C.S. and Junter, Newcastle upon Tyne.

Propulsion: screw employing a two-cylinder compression engine

Horsepower: 150. **Boilers:** one



This propeller on the Chadwick is slowly vanishing

The scenery around Skye is spectacular
Photos by Simon Volpe

A diver explores the remains of the *Urlana*



Coal from the wreck's cargo littered the sea floor, this together with shingle and shale, was stable enough not to disturb the underwater visibility, which reached a full five metres.

A huge propeller shaft, complete with the propeller was a notable feature of the *Chadwick*, as were many other parts of the wreck. Marine life too, didn't disappoint us, and included an over familiar Ballan wrasse. Unfortunately, the tide was gradually getting stronger - making the job of trying to hold strobes on long extended arms, become close to impossible. The water, a chilly 7°C (fairly normal for April), was another contributing factor that drew the dive to a close after a mere thirty-three minutes.

THE URLANA

Our next dive the *Urlana*, doesn't look like a ship anymore, as, at a depth of only 14m, years of winter storms have broken her up and ensured her dispersal about the seabed. Despite this, the wreckage, scattered randomly in the gullies, never ceases to be of interest. Her boilers actually rest about one 100m offshore, and have survived the tempests well. Numerous brass items, such as ammunition, nestle in the cracks and

URLANA

Location: Inner Hebrides Isle of Skye, Loch Bracadale W. end
Sank: 5 September 1943 at position 57.20N 06.34W
Voyage: from Buenos Aires to London Steamship
Constructed: from steel. **Length:** 130.37x17.5x9.77m
Port of Registry: London
Owners: British India Steam Navigation Co Ltd
Flagged: UK. **Gross tonnage:** 6852
Cargo: general, unspecified
Built: 1941 by Barclay Curle & Co Ltd, Glasgow.
Propulsion: screw employing triple expansion engine with 1 turbine.
Horse power: 630. **Boilers:** 4

(understandably), were quick to evacuate. Nevertheless some foresight ensued and later, as she was being towed away into Lochalsh (before being completely abandoned), a huge explosion occurred. Parts of the ship were later found a quarter of a mile away. The vessels port side had to be removed later, to facilitate the retrieval of the remaining unexploded mines

DIVING PORT NAPIER The Port Napier is an unforgettable dive; a very ship-like ship, lying on her starboard side in 22m of relatively sheltered water, at Loch Na Beiste.

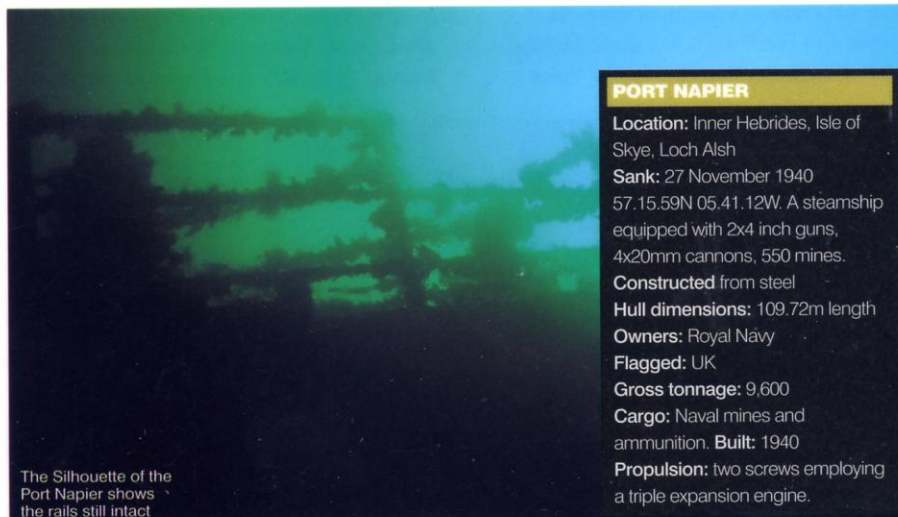
Part of her appeal is the fact that everything is so very ship like. Railings, bollards, anchor chains, the wheel house, all of these provide easy reminders to what part of the vessel is being swam and observed. Finning through the ship's interior is also an option, as vast sections are exposed with enormous holes, allowing welcome sunlight to filter through. This makes it a very photogenic dive, and the fact that she lies in shallow water allows plenty of time to explore her entire length.

Sadly, at the time of writing, considerable marine salvage is taking place to recover steel, putting a question mark over the wreck's long-term appeal.

SCENIC APPEAL MACLEODS MAIDENS

Lying just west of Idrigill Point, is a spectacular above-water geological feature, and is named such because they are reminiscent of women in long dresses.

Below the water line, the scenery continues. At first in the form of kelp covered gullies, but the addition of more depth, leads to small caverns, which can be entered if the swell is not too great. At 8m, visibility was a welcome benefit, allowing some excellent photo opportunities. Leaving ►



The Silhouette of the Port Napier shows the rails still intact

PORT NAPIER

Location: Inner Hebrides, Isle of Skye, Loch Alsh
Sank: 27 November 1940
 57.15.59N 05.41.12W. A steamship equipped with 2x4 inch guns, 4x20mm cannons, 550 mines.
Constructed: from steel
Hull dimensions: 109.72m length
Owners: Royal Navy
Flagged: UK
Gross tonnage: 9,600
Cargo: Naval mines and ammunition. **Built:** 1940
Propulsion: two screws employing a triple expansion engine.



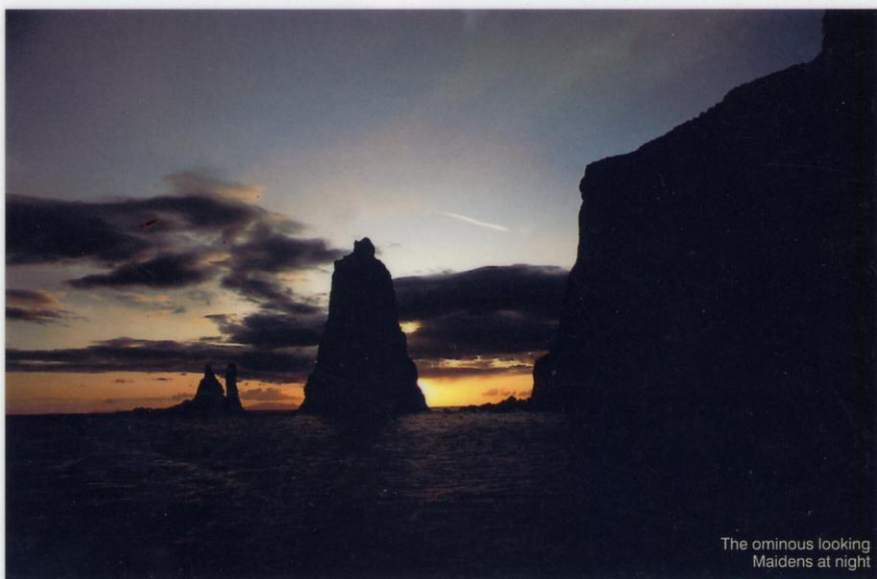
Meanish reef has a variety of marine life

the wreck at the beginning of dusk made this site especially memorable. The heavy, black silhouettes of the Maidens, set against a burning orange and yellow sky, certainly left a lasting impression.

MEANISH REEF

Easily accessed as a shore dive, care has to be taken when scrambling over the huge round boulders of Meanish Reef, as they become very slippery at low tide. Once in the water and free from this peril, the first few fin kicks take you through a muddle of thick kelp fronds. Eventually, with the addition of depth, the scene clears to reveal a colourful seascape, easily appreciated with the benefit of six-metre visibility. The site drops in a series of terraces, slopes and small walls to a depth beyond 25m. Deadmen's fingers decorate these

"THE SAME RUGGED BEAUTY EXTENDS BELOW THE WATER LINE - AND AS DIVERS, WE ARE PRIVILEGED TO BE ABLE TO BEAR WITNESS TO THIS"



The ominous looking Maidens at night

walls, with finer detail being added by colourful jewel anemones. Scallops timorously hide under the sand, fluttering to life occasionally as they sense our alien activities.

Schools of juvenile fish add additional movement to dream-like sequences and remind us of the good state of health of Meanish Reef and its bio diversity.

THE NORTH FACE OF WAIY ISLAND

Loch Bracadale drops in small steps to beyond 30m and there must be something different about this site, as dive time surpassed the 60min interval.

Perhaps it was the Dahlia anemones, the starfish, the Yellow sponges, or was it the Devonshire cup coral, the shoals of Saithe, the eerie jellyfish or perhaps the countless sea urchins?

The Ballan wrasse, which had become a good friend, was sorry to see us leave. Photographic film was expended, air was

running low and the cold began to eat into the dry suits; our exit was probably timely.

LOCHBAY PINNACLES

Within the Watermish Peninsular, Lochbay Pinnacles represents an excellent dive, made even better by a visit at night. The pinnacles rise from the seabed, so by dropping down to about eighteen metres, one can move in concentric circles with the peace of mind that the dive site has not inadvertently been lost. This is an important point, when a boat is providing surface cover.

Torchlight revealed a blood red carpet of brittle stars, interspersed with sea squirts, creating quite a spectacle. A true macro photographer's paradise, one is spoilt for choice as to which way to point the lens.

Scenic dives outnumber wrecks in the Skye region and plenty more sites remain undescribed, and even unvisited. For this reason one can almost guarantee that an expedition to Skye will lead to a subsequent visit. **SW**

Whose eggs are these?



LOGISTICS

From Fort William: Take the A82 and A87. **From Inverness:** Take the A82, A887 and A87 to Kyle of Lochalsh for the Skye Bridge. **Diving:** Dive and Sea, The Hebrides. Overlooks Lochbay and Loch Dunvegan. **Diving costs** £18-20 a day depending on location: Tel (01470) 592219. Accommodation is available. **When to go:** A year round destination. **Further Information:** Highlands of Scotland Tourist Board (01997) 421160 **Dive Skye and Sea:** www.dive-and-sea-the-hebrides.co.uk

Boat launching is a big consideration as much of Skye is fronted by cliffs and sheer drops, rather than gentle slipways.

As a visitor to this region, one would be well advised to employ the services of those who have local knowledge. It is a remote area, and one is a long way from help if something should go wrong. In good hands, one will be shown the incredible scenic appeal, together with an excellent wreck heritage that the Hebrides has unwittingly acquired.