



ESTEC SWIMMING & SUB-AQUA CLUB

www.geocities.com/estecessac

June 2006 Newsletter

** Second Edition*



In this issue:

- Editorial
- From The Chair
- Con and Maria in Guatemala
- Memorial Service for Penny
- First Dive
- Dive Weekend at De Kabbelaar
- My First Dive In The Netherlands
- Diving Matters
- Expedition Matters
- AGM 2006
- Our Committee for 2006/2007

We try to produce a newsletter each March, June, September and December. Contributions should reach the editor by the end of each preceding month.

**Updated versions of the newsletter, though automatically posted on our website, will not necessarily be distributed by email.*

Such updates, following on from the first edition contain corrections and/or information previously unavailable or overlooked.

Editorial

The decision to cancel the swimming gala this year was disappointing but inevitable. As a long time active, both swimming and sub-aqua club, member places me in an as good a position as anyone I suppose, to comment on the changing face, decline even, in some areas of the ESSAC spirit or, is it just me reminiscing for the days when the sun always shone?

Back in 1982 I don't remember whether there were more club members than there are now but, it certainly felt like it - and the main preoccupation was diving! What with the very long lead-in snorkel course (twelve weeks would you believe) before diving training even began, the relatively antiquated

equipment that you really needed to be taught how to use, and only one available swimming pool session per week did rather tend to concentrate the (diving) mind. Almost total dedication to the club seemed to be the norm.



Zeeland - this year - See 'First Dive'

Nor were the swimmers forgotten for they were largely the families of the diving element. So many youngsters with us (with families of their own today) weren't just unwillingly dragged along (at least not always) because their parents said they should - they really did enjoy mixing-it.

So, what is the answer? A few attempts at reviving such jolly things as the May Weekend and the Quadrathlon drew virtually no response so we sit back and simply continue to enjoy the facilities our subs pay for. That, today, seems to be enough for most members!

Phil

From The Chair

As I write this contribution for the Newsletter it is late on a Friday evening where 'tomorrow' has two distinct and rather different meanings. Tomorrow is the first day of the 'Kabbelaar weekend' which is what eventually emerged from my attempts to resurrect the old tradition of having an 'Aqua-Delta weekend' in the spring. Tomorrow is also one week before the AGM, it is the day when the agenda and the reports from the various Committee members should be circulated to all members of our Club. I am afraid I have not yet been able to write mine, partly because of the preparations for the 'Kabbelaar weekend'.

These two meanings of 'tomorrow' illustrate very clearly two different faces of our Club. On the one hand we have members who are enjoying what the Club manages to offer. This weekend will provide some of this year's diver trainees with their very first dives - mine was at Den Osse in late May 1990 (during an Aqua-Delta weekend...) and I will never forget it - and others with further progress in their training. The majority of us will be spending the whole long weekend down in Zeeland, hopefully enjoying gentler climatic conditions than in the past couple of weeks - the weather forecast is actually quite promising - while others will join for one or two days. I am looking forward to an enjoyable time together with people who enjoy what they are doing as well as each other's company.

On the other hand we have the AGM. The date has been set a long time ago, and I have circulated two emails on the subject. Perhaps unsurprisingly - I am putting on my cynic hat now - but nevertheless still disappointingly the silence is deafening, there simply is no response whatsoever. Not one single individual has contacted me even to enquire about any of the Committee positions. Hopefully my fellow Committee members are more attractive contact points... A Club is something which is run not only for but also by its members, this is certainly also true for ESSAC. However, although the 'for' bit appear

in place, the 'by' bit is increasingly more difficult to make happen. At this point it is very unclear to me what to expect of the AGM, to my knowledge we simply do not have people for all the Committee positions, and the Club is facing tough challenges for the future on other fronts too.

When you read this - I am assuming this Newsletter is published after the AGM - you know the outcome of the AGM. I hope at least some worries bouncing around in my head right now in the end turned out to be unfounded.

Göran

Con and Maria in Guatemala

This letter (e-mail), dated 2 May 2006, was originally headed 'To all Contributors to the Guatemala Children's Fund'. However I believe Con and Maria's activities are an interesting adventure worth keeping up-to-date with, so, read on (ed.):

Maria and I arrived in Antigua on the 2nd of April and have spent most of our time since then attending Spanish language classes. Maria has now started working full time at the Camino Seguro centre for children from "problem" families in San Pedro just outside of Antigua, these kids live at the centre and only go home once or twice per month.



At the Guatemala City centre where I am working the original plans to build a workshop (which would subsequently be set up and equipped with money from our fund) have been extended considerably thanks to a special development grant which Camino Seguro managed to win from the Guatemala

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government. The grant is sufficient to construct a much larger building than originally planned. It will now house:

- a bakery which will provide bread for the school and also training for the kids in how to do baking.

- a carpentry workshop which will replace the old "carpenteria" where I worked last year. The old building is quite tatty with a leaking roof and is only rented in any case.

- our metal workshop of course
- two washrooms and showers plus some display cabinets to show off the items produced in the workshops.

Construction of this larger building is well underway, the foundations are completed and concrete floors poured, with water and drainage etc. connected.

Two wood burning ovens for the bakery were donated and installed by a Canadian company - see the rear left hand side of the attached photo - and the building completion is scheduled for September. I am currently encouraging the builders in their efforts and trying to optimise the internal building layout for the workshops. Also the present volunteer coordinator in the city is leaving next month so I need to pick up that task until the replacement will come on line in mid August.

There is lots to do here if anyone should fancy a real working holiday, in the meantime I have not yet spent any of our fund money and am guarding it carefully until the time comes to start buying equipment and setting up the workshop.

Should you wish to make any further donations the fund bank account is still open and there are several other worthy causes here in Camino Seguro if there should be any cash remaining after equipping the workshop.

Thank you all for your generous support to this very worthwhile project

Con Mc Carthy

Memorial Service for Penny

From my perspective it was really thanks to Keith and Drusilla offering me a place in their car that I ended up going. Peter Urwin, Keith Miller, Drusilla Wishart, and myself went together to the memorial service

for Penny in the little - as it turned out very little - village of Toft Monks (in Norfolk, where she grew up) on 7 April. We started our journey by an uneventful night ferry crossing from Hoek van Holland to Harwich; I will remember the bartender though, a real character compared to whom R2D2 would seem cheerful indeed.

Having found Toft Monks with time to spare, we went to nearby Great Yarmouth to kill time, and to find a place to change clothes for the service. The solution was a giant Tesco supermarket...



Outside Tesco's

Back in Toft Monks we were joined by Mark Kingdon who was in the vicinity for work, and also by Roger and Carol Smithson. Life sometimes plays funny games. Here I found myself in a memorial service for a common diver friend, together with both the instructor who did my Sports Diver assessment (Mark) and my buddy at the time (Keith). It happened at Stormvogel in Oostvoornse meer in December 1990 - I vividly remember it was snowing as we entered the water - before I even got to know Penny who came a bit later to our Club. Both Roger and Carol had trained me at the time.

The old church was filled beyond capacity. The nature of the event obviously was not a cheerful one, but I was very impressed by Penny's sister Fiona who very clearly was the driving force behind it, making it a very worthy one. Fiona was the first of a number of people paying their tribute to the memory of Penny, one of whom was Keith.

After the service itself there was a reception. I met several people who I do not

really know but had met at various events through Penny. It was a strange atmosphere. It was actually really nice to meet and talk to some of these people, in particular to my buddy from the Galapagos holiday which Penny organised; that only such a sad accident would make it happen! We agreed that Penny was still in charge and busy sorting ourselves out as always. I also talked to Fiona who I had never met before. She convinced me that the fact that so many people had sent emails, written in various weblogs, and had come to the service, really meant a lot to her and the family. She said she had never managed to come and visit Penny in Hyères, and now she had been there several times in just a couple of months.



A tribute delivered by Keith to the memory of Penny

In many discussions obviously the question of what really happened and why came up. Nobody seemed to know any more than we already did, investigations apparently were still ongoing, but with unclear - if any - results. I got the impression Fiona unsurprisingly was very unhappy about this. In fact only a couple of weeks ago I got an email from her telling me that they still have received no news, and added:

"I just wanted to pass on the word to Penny's friends that we are still as much in the dark as they are and as soon as we know something pertinent - then they will know. I just hope our language skills hold up at the procureur's office!!"

Göran

First Dive

Three of this year's diver trainees made their first open water dives during the 'Kabbelaar weekend'. Here is the report from one them - see the photo on the front page, where the author is second from the right.

Wrapped in layers of neoprene, I slide into the darkness of the salty "Grevelingen" lake of Zeeland for my first open water dive. This is definitely not the swimming pool I know from my earlier lessons. No easy jump into warm, clear water with a minimum of equipment this time. Instead, an ungraceful stumble over slippery basalt blocks, carrying enough gear to make a small submarine jealous.

Descending into the murky depths, there is no point of reference apart from the instructors hovering close by. As we go down into the green soup, sunlight and colours are slowly filtered away. Then suddenly my feet sink into a soft, muddy substance; we have reached the bottom. When the dust clears, I find out we are not alone: small crabs are crawling about between large numbers of sea stars of all sizes. After checking everybody (and especially me) is okay, we slowly swim further to an artificial reef of hollow concrete blocks. As the torches are not able to shine very far, every next meter reveals something new. Large crabs are hiding inside the cavities, and we even spot a small lobster. A flat fish is lying on the bottom, trying to become one with the sand and hide from our torches. Tiny jelly fish seem to sparkle in our artificial lights. We have trembled into an alien world of green and brown hues, where fishy eyes are staring at us staring at them.

Meanwhile I am having trouble not to crash into the bottom, not to kick up too much silt, and to stay near the instructors without bumping into them. The rather strong underwater currents streaming around the reef are difficult to handle, and a meter distance could be enough to loose my trusty instructors into the green dark haze.

After half an hour we surface. Tired but satisfied I crawl back on land like some kind of half frozen amphibian. I am happy to have finally done a real dive, and maybe even happier for not having made too many rooky mistakes (I think). Amazing how different the world is just a couple of meters below the surface.

Michel van Pelt

Dive Weekend at De Kabbelaar

A total of 14 people made a total 45 dives over three days in Scharendijke. Veerle Sterken was helping making this event happen, assuming responsibility for organising the accommodation in 'De Kabbelaar'. Here is her report :

After lots of theory lessons, practical lessons in the pool and the theory exams it was finally time to be introduced to what diving really is like, especially in the Netherlands. I looked forward to this weekend in 'De Kabbelaar' (Scharendijke, Zeeland) for a long time, and the weather forecast would make it feel even more like a mini-diving-holiday.

So there we were, on Saturday morning at the Kabbelaar in Zeeland, ready to discuss the dive plan and to prepare for the dives. Göran was the Dive Marshal for the weekend and he set up the plan for the first dives. However, a little head-against-the-car-boot-accident involving one of the students caused a visit to the doctor to be necessary and altered the buddy pair planning. Apart from that, the atmosphere was very relaxed and we were not in a hurry, which caused us to get into the water only at about noon. Not really being an animal lover (in fact, I am afraid of most animals), I was not sure if I would experience the diving in open water more interesting than in the swimming pool. After all, being able to 'float' in the water, neutrally buoyant, being able to breath under water, the calmness and the watching of other divers in the swimming pool of Wassenaar was already very satisfying for me. So I was very curious on how I would experience not watching divers, but other animal-like creatures under water.

The first dive seemed to be impressive: Göran and I found a reef on the right side of the pier with lots of life, huge lobsters, crabs etc. It was amazing. Diving at that moment didn't feel like a sport at all, it felt more like if we were simply going to the zoo, or doing some kind of eco-tourism... a walk in the woods, but then under water and with more animals than usually above water. The animals weren't scary at all, and I even got a piece of lobster (his scissor) as a present from Göran (no, we didn't kill it, as we told everybody). After having enjoyed the scenery with a visibility of about 2 to 3 m, we started the exercises for

ocean divers, like mask and DV clearing and breathing from the AAS. The rest of the noon was spent by supporting as surface support, enjoying a little nap on a little wall (humpty dumpy) and preparing for the second dive of the day.



The author (right) ready to dive together with Göran. In the background the white buoy above the 9m platform

The second dive was even more interesting. The water was rather choppy so swimming on the surface towards the white buoy was rather tiring. Yes, maybe diving *is* a sports then after all. Once at the buoy, we started descending towards a platform at 9 m depth. Also this was a very new and challenging experience. It felt like in the movies, as if we were doing some mini-expeditions to unknown areas. Descending this line going down from the buoy into the nothing, with limited visibility was an adventure for me on its own. Almost down, the contours of a platform became slowly visible, and a large shadow of a diver who was watching me appeared at the same time...Göran of course. Once down, he lead me along the 9m line towards the artificial reef, consisting of a bunch of large concrete bowls ('reef-balls') with holes in them. We explored the reef and discovered many more lobsters, crabs and little fish. Once further, we floated above a minefield of sea stars, which left a large impression on me, simply because of the large amount of them. It made me think about the 'the snorks' cartoon I used to watch on television when I was a kid. Life underwater looked like in that cartoon, and I became very careful trying not to disturb the life and the soil too much by my fins, or not to crush the sea stars by accident.

The day was nice, the sun was shining and the evening was introduced by having a very nice meal in the Kabbelaar. The next morning all students were able to dive, and the sun was shining again, without any wind this time, but visibility was poorer (1-2 m). The dives were more concentrated on deploying DSMBs, doing the AAS ascent, and for the sports divers amongst us on the rescue skills.

One of us, Wim van Leeuwen, was extremely unlucky with his gear, but it was very interesting to see as a fresh student how he and Göran dealt with a broken mask strap very calmly at 9 m below sea level. Also the surface support was superb, helping each other kitting up and down, with the fins and getting out of the water. The last day we decided to do only one dive in order not to be home too late, and in such manner that we could still make use of the Kabbelaar's showering facilities. The last dive was a dive which I had to lead myself. The first part of this dive was rather boring with very little life to see. After that, we ended up in complete darkness at 14.5 m, but fortunately an ascent to 9 m made us discover a very nice and beautiful reef...the same as on day one. All in all it was a most interesting and succesfull weekend of diving, with nice sunny weather, good dives and a very good atmosphere. Cheers for the instructors!

Veerle

My First Dive In The Netherlands

The great day had at last arrived! After more or less a year living in the Netherlands and working at ESTEC I was about to sample the delights of Dutch diving! I had lived and dived in the UK for many years and had experienced a wide range of conditions and dives of different degrees of pleasantness ranging from the absolutely unforgettable in terms of marine life and visibility (the Farne Islands and the wrecks of the M2 and Eolian Sky off Portland Bill to name just a few) to the absolutely grim dives where the only indication that the bottom was close came when the descent stopped after physically hitting the bottom and raising a cloud of silt which seemed to follow the divers during all the dive. To be honest, I have to confess my expectations

where closer to the latter rather than the former...

Before leaving London in May last year I had persistently contacted Peter in order to join the club and start diving as quickly as possible. Unfortunately for lots of different reasons I was completely unable to do a single dive here until May this year.

After lots of careful planning by Göran, the appointed DM for the weekend (after all we are a BSAC club and we always plan very carefully!) we had agreed to go diving in the Archimedes end at Oostvoornsemeer on Sunday 10th of May. Apart from the DM I was the only diver available and since none of us had been in the water for a long time a shallow and easy shore dive seemed a perfectly good plan. The training of new members was going to start soon and before taking trainees in the water it would be wise to make sure our skills although a bit rusty were still there. That was the plan and it was of course a good, solid and consistent plan, at least until we met Laurent in the pool the Saturday before going diving and he persuaded us to join the Harings on Sunday. They were going to Grevelingen and there were two places available in their RIB! After some more careful planning the BSAC way and taking into account my not very good knowledge of Dutch geography (I only realised Zeeland was in the South after this memorable dive) and my even worst sense of orientation (the new trainees need not worry as my underwater navigation skills are superb, honest...) we agreed on a meeting place on the A13 just after Delft.

Willing to give the DM and president of the club an impression of reliability and punctuality, qualities expected of a BSAC Dive Leader and even more of an Assistant Instructor, I got to the meeting point on time after getting out of bed at an unspeakable time in the morning. I actually got there so early that I had to wait a few minutes for Göran's arrival. Those of you who know me a little better will of course appreciate the almost super human effort that went into this minor by normal standards, but huge by my own standards, feat of punctuality. The things one does for the sake of diving!

We got to the diving site on time and after a few minutes Laurent arrived with the

RIB. Launching the RIB from the slipway was easy and in no time we were prepared to go diving. I paired with Göran and when we got to the dive site there was already a big boat there full of divers who by their cute little colourful snorkels and what on a first impression seemed to be an instructor/trainee ratio of a very small number could almost unmistakably be identified as belonging to the PADI species.

The good thing at the Grevelingen and most of the dive sites in the Netherlands I have been since then is that they are not tidal and therefore the stress of getting in the water before there is a real risk that we will surface in the middle of nowhere is absent. After all the clips, buckles and dangling bits attached to the two intrepid divers were carefully checked and we were confident they were in reasonably good working condition we did our careful buddy check and off we went. And that's when the surprise came: as Göran started to point his torch around (mine being more or less unusable after the very old batteries died in a few seconds) we realised there were lobsters of all sizes under every crevice in the rocks covering the bottom! In my three or four years of diving in the UK I had managed to see maybe five or six but here it seemed they were popping out of the sea bed! The visibility was not particularly good in places (and I am sure that had nothing to do with my buoyancy being a bit questionable after being out of the water for a while...) but then there were patches where the water was very clear and of course there were more lobsters everywhere! And that was not all: large numbers of what looked like a species of goby (we were told later by one of our Harings fellow divers the dark one was the male and the less dark the female) and large numbers of small anemones clinging to the rocks! By now my expectations had been fully fulfilled and I was even starting to feel a bit guilty they were so low from the beginning.

The end of the dive was approaching soon and as we begun the safety stop at 6 m it became clear I was positively buoyant with no hope of stopping a very irregular ascent. Fortunately there was a lobster basket firmly anchored on the sea bed and I managed to hold on to it for a few minutes under the watchful

and somewhat puzzled eye of my buddy.

We got back in the RIB, headed for the Kabbelaar for an air fill and after a couple of hours we were back in the water. This time I took the precaution of adding some extra weight as one cannot always count on a friendly fisherman to leave his lobster baskets around for the use of unprepared divers . . . and it was more of the same: lobsters, gobies and to top it all a huge flat fish that according to my fish book could be a dab, or maybe something else . . . but it certainly was huge! We quickly returned to the slipway and soon we were moving home.

I really cannot stress how much I was positively surprised by what I saw on my first dive in the Netherlands and was confirmed over the last few weekends. In the mean time I was in the UK diving with my old club and I think I managed to convince some of my buddies there that they should come here and try for themselves!

Now that we have actually started to take the new trainees for their first open water dives I sincerely hope they can quickly overcome any little apprehension they may still harbour about diving in the cold and sometimes not very clear waters of the Netherlands: it is true that diving in the Netherlands is not diving the great Barrier Reef or the Red Sea but if you keep your minds and your eyes open I am sure you will soon be able to feel the sense of wonder that I (and am I pretty sure most of my fellow divers) feel every time I go underwater!

Luis

Diving Matters

The following is the (entire) dive marshal listing as issued on 11 May 2006 - also published in the Diving and Training page of our website :

Saturday 13 and Sunday 14 May	Göran
Saturday 20 and Sunday 21 May	Luis/Peter
Saturday 27 and Sunday 28 May	Anthony
Saturday 03 and Sunday 04 June	Göran
Saturday 10 and Sunday 11 June	John
Saturday 17 and Sunday 18 June	Luis
Saturday 24 and Sunday 25 June	Bas
Saturday 01 and Sunday 02 July	Anthony
Saturday 08 and Sunday 09 July	Bas
Saturday 15 and Sunday 16 July	John

Peter

AGM 2006

Despite doubts before the event, attendance at the AGM held 'below stairs' at the Sterrenbad on Saturday 10 June 2006 was quite good. There being no quorum stipulations to worry about, the meeting went ahead as planned. The only hiccup was that the pool authorities had lost the key to the room therefore it was some twenty minutes before one was found somewhere in the Wasseenaar locale thanks to a sprint cycling effort by Brian Hedley!

The concerns beforehand regarding replacements, to the outgoing committee, though not entirely successful, proved, as usual, groundless. In fact the voting-in of the new committee was one of the swifter parts of the proceedings. The final lineup can be viewed in 'Our Committee' at the end of this newsletter.

Typically the meeting was often bogged down debating what in all honesty can only be described (by this reporter at least) as trivia. Göran, as the outgoing/incoming, chairman did a superb job but must have been exasperated by the time-wasting that occurred. The meeting closed after more than two and a half hours! Can we do better next year ... hmm ... ?

There are no dramatic details to

report, except perhaps for the predicted inflationary adjustments in subscriptions made, with half an eye also on the way that the SSCC view our actions? It remains undeniable however that we continue to get our swimming and diving on-the-cheap!

A full report of the AGM minutes will be available to all in due course.

Our Committee

Our 2006/2007 elected committee is:

Chairman	Göran Pilbratt
ESSAC Secretary	Wim van Leeuwen
ESSAC Treasurer	Wim van Leeuwen
BSAC Secretary	Chantal Macleod-Nolan
Diving Officer	Mario Monaldi
Training Officer	Vacant
Snorkelling Officer	Wim van Leeuwen
Equipment Officer	Vacant
Expeditions Officer	Valerie Le Gallou
Swimming Officer	Myra Macleod-Nolan
Social Secretary(s)	Rita Kremer Wil Hedley

The committee minutes and reports can be viewed on our website under the 'Our Committee' icon.