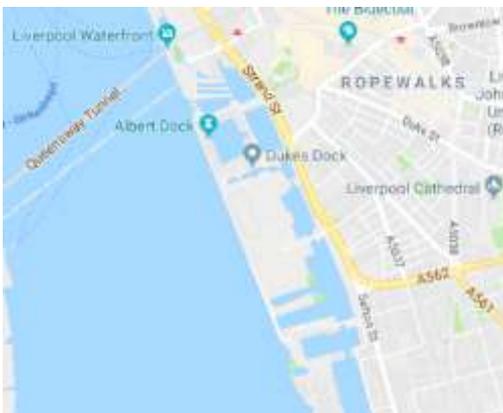


North West England

Seasearch Site Surveys 2017

This report summarises the results of surveys carried out during 2017 by Seasearch divers in North West England. This area runs from Liverpool Bay in the south to Morecombe Bay in the north. The area is a very challenging one with strong currents, no shelter or lee from wind, no charter boats and fairly flat seabed. The main focus of 2017 has been to visit local dive clubs who are known to dive the wrecks of Liverpool Bay and/or who are close to the coast, to encourage them to explore this coastline and to take on the challenge of Seasearch. 7 clubs were visited and were enthusiastic to this end. In particular West Lancs SAC based on the South Shore at Blackpool were most committed and I was invited out with them to explore Blackpool waters on several occasions.

Four Observer courses were run in 2017, 3 for NW England and one for Leeds University SAC. All qualifying dives were carried out at Duke's Dock in Liverpool.



Duke's Dock Liverpool

Since the opening of The Albert Dock complex for leisure purposes in 1986, the marine life has taken hold and continues to flourish. The main features of the habitat are silty seabed and stone dock walls. Water quality is paramount as this is a public place thus the marine life is very important in helping to achieve this.

Survey Dive Details

3 tutor lead dives and one pleasure dive were carried out in Duke's Dock with the focus being either the sea bed or the Dock walls. In total 48 Observer training dives and 4 Surveyor dives were conducted.

Mytilus edulis is the predominant mollusc recorded with very large specimens observed. With the absence of the main predator, *Asterias rubens*, the common mussel thrives. Cockles were also seen which is very encouraging as these only thrive in good quality water. *Ciona intestinalis*, the yellow fluted squirt was commonly recorded along with *Botryllus schlosseri*, the star sea squirt.

Several sponges were recorded including *Halichondria bowerbanki* and *Myxilla incrustans*. The silty bottom saw a number of annelids, *Oxydromus flexuosus* and Nereididae sp. The walls had evidence of polychaete tubes. Fish life in the docks is spectacular. Shoals of *Trisopterus luscus* (bib) and *Gobiusculus flavescens* (2 spot gobies) were common. European eels were spotted along with black gobies, *Gasterosteus aculeatus* (3 spined sticklebacks), *Taurulus bubalis* (scorpion fish) and the snake pipefish, *Entelurus aequoreus*.

Aurelia aurita scyphysta were common on the dock walls which lead to quite an explosion of moon jellies in the summer months. Tiny mysid shrimps dotted the walls along with *Carcinus maenas* and a particular favourite was a humungous common lobster spied in the shadows of one of the walkways. The marine life in the docks appears to be very healthy. Litter is present as one would expect with a heavy footfall but a lot of this provides shelter for crabs and fish plus growth opportunities for algae and squirts.



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Blackpool

West Lancs SAC were very keen to explore the waters, which are literally on their door step and invited me out on a couple of occasions to understand the Blackpool coast. Our first expedition was to a wreck approximately 5 miles west of Blackpool close to the Ribble Estuary. The seabed was surveyed here in approximately 11m. Light levels were good and visibility about 2m. Echinoderms were the dominant phyla with brittle stars *Ophiura ophiura* common along with *Asterias rubens*, common starfish and *Astropecten irregularis*, sand sea stars. *Pomatoschistus minutus* (sand gobies) and rays were common along with hermit crabs, *Lanice conchilega* (sand mason worms) and *Inachus* spp. The second dive was the wreck of the Stone Barge approximately 1.5 km west of Blackpool Pleasure Beach and was quite spectacular. It is believed that the barge was carrying stones for the construction of the pier when it sank thus I was able to get 3 habitats in one dive – wreckage, cobbles and sand (sea bed). *Metridium dianthus* (plumose anemones) and *Alcyonium digitatum* (dead mens' fingers) covered the wreck as had a lobster found his home in the

superstructure. Swimming, edible and hermit crabs roamed the wreck and the seabed. Fish life was prolific – *Ctenolabrus rupestris* (gold sinney), cod, *Trisopterus luscus* (bib), *Trisopterus minutus* (poor cod) and *Pleuronectes platessa* (plaice.)



Acknowledgements

Many thanks to West Lancs SAC for inviting me to join their dives and to add some new and exciting sites to the map of the North West. Thanks to photographers Tony Gilbert, Crawford Currie, Alistair Allen, Carol Horne, Catherine Gras, Ken Byrne, Matt Boa, Paul Daley, Denis Mahar, Mike Smith and Ariel Northway for allowing me to use their photos in this report. This report has been compiled by Wendy Northway, Seasearch North-West England Co-ordinator.

Seasearch is a partnership between the Marine Conservation Society (MCS), The Wildlife Trusts, statutory nature conservation bodies and others, co-ordinated nationally by MCS and co-ordinated and delivered locally in England by Wildlife Trust and MCS local co-ordinators. For more information on Seasearch and to see all of the partners involved nationally, please visit www.seasearch.org.uk or email info@seasearch.org.uk

