

Common crab
perches on a
support

Whisky & Water

LOCH FYNE, LOCH LONG AND THE AUCHENTOSHEN DISTILLERY

NICK AND CAROLINE ROBERTSON-BROWN head north of the border to continue their quest to combine Scottish diving with a drop of the local tittle

Photographs by **FROGFISH PHOTOGRAPHY**

In the previous instalment of Whisky & Water, we had spent three days in Oban diving Loch Crerran. Having satisfied ourselves with the diving and finished up with some great whisky at the Oban distillery, we headed 45 minutes southeast to Strachur on the southern coast of Loch Fyne. We have dived in Scotland on a fair number of occasions and had always wanted to dive Loch Fyne, but for one reason or another, we had never managed it.

We had rented a holiday cottage in the village of Strachur and despite having a few problems trying to find it, we couldn't have asked for anything better. The main room has a picture window overlooking Loch Fyne, with the shoreline just 20 metres in front of the house. Once we had unloaded and prepared our diving kit and cameras, we set off on a reconnaissance run to try and find the best location for a shore dive. While we came across one or two lay-bys where the access for diving looked reasonable, nothing really shouted 'this is it', and so we parked up back at the house and made our way on foot to the local hostelry, the Creggan Inn. We soon got chatting to the friendly locals, as one does, and we were informed that they occasionally saw small groups diving from a disused jetty just half a mile up the road from the pub. We were later to discover that this dive site is about as good as it gets, for a shore dive.

High tide the next day was around midday, so we had a lazy start before heading out to check out the jetty. It did indeed look perfect, with plenty of parking space and a disused concrete jetty to set-up the kit. Once the tide was fully in, we all got into the water and, like before, some went left and some went right, but Al and Miche, with the twin sets, headed straight down to 20m, on a quest to find firework anemones. The dive site was teeming with life and throughout the dive my buddy and I were constantly calling each other over to show off our latest find. The visibility was five to six metres and with the sun shining in a cloudless sky, there was no shortage of light at 8-10m. Diving at a shallow depth, we were able to spend 90 minutes underwater, finning gently so as not to disturb the silt on the seabed. At the end of the dive, we surfaced to find that the others had only just surfaced themselves and for the whole of the surface interval, we were all buzzing and chatting about what we had seen.

For the second dive, we decided to stay at this location but take a different route and having all told each other where to go for the different animals, the next 90 minutes seemed over in no time at all. Once again, we had seen numerous critters but we were low on air and all good things must come to an end. We needed to refill our tanks and across the other side of the lock at Inveraray, there is a filling station that stays open during the spring and summer months. If you are planning on diving here outside of the season, you will need to go to Puffin Divers in Oban or else head to Glasgow.

The following day we headed further east to Arrochar at the northern end of Loch Long. We know this place well as we have relatives here and it was where we got married 16 years ago. We have dived Loch Long on several occasions in the past but have never actually dived beneath the old torpedo testing station and on this occasion, with the sun glaring down from a cloudless sky, we decided to see what was beneath there.



More-stationary
life provides a
blast of colour...



...amid a sea of
browns and
greens



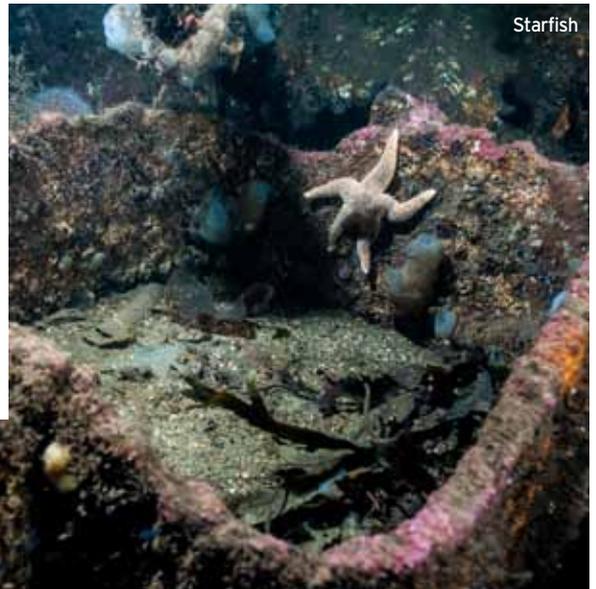
Stunning view down the loch



Awaiting the next trial tipple



Exploring through the support beams



Starfish

We kitted-up on the slipway and walked into the water together. As we disappeared beneath the surface, we were delighted to see that the visibility was every bit as good as we had the day before at Loch Fyne. The seabed, however, came as something of a surprise for it was covered as far as you could see by empty mussel shells. We moved away from this area, but it was 20 or 30 metres before we could actually see the seabed. We knew, from having dived here in the past, that there was some great life to be found, and as we shone our lights under rocks and into the nooks and crannies, we did find some. At one point, we found a conger eel just peeking its snout from within a hole in the rock. Despite trying to tease it out into the open, it just stayed where it was and stared at us. There was other wildlife about, but having been spoiled at the previous dive site, we decided to surface and after chatting with the rest of the group, opted to head back to our accommodation and Loch Fyne for our second dive.

Once back at Loch Fyne we decided there was still plenty of mileage in yesterday's dive site and so, with the sun still shining, we descended below the surface for the final dive of the trip. We moved further along from where we had been on the last two dives and found more great wildlife hiding in old tyres, bottles and other bits of junk that had been thrown into the loch. Al found his firework anemone and had a huge grin on his face as we all surfaced at around the same time, packed away the dive gear and cameras and headed back to the house to rinse off all the equipment.

"The dive site was teeming with life and throughout the dive, my buddy and I were constantly calling each other over to show off our latest find"

The following morning was time to head south and home. However, less than an hour away, just after the Erskine Bridge, is the Auchenoshen Distillery and we were booked in for a tour at midday. When we arrived at reception, we were met by Neil, who was to be our guide around the distillery and as it turned out, he not only used to work there making the whisky, he had an amusing story at every stop on the tour. Auchenoshen is a smooth whisky and this is partly due to the fact that it is the only Scottish distillery that triple distills the fluid before it is placed in barrels for varying lengths of time. Our favourite was the '3 Wood', which is initially matured in bourbon casks before being left in Oloroso and then Pedro Jiminez casks to infuse extra richness and a sweet fruitiness. They make five other styles so there should be a taste for anyone who enjoys a tipple, unless you are one who only enjoys the really peaty styles, as these whiskies are not peaty at all. ■