

The Tanks That Swam

(Project Valentine 75)

This year sees an exciting departure from our usual diving programme. We are going to be adopting a project based approach that will give our diving a bit more of a focus. Project Valentine 75 will see us visiting, surveying and recording the seven Valentine tanks that are sunk in Poole Bay. The aim will be to collect enough information about them to build an exhibition about them in time for the 75th anniversary of their sinking.

Why choose the Valentine tanks?

The tanks are a popular dive site that most of us have dived. However we only dive the two that are roped together. There are another five that are rarely if ever visited. A condition survey by Bournemouth University has shown that, despite anecdotal information, all the tanks are still recognizable as tanks. As part of their survey they carried out a metal survey which shows that 80% of the original metal thickness has been corroded away. They may not last much longer and it will be an opportunity to be part of recording and preserving information about an important part of our local history. Their depth means that they will be accessible to all members of the club and will give us some good dive times.

How will all club members be involved?

The plan will be to carry out a comprehensive survey covering both the archeological and biological aspects. The tanks lie on a relatively flat seabed and so act as a magnet for wildlife. It's the combination of the historical and natural history aspects of the project that will hopefully appeal to all members of the club.

Dives will allow people to focus on their own interests. Seasearchers will be able to complete observer forms; photographers can record divers, the tanks and the wildlife; metal heads, the condition of the tanks and any associated artifacts. There have been some exciting developments in creating 3D images from photographs (photogrammetry) and the project will enable us to access resources to carry this out. The project will also give us opportunities to extend out training beyond the normal BSAC dive qualifications. There may be a chance to run a Seasearch surveyor course and also for people to do the Basic Archeological Diver course (its official, you can become a BAD diver!!!) or take part in the NAS training programme.

We could also run some in house skill development courses such as the search and recovery course or the wreck appreciation course. These would enable us to establish links with other local clubs.

I'm not an active diver anymore, how can I help?

The plan is to record as much information as possible about the tanks and there will be opportunities to carry out research into the history of Operation Smash, the history of the Valentine tanks, the regiments involved in using the Valentines etc. We will try and arrange visits to the Tank Museum's



archives and the National Archives at Kew. It would be great to get some funding for the project and researching and writing grant applications would be really useful contribution.

Will the project take over all our diving?

The simple answer is NO. We see the project as being a focus for our diving but we won't be diving the tanks exclusively. We'll still do the old favourites such as the Betsy, the Kyarra, the Black Hawk and the local reefs as well. We've yet to establish the exact programme but we think we will aim for a least a couple of non project dives each month. It will be difficult to get to the tanks on a Wednesday night and these will still follow our normal routine. There may also be at least one trip away for a weekend to West Dorset, Plymouth or even Cornwall.

What's the project timetable?

We will be launching the project in mid to late February with a talk from a guest speaker. This will put a background to the project and will explain how clubs have carried out similar projects. We're going to open this up to other clubs as well so it should be a really good social evening as well.

The first dive of the project will be on April 4th and will be a hard boat dive. This is the anniversary of their sinking and we plan to use this dive to check out the two tanks we normally dive, begin to put some markers down and also to lay a wreath to commemorate the six soldiers who lost their lives in the operation.

During May we will be making sure we know where the other five tanks are and carrying out some visual surveys. There will be the opportunity to do some mid week dives as well, tides, boats and weather permitting.

The summer will be spent carrying out the surveys and exploring the sites. Hopefully we will have a lot of data by the end of our dive season and during the quiet months we can work on developing the exhibition and carrying out the secondary research.

If this year goes well we will carry on the project in 2018 with perhaps more detailed surveys or extending the project to visit some of the other WW2 wrecks around south coast.

How will you keep people informed?

We'll have regular updates on the website and the Facebook page and the newsletters will carry updates as well. There is already a "Valentine 75" Facebook page which is "open" to the public and we hope that this will be used by the club and others to post updates. If you've got any comments or questions drop the committee an email and we'll get back to you.

We see it as a club project and hope that everyone will feel part of it.

