

Submarine A1 Licensee report 2017

By

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Overview

This year has seen an increase in visitors who visited the site and numbers are up from last year, the successful implementation of the diver trail created during 2013 had helped promote diving on the site by a rise in inquiries about diving the wreck even if they have not materialised into actual dives. This year I have seen groups from outside the area wanting to dive the site. I have been working again with local dive shops to help promote the site but sadly on every occasion the dives have been cancelled. I have made every effort to be on all of the dives and brief divers prior to diving the site. The weather has been generally good though many dives have been cancelled in the diving calendar this season. Despite long spells of hot dry periods and low winds, calm seas have not produced good visibility particularly in the summer months in Bracklesham Bay and this is probably still down to the dredging of Portsmouth harbour this year which has now concluded but has left the area with a legacy of poor visibility and this may have put divers off visiting the area and diving in general.

Diving

The site was first dived on the 20th of May this year with a group from Milton Keynes. Visibility on the site was less than 2metres and some divers had difficulty in finding the site despite the shot line being near to the wreck.

The second dive was on the 15th July by myself and a club member from Southsea Sub-Aqua club. Visibility was around 2m on this occasion.

The third dive was on the 16th July, the site was dived by a group of divers from the London area who also visited the Hazardous site afterwards, visibility was reported as less than 2m.

On the 17th July a group from Tal Scuba visited the site on a NAS protected wreck day, as was the Invincible later in the afternoon. Visibility was again around 2m on A1 and less on Invincible.

The final dive took place on the 27th October which was another NAS protected wreck day that had been rescheduled due to previous bad weather. Visibility was poor around 1-2m

Condition of wreck

The wreck remains in the same condition as previous years with no sign of deterioration of the hull or main structure. The heavy concretion over most of the hull is offering good protection and the main concern that still remains is the crack in the conning tower which is gradually opening up very slowly. Damage from fishing pots and lines this year is not visible on the structure and whilst there has been evidence of Rod fishing taking place on the site (hooks and line tangled on the wreck) this is minimal. A fishing boat was advised to leave the site prior to diving on one occasion. The seabed around the wreck and the wreck itself has a coating of fine sediment/mud over it which is easily disturbed by either fins or hands. Whilst this is adding to the protection it is evidence of what is in the water column. Inside the submarine sediment levels must be increasing though no measurements are being taken at this point in time and the inside is often also full of weed so this is difficult to monitor. It is estimated that the levels are well over half the depth of the internals of the submarine if not closer to 2 thirds full of sediment.

Marine Life

The site continues to be a haven for marine life though over that past 3 years there has been a noticeable decline in marine life on and around the wreck. Whilst there is no direct evidence to support my theory of dredging being the cause, the poor water quality has in my opinion impacted on the life on and around the wreck site. The most noticeable being the demise of shredded carrot sponge (*Amphilectus fucorum*) and Breadcrumb sponge (*Halichondria panicea*) from the bow area. These two sponges generally grow where there is good water quality and good flow and since dredging has taken place these have now disappeared from the site along with many resident fish. The population of Tompot blenny's and scorpion fish has also seriously diminished.

Conclusion

As previously stated the site remains stable, there is no evidence of tampering with the site and groups of divers are contacting either myself directly or going through the NAS to arrange diving on the site. No pictures have been produced for the report this year as the visibility has been very poor and whilst this does not affect the site in any way it does affect divers who dive on the site and all divers are briefed prior to diving about the dangers of diving in poor conditions and the risk of something going wrong is amplified by such conditions. Whilst we cannot control conditions on the site some effort could be made to monitor sediment levels and this may perhaps help us understand why visibility in recent years has deteriorated since 2013 when we put the diver trail in and why it is so bad now. We had some excellent water quality and conditions in 2013, and that was pre dredging of Southampton water and Portsmouth harbour.

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