Submarine A1 Licensee report 2019

By

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Overview

This year has seen a decline in divers who visited the site and numbers are down from last year, this has been the first year of reduced numbers since the diver trail was created during 2013. I have seen a general decline in inquiries about diving the wreck and I have seen no groups from outside the area again 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. However the majority of the dives planned with the NAS did go ahead and the weather has been good on those occasions. I have made every effort to be on all of the dives and brief divers prior to diving the site. The summer weather has been generally poor this year compared to last season which was exceptional and very few dives were cancelled. There were few long spells of hot dry periods and a lot of easterly winds which along with a reasonable rain fall gave poor visibility on the site for the 3 dives that took place visibility was 2-3m.

Diving

The site was first dived on the 11th of April this year with a group from NAS on a protected wreck day. Visibility on the site was about 2 metres and some divers had difficulty in finding the site despite the shot line being near to the wreck.

The second dive was on the 30th May this was a NAS Protected wreck day dive lead by myself and Visibility was around 2m on this occasion.

The third dive on the 8th September, a group from Southsea Sub-Aqua club visited the site visibility was reported 3m this was the final dive that took place this season.

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. No damage from fishing pots and lines has been seen this year whilst there has been evidence of Rod fishing taking place on the site (hooks and line tangled on the wreck) this is minimal. There are some fishing pots within the 300m exclusion zone of the wreck but they appear to have been there all season and have not moved, there is no clear identification marks on the buoys, there were some markings on the pot floats but they have become unreadable, they are not regarded as a threat to the site currently although

they should not be there. The seabed around the wreck and the wreck itself has a coating of fine sediment/mud over it which is very easily disturbed by either fins or hands. Whilst this is adding to the protection it is evidence of what is continuously in the water column. Looking inside the submarine sediment levels must be increasing though no measurements are currently 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

This year has seen an improvement in water quality generaly around the area and in the bay so there has been a visual improvement in life on the wreck and growth of marine organisms. The site has always been a haven for marine life though over that past 3 years of dredging there had been a noticeable decline in marine life on and around the wreck during the dredging period when the water quality was black and very poor. Now that dredging has stopped life on and around the wreck site has been seen to be increasing. The shredded carrot sponge (Amphilectus fucorum) and Breadcrumb sponge (Halichondria panicea) from the bow area continue to grow again and increase its surface area on the wreck in parts. These two sponges general grow where there is good water quality and a good flow over them so it is good to see them beginning to grow again. I am now in discussions with Chichester County Council regarding a project that will look at water quality and marine life in the Bracklesham bay area including A1. This is being scoped out next season and could give a valuable insight into why the bay visibility is so variable.

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. Whilst we have no direct control of conditions on the site I believe that there would be some value in monitoring sediment levels on the site and this may perhaps help us understand why visibility is so variable in Portsmouth and Chichester harbour areas. This may be a reason why divers have stopped visiting the submarine as nobody want to dive in poor conditions and poor visibility.

Martin Davies