

RIB diving With Clidive



By Norman Lomax
Last Amended March 2008

"Believe me, my young friend; there is nothing, absolutely nothing - half as much worth doing as simply messing about in boats"

Kenneth Grahame, Wind in the Willows

Diving from a RIB is very much part of the British diving experience and offers maximum access to the dive sites, maximum versatility in terms of dive managing, and generally a lot of fun. However, it does present its own set of challenges due to exposure to the elements and lack of space. It demands a certain amount of personal organisation and preparation not only to make life easier for yourself but also others around you. For those who haven't done much RIB diving, here's a guide of what to expect and what is expected from you. If you need any clarification on anything don't hesitate ask the equipment officer or any other boat handler.

Some definitions:

RIB Rigid Inflatable Boat It has a rigid deep V hull supported by a system of air filled tubes. These tubes enable a huge amount of buoyancy. Even if the boats are full of water **they will not sink**.

Dive Manager (DM) Person appointed by the Diving Officer, to be responsible for organising the diving and safety on their behalf. They decide where to dive, when to dive and who is diving with whom. They also appoint assistant marshals and boat handlers.

Boat Handler (BH) Person appointed by the DM to drive the boats. The boat handler is responsible for the safety of all in the boat and is a qualified Diver Cox'n and ratified by the club's committee. In addition they also have a VHF Marine Radio licence, and are training in Oxygen Administration and Rescue Management.

Boat Fairies (usually includes BHs, DMs and assistants) These are the people who work often unnoticed and unseen ensuring the boats get to particular locations, are fuelled, and are not swept away during the night etc etc

Boat Boxes These are the square boxes mounted on the Aframes at the back of the boats. These contain emergency flares, first aid kit, tools and spares. Everybody should familiarise themselves with their contents. You may have to use them.

Bow Pointy bit at front of boat

Stern Back of boat, where A frame and transom are (transom is the fibre glass bit.)

Port Left side of boat when facing the bow

Starboard Right side of boat when facing bow

Painter The rope attached outside below the bow

Elephant's trunk The drain at stern you can put down and take up

Launching/Recovery

Everybody in the club owns the RIBs. They are expensive (Blue – £30k ish, Yellow £20k ish); we are all responsible for them. Your diving weekend doesn't end until the boats are put away. Get involved, learn how to contribute and we can all get in the pub/home earlier!

Equipment

When diving from boats every diver should have a whistle and flag to prevent being lost at sea during low visibility/sea fog. These items are very cheap so please make it a priority to buy or borrow them. Assemble and check your set before getting on the RIB. Once you are out at sea little can be done and you will miss the dive.

Ensure that all cylinders are turned off before putting them onboard – they can be accidentally start to free flow and you can lose your air. Divers in drysuits should ensure that the zip is fully closed before getting on board. Use the buddy system and check each other. Falling in could have disastrous results

Be wary of carrying your weight-belt by wearing it. Slipping with a 10kg around your waist can cause injury, wading in water with serious lumps of lead tied to you is be a good idea ! Equally do not wear your weight-belt in the boat until you start kitting up – incase you fall overboard.

Except weight- belts, all waterproof equipment, i.e. mask, fins, snorkel, reel, hood, gloves should be stored in a mesh 'goody' bag. These are stowed at the front of the boats and are passed back to divers as they kit up. After kitting up they are passed back to the front. Loose equipment is potentially dangerous and diving kit is too expensive to lose!

Regulators and consoles should be stored inside the BCD to ensure they are not damaged by cylinders or by someone stepping on them. The assembled set (cylinder, BCD and reg's/console) is stored in the metal frame in the centre of the boat. These should be secured in place using the bungee cords.

Weight-belts tend to be stored just behind the drivers console and can be left on the boats for the whole weekend at your own risk.

Car keys and mobile phones can be stored in one of the boat boxes mounted on the A-frame at the back of the boat. Using the cubbyhole on the consoles is not advised. (Things fall down the gaps and are lost forever)

Help each other when getting kit on/off the boats; ensure that it's not always the same person heaving cylinders from the water into the boats.

Remember use the strength in your arms and legs when shifting cylinders, straight backs may save a strain.

Protection from the elements

Don't forget warm hat and sunscreen on every trip, even on the dullest day you can suffer windburn and UV burn.

If you are diving in semi dry or a wet suit, we cannot stress enough the importance of having adequate windproof thermal protection no matter what the weather forecast, any threat of hypothermia should be taken very seriously. This applies to the trip out to the dive site as well as back. A waterproof bag can be used to keep these garments dry whilst diving.

Tide and time wait for no man

Do not underestimate the responsibilities your Dive Mangers have voluntarily taken on board. They are trying to provide you with an exciting weekend in an environment which is changing constantly above and below the water and trying to times be aware of all safety and group capability issues.

If the boat is set to leave at a certain time, or for a certain location, there is a good reason. Please ensure you do your bit so we can all 'dive the plan'. Don't plan/judge your state of readiness by taking the lead from other people, this just means that the group lags behind the slowest person! Take individual personal responsibility for being on time with kit checked, ready to dive.

Underway at sea

Hold onto the boat at all times. If the sea is lumpy, you may find life easier and more fun if you stand, using your legs and knees to 'ride' the waves. The boat handler will instruct you to hold tight when they are about to accelerate. For efficiency and comfort, the boat should be evenly balanced at all times, judge where you should be sitting to achieve this. In order to get the boat planning the boat handler may ask you to move forward.

Driving the boat can be a lot of fun, (the Boat Handling Course is open to any level of diver and is highly recommended), however reading the waves with half the English Channel slapping into your eyes can be.... err ...stressful. This is when the boat handlers need extra sets of eyes. Help them by looking out for hazards in front and behind.

At the back of the boats, on the floor immediately in front of the transom, is a rectangular inset box known as the bilge. This sometimes fills with water and sometimes spills over into the bottom of the boat. This is nothing to be concerned about; the boat-handler can use an electric pump to clear the water. At speed a self-

draining flexible pipe known as an 'elephants trunk' is lowered into the water to drain the boat.

Discipline

Sorry to be draconian but this IS the law. The person driving the boat carries the burden of responsibility, their decision is final and you should be ready to act upon any instructions immediately at all times.

Dehydration contributes to DCI. Get into the habit of drinking lots of fluids. The DM will delegate to someone that there will always be water on the boats. Smoking is absolutely prohibited on the RIBs at all times.

Safety

Our RIBs are more or less the same spec as RNLI Inshore Lifeboats and are the perfect tool for the job as long as we adhere to some basic safety guidelines.

Tidiness

As already mentioned, a tidy boat is a safe boat. Everything has its specific home for easy access. Loose kit is not acceptable, get a mesh bag or similar to store kit like mask, fins snorkel etc. All ropes and lines must be stowed neatly at the front of the boat to prevent entanglement either around someone's feet or the propeller.

Man Overboard

It is extremely unlikely that you will be thrown out of the boat. But if you are, DO NOT ATTEMPT to hang on to the side of the boat in an effort to stop yourself falling in. Just let yourself go. Ignoring this advice opens you to risk of severe tearing of muscles etc (the boats can do 30kts plus), or worse still, could lead to impact with the propellers. Your thermal suit will give you plenty of buoyancy. Just keep your eyes on the boat. It'll soon be back with you asking for an OK signal.

As soon as somebody goes for a swim, everybody in the boat should maintain visual contact. It is also important that everyone points at the person in the water and continues to do so until instructed by the boat handler. Divers in the boat must assume that the driver has not noticed a man overboard. The correct procedure for alerting him/her is to shout loudly 'man overboard' and tap the driver's shoulder so by immediately indicating which side of the boat the swimmer is...and keep pointing.

Helicopter Evacuation

Whether it's a training run for the Coastguard Rescue Crews (they've got to practice on somebody!) or in the unlikely event of a real emergency, you may be faced with a line connected to a winch coming at you from a helicopter. **DO NOT TOUCH THIS UNLESS TOLD TO**. It's an electrical earthing device and we'd rather not have any human spark plugs! As always, take instructions from the boat handler.

Sea Sickness

Best way to avoid motion sickness is to keep busy, by not 'being a passenger' and not to have alcohol the night before. If you do feel a bit queasy concentrate on something fixed like the horizon or landmass. There are motion-sickness inhibiting drugs available over the counter from Boots etc. The problem with seasickness medication is that some of these tablets may make you drowsy and may therefore

predispose you to nitrogen narcosis. It is strongly advisable to find the medication which best suits your body. First you should purchase a type recommended by your local pharmacist (eg. Stugeron), and take a test dose at a time when you are not driving or diving. If you become drowsy, you will know the medication does not suit you, and then you must try another type. This procedure should be repeated until you find one which does not make you drowsy. It is important to note that the one that suits you best may not suit your buddy at all. This is nothing to worry about and is due to differing body metabolism. Your initial dives on this medication should be shallow and depth should be gradually increased over subsequent dives in order to minimise the possibility of adverse affects on a deep dive. Beware of the possible additive affects of this medication with prolonged use. If any drowsiness is experienced, you should not take a dose on that day.

At the start of a new diving season, prior to diving, it is advisable to retest yourself in this way to ensure that your chosen medication still suits you. Sometimes on calm days, when the boat is drifting, people getting kitted up at the back of the boat may get a lungful of diesel exhaust fumes, the driver may not be aware of this, tell them what's happening, they may well be able to position the boat in such a way to avoid it.

Even if you feel unwell in the boat, it is worth attempting to go diving. I promise you will feel much better once you are under the water. If you're feeling ill let the boat handler know so that they can get you into the water first if possible.

At the dive site

OK, you arrive at the dive site, ...what's next. First the DM/BH has to find the site or a particular point on a site and does so using a combination of transit points, echo sounder and GPS. This may involve several passes over apparently the same place or it may even appear that the boat is just going around in circles. Sometimes this is very difficult and requires intense concentration, be advised..... this is not a good time to start singing 'oh,why are we waiting'!

Time is also taken studying the water movement, if a shot has been put in time may be needed to ensure it's not drifting. Safety is paramount. Patience please. You will be briefed on the dive and whom you are diving with and also includes an order of entry into the water. If you are not getting kitted up, help others by giving them space, help each other.

Do not attempt to kit up in a standing position. Rest your set on the tubes and sit down into the BCD. Depending on conditions, it might be important to kit up quickly. Be prepared, practice. Then comes the ESSENTIAL buddy check, you will be amazed at what doesn't get turned on, plugged in etc in the heat of the moment. Remember what you have been taught. Use the BAR system to determine sequence of check, Buoyancy, Air, Releases. If you need a refresher, no problem, just ask an instructor.

After this, let the Boat Handler know your buddy pair is ready, they will then pootle over to the entry point. Listen to them intently, with your regulator in your mouth and mask on. The boat handler will give you a countdown, 3,2,1,GO. On GO make sure you go smartly, otherwise you might miss the shot (not all dives are 'shotted'). If

more than one diver is going to roll into the water ensure that the person nearest the back of the boat goes first. This will avoid you landing on someone in the water. On surfacing from the backwards roll, give the OK signal to the boathandler. Try not to get into the habit of doing this automatically without thinking, make sure everything really is OK first and wait for confirmation signal back. As you surface, you may be a little disorientated, if so, look towards the boat, the boat handler or DM will be pointing to where the shot is. You should try to get to the shot as quickly as possible. When there compose yourself, signal the descend signal to your buddy, acknowledge the signal with an OK and descend slowly together, clearing your ears early and often.

Pulling a dive: Don't forget, we are diving for fun. We have a philosophy in the club that means that if at any point, for whatever reason, you just don't fancy it, you just don't want to do the dive, you can abort at any point. Having said that, the more experienced people or instructors around you will try to allay any discomfort you may have with encouragement, but at the end of the day you can pull out with no questions asked. (Buddy system applies, one up, both up).

When divers are in the water and you are still up top, you may be asked to put up the flag. This is the internationally recognised A-flag which indicates 'caution divers down'.

On surfacing, buddy pairs should remain together, one facing and constantly watching the boat, the other looking behind his buddy keeping a lookout for hazards. You should now give the OK signal to the Boat Handler to indicate all is well and receive acknowledgement OK signal back. You should not be chatting about the fantastic dive, the dive hasn't finished yet; keep your regulators in your mouths! If the boat doesn't immediately come to pick you up, don't worry. They know where you are and maybe picking others up first. If when you surface, you cannot see the boat deploy your yellow safety flag or use a whistle to attract attention. Every diver in the club, diving off boats should have both of these devices.

The boat will approach and you will be told which side of the boat to enter. You will both always be entering on the same side. Weight-belts are handed up first, followed by any delicacies such as torches or cameras. Lie back and unclip the left side release of the BCD leaving regulator in your mouth until final moment. People already on board should be helping you, and remembering the principle of a tidy boat is safer, will be putting your kit away whilst you kick hard with your fins and jump into the boat.

Now you have finished diving you are part of the topside group whose joint responsibility is to the safety of not only themselves but those underwater. So keep your eyes peeled, constantly scan through 360 degrees just in case a diver unexpectedly surfaces, keep a look out for bubbles breaking the surface, this will help keep track of divers, get ready to help de-kitting and getting divers aboard. If you are waiting to dive, ensure your kit is positioned in a convenient space for efficiency.

When everybody is aboard, you will be asked to give your vital statistics! Dive Time, max depth, Air quantity when you went in and what's left when you came out, and

there should be a quick debrief. The buddy system is still in operation, you are still off gassing, look out for each other and use your tables to establish your tissue code etc.

Respect personal dignity

There will be times when the call of nature comes at sea. Which is tricky when we're all trussed up in dry suits etc. Don't suffer, tell the boat handler and if it's safe they'll stop. For the boys it's quite a simple operation, go to the back of the boat and pee into the sea whilst firmly holding onto the A-frame. For the girls, it much more awkward, the solution is to use the bilge just in front of the transom. On the Yellow boat this is a black area sunk into the floor, on Blue it a smaller well, covered by a flap up metal grate. I'm afraid there is nothing very dignified about any of this and it is behoved upon everybody else to avert their eyes and chat about the stars!!!!

'Schoolboy humour' in these situations is wholly inappropriate and does not fit in with ethos of the club.

Respect the Sea

Please don't throw anything overboard which you are not certain is biodegradable. Watch out for any loose plastic bags or sweet wrappers that may be blown overboard.

Back at the dock

Don't run away to the loos and forget to come back and help everybody else get all the kit off and secure the boat.

Get your cylinder to the air refill station ASAP to avoid delays later on. Be wary of intense physical activity immediately after a dive, it maybe DCI provocative (which is why we must all share the workload thus making light work!)

Take on fluids and fuel (eat !...)

Help others

We want this article to be useful to new people. If you think of anything we haven't mentioned that would have been useful to you prior to your first trip then please let us know and we will add it.