

LOCH FYNE MARATHON RAISES £8800

SCOTTISH DIVERS HAVE RAISED £8800 for a children's charity from a 24-hour sponsored dive in Loch Fyne.

Atlantic Divers, an independent club based in central Scotland, ran the event in aid of Cash for Kids, which supports deprived Scottish children.

Based at the Quarry View Tearoom, just north of Furnace on the northern shore of Loch Fyne, some 60 divers, unaffiliated or from varied diving organisations, gathered last October in high winds and rain.

They maintained a 24-hour relay in which buddy teams stayed under water for 40 minutes at a time, ensuring that there were at least two divers under water at all times for a full day, from noon to noon.

It took a while to collect money pledged to the cause, but the total of £8800 was finally announced in January by the delighted management team.

Logistics for the marathon included a 12-strong support team, first-aiders, boat cover and topside lighting. Under water, a 60m-long weighted line was set along the

loch reef at a depth of 10m.

Marked with tags and light sticks, this allowed divers to stretch their fins without risk of losing contact on swap-overs. The course was connected by rope to a surface buoy, via a 6m-deep deco station.

Atlantic divers - www.atlantic-divers.co.uk



MARCH DIARY

- 4 *Divewise, the North-east Diving Conference, Durham. Organised by BSAC's North-east Regional Coach, this event attracts up to 300 divers from all agencies. Topics include technical diving, RN bomb disposal and commercial/military rebreathers. Details - David Taylor, 01207 237022; bookings - www.dive-wise.com*
- 10/11 *London International Dive Show, ExCeL, Docklands. The capital's annual diving extravaganza! See p77 onwards for full details.*
- 18 *Cetacean Identification Course, National Oceanographic Centre, Southampton. For potential volunteers keen to learn about cetacean (and seabird) monitoring. The organiser is research charity Marinelife, which runs the Biscay Dolphin Research Programme in which teams record cetaceans from two Biscay route ferries. The course follows a similar session at the National Marine Aquarium at Plymouth in mid-January, which attracted a capacity 47 people. Enquiries - John Arnott, john.arnott@marine-life.org.uk*
- 25 *In Deep 2007, the North-west Regional Conference, Park Hall, near Chorley (not 7 March as previously advertised). Organised by BSAC's North-west Regional Coach but an event for all-comers, themes include hyperbaric treatment, dolphins and whales, digital photography, hardhat diving, dive travel and extreme ironing. Details - www.bsac-nw.org; booking - Norma Pearson, 0794 738 1885.*
- 25 *London DCI Seminar. Organised by the Sub-Aqua Association and London Diving Chamber, this one-day event at the London Welsh Centre, Gray's Inn Road, features three divers who have suffered from decompression illness sharing their experiences, with hyperbaric doctors offering advice. The seminar, also covering diver denial and facts about PFOs and lung shunts, is open to all. £12 admission includes a light lunch. Bookings - 0207 806 400, ext 4445*
- 30 *Shell Wildlife Photographer of the Year Competition, deadline for postal submissions. The annual international competition, for amateurs and professionals, is organised by London's Natural History Museum and BBC Wildlife. Marine photographers have done well in recent years. New for 2007 is a £10,000 prize for the overall winner. An exhibition of 92 winning and commended images from the last competition is on display at the NHM until 29 April, when it will tour in Britain, other European countries, the USA, Australia and UAE. www.nhm.ac.uk/wildphoto*



DISABILITY ABROAD

LAST MONTH I LOOKED at some of the scenarios you would encounter as a disabled diver using dive-boats in the UK. All the operators came through with top marks, but would I get a similar response from outside the UK?

At Longwood Holidays Emma said my request shouldn't be a problem. She proceeded to tell me about the offers Longwood has with the *VIP One* liveboard out of Sharm. Emma promised to get back in touch, and colleague Dan did indeed e-mail to tell me that though *VIP One* wasn't adapted for disabled divers it would be happy to assist.

But I did feel I was being pushed into taking up the company's current special offer.

After several questions about the level of my friend's mobility, Helen from Dive Worldwide believed my request would be "tricky" but promised to get back in touch.

A day later, her colleague Juliet e-mailed with details of four liveboards that could accommodate my friend.

I was impressed with how she had contacted the operators to discuss our needs, considering everything from strength of currents to the divemaster's skills.

One of the operators, Mermaid Liveboards working in Indonesia and Thailand, had provided a meticulous breakdown of how every part of the boat either was or could be adapted for use by my colleague - a superb response.

As if this wasn't enough, and in the absence of a very



guilty-feeling Mystery Diver's response, Juliet sent further suggestions from Indonesia's Wakatobi resort. It has a fantastic-looking liveboard and went into incredible detail about how it could accommodate a disabled diver.

It even suggested getting in touch with a previous customer who had a level of disability similar to that of my fictitious friend. The Wakatobi resort itself was also presented as an option, with a description and photographs of how the rooms and the diving could cater for my friend's needs.

A conservative estimate of the time Juliet had spent in dealing with my enquiry would be two hours. This was a five-star level of service.

Over the pond in the USA, operators seemed surprised that there might be an issue. At It's A Dive in the Florida Keys, Fermin told me that "being in a wheel-chair is fine, we often have handicapped divers come out with us." While on the West Coast in San Diego, Greg from the liveboard *Horizon* said: "The boat wasn't built with this in mind, but the crew are used to paraplegic and quadriplegic divers - it will be no problem."

I had thought that the UK was well prepared for divers with disabilities, but after looking at the rest of the world I can see that were only just starting to catch up.