

"This particular bottle of fizz has a special story, as these vines have only ever been pruned by just one person - Annie Lindo"



Camel Valley Vineyard



ENGLAND - RED, WHITE & BLUE

The Frogfish Photography team start their Wining and Diving tour of the world right here in Blighty, with trips to Dorset and Cornwall

Photographs by NICK AND CAROLINE ROBERTSON-BROWN

Vineyards around England can make a great port of call for those days when the weather is not kind for diving, or when you are looking for something to do with the family that ties in with your diving adventures. For this particular Wining and Diving piece, we combined visiting a couple of vineyards with exploring two of the most-popular areas for diving in England. For some time now, people have scoffed at the thought of English wine, however in recent times, vineyards have been popping up all over the country and they are producing wines that rival many you may find from overseas. We combined visiting the Wickham vineyard in Hampshire with diving Swanage Pier, and then we visited the Camel Valley vineyard in Cornwall while trying out some shore diving and snorkelling too. Both the wines and the diving were a revelation!

DORSET

The Wickham vineyard is just over an hour from Swanage Pier. You can do a guided or audio tour of the vines, take in a fabulous lunch in their wonderful restaurant, and best of all, try out their excellent range of wines, all produced from grapes grown on the site. The most-astounding part of our trip was tasting their amazing Pinot Noir. While England has been turning out decent sparkling and white wine for a some time now, a great English red wine is still something to treasure - and this is the best, by a long shot, that we have tasted. Having dived Swanage Pier on the Saturday, this was a real treat on the Sunday, when conditions for diving were not so great. We took kids and grandkids to lunch, and the adults got to taste all the wines.

Swanage Pier features heavily in everyone's list of great dives in England. It is easy, shallow and

packed full of life. Tompot blennies guard every hole in the pier stanchions, cuttlefish patrol the seaweed, crustaceans feed on debris thrown into the sea by the tourists on the pier, and shoals of various fish lurk in the darker, shaded areas. As you rarely get past 5m on this dive, you have plenty of time to go slowly and really focus on the small stuff. It is a bit like muck diving in Indonesia!

The entry is a simple walk down the steps into the water from the pier, where you can park, get air fills and even rinse off afterwards. A short snorkel along the concrete wall and you are under the wooden pier ready to descend. Even if the conditions are not ideal, if you take it slowly you will be rewarded with lots of marine life.

In addition, if you prefer to boat dive, trips run most days right from the pier with Divers Down.



Getting ready to shore dive



Caroline with the blue shark



CORNWALL

Our plan was to base ourselves near to Penzance, where we would be meeting up with Charlie Hood to try to photograph an elusive UK shark species, but we also wanted to take advantage of the excellent shore diving to be had in this area, so we planned to dive Lamorna Cove and also Porthkerris.

Our first day out was in search of the blue shark. To be able to photograph these shy and elegant sharks, we needed to head offshore about ten miles and create a smelly slick of chum to tempt in this rather-curious shark. We bobbed in somewhat rolling seas for six hours, and briefly caught sight of a flick of a tail, and then it was gone! Not what we had been hoping for, and the mood aboard RIB Logan was glum as we headed back towards the shore. Suddenly we got a shout from Charlie - he had spotted a basking shark, a really big one. We donned our snorkelling gear and slipped off the RIB for a look. We were lucky. It stayed with us, feeding in long, slow circles so that everyone got a great encounter in deep open-water. As the shark swam alongside the boat, it was clear that it was little bit longer than the RIB, so we estimated that it was at least eight metres long. While this made our day and we came back to shore delighted with our basking-shark encounter, it was not what we had set out for and so we booked another day out to try again for the blues. If you don't try, then you definitely won't see them!

To fill the time before our next trip out to find

VINO VERDICT

Best Red: Wickham Pinot Noir;
www.wickhamvineyard.com

Best White: Camel Valley Annies Anniversary Brut;
www.camelvalley.com

Best Blue: Charles Hood, Penzance;
www.charleshood.com

blue sharks, we shore-dived Lamorna Cove. There is a car park, loos, a café and an easy slipway to walk into the sea. While you need to watch out for small passing boats, the site is sheltered and shallow. We followed the concrete pier and then turned along a reef wall of rocks, covered in anemones and kelp, to the right of the cove. You have to be wary and keep your eyes peeled for weaverfish, so wear gloves on this dive just in case. Sand eels filled the water in the shallow sandy areas, wrasse and spider crabs entertained us on the dive, and all the while we had one eye out on the surface in case our basking shark came back to visit us!

Another day off diving meant it was time to visit another English vineyard. The Camel Valley vineyard is one of the best-known and most-established



Wickham Vineyard

in the country. It has won numerous awards for its sparkling white wines, grown on the slopes leading down to the Camel River. It benefits from the increased sunshine the south west gets in the summer and our favourite of their amazing range was Annies Anniversary Brut. This particular bottle of fizz has a special story, as these vines have only ever been pruned by just one person - Annie Lindo. Her vineyard is her pride and joy and every year for 22 years, she alone has pruned her own 5,000 vines. This bottle is a great tribute to commemorate her 100,000th vine, the millionth cut by hand with secateurs, and her 20th vintage. It is fruity, zesty and is perfect for a day off diving, sitting watching the sun go down over the Cornish seascape. You can sit on the veranda, trying different wines, as well as a mind-blowing cider, looking over the vines. You can also stay in one of the cottages within the vineyard.

Our final shore dive of the trip was at Porthkerris. The Porthkerris dive centre here has an excellent set-up, where you can park right by the shore entry, via a steepish set of rocks with a well-thought-out hand rail to assist you out again. You can get air fills, shower, rinse your equipment and get an excellent lunch without having to move away from the site. There are plenty of great boat dives from here too, but we only popped in for a quick shore dive round the shallow rocks. There



A tasting is great fun





A curious blue shark passes Nick



"Once again, with cries of 'no' through all our snorkels, she bit another jellyfish, but this time, after spitting it out, she stayed with us, and took the nasty taste away by snaffling up another chunk of mackerel!"

is an abundance of life here too. While we saw the evidence of a resident conger eel, he must have popped out that morning, but the wrasse were really very friendly to make up for it.

The day of our final attempt to snorkel with blue sharks arrived. We wanted to set off early to get the most from our day at sea. We packed our masks, snorkels, fins and camera gear onto the RIB and set out across the flat-calm waters. It was sunny and there was virtually no wind - perfect conditions. It takes a while to get the ten or so miles offshore, and on the way we saw a sunfish and porpoise. Then we set about putting a small bag of chum in the water and waiting. A few hours passed and we all started to think that we might not be lucky once again. Then Nick glanced over the edge and shouted - 'shark!' It was hard to keep our cool, but it is also important not to scare them off, so quietly, we put together our equipment and slipped gently into the water. There was one, elegant blue shark swimming around the boat. She was not at all shy, but in fact, quite curious and approached each of us in turn, coming right up to the camera lenses and masks. What's more, she stayed around the boat for over 30 minutes, taking the odd piece of mackerel that Charlie would throw out to her. It was an amazing experience. Then she bit on a compass jellyfish, spat it out and in disgust swam out to sea. We were really sad to see her go, but delighted to get such a great encounter. We got back on the boat full of joy. We had some lunch in the sunshine, reviewed some of our images and chatted about this wonderful shark. Blue sharks have a beautiful blue back and white underbelly and they have unusually long pectoral fins. They can grow up to about three metres, and are sleek and slender-looking sharks. As with many species of shark, their main threat is being fished for their fins and they are now endangered. They have huge eyes which must help with fishing for squid in deep water, but they also make for a great photo!

The day had been perfect, and we were just thinking of heading back to shore, discussing the great curry house and which real ale pub to visit in Penzance, when the cry of 'shark' came forth again. She was back for more and we were not going to say no. This time she swam around us for 25 minutes, taking it in turns to visit each of the five of us. She got very close and seemed curious as to what we were and why we were there. Once again, with cries of 'no' through all our snorkels, she bit another jellyfish, but this time, after spitting it out, she stayed with us, and took the nasty taste away by snaffling up another chunk of mackerel! She might not have been the brightest of sharks, but she gave us a day we would not forget.

Our two trips to southern England gave us some great, easy-going diving as well as taking in the best 'red, white and blue' that England has to offer! ■

Fiesty crab at Lamorna Cove



Tompot Blennies inhabit each pier stanchion at Swanage



DRINK, AND DIVE SAFE

Please be aware that we are not suggesting that you drink alcohol before diving. You should be very careful to make sure that you are not dehydrated (which can be caused by alcohol consumption) and not intoxicated before you go diving, as this may lead to serious injury.

We always left at least 24 hours between any wine tasting and any diving that we did on this trip.