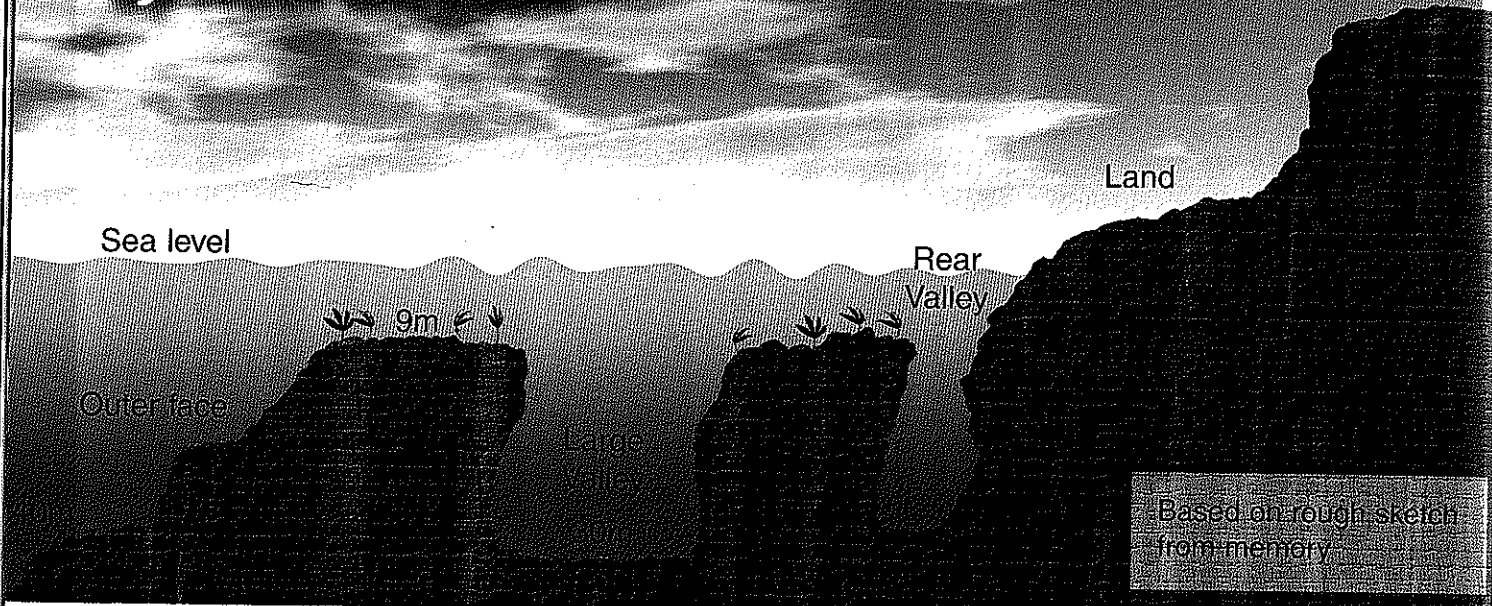


GOING SLIGHTLY ASTRAY AT THE DIAMOND ROCKS

By Noel Gleeson

© Cliff Walk



Based on rough sketch from memory

Diamond Rocks profile (revised).

Traditionally Kilkee SAC dives on Monday evenings during the season and this was one of those dives. The seas were reasonable with a moderate swell and our diving officer (der tauchsfuhrer) decided to do the Diamond Rocks a little south of Kilkee Bay. This is the site of a reef parallel to the shore which protects a deep (30 metres plus) valley from the sediment of the sea. This often results in relatively clear water within. There is the added bonus of a spectacular entry portal to the valley on its north side with smooth-sided cliff walls and two deep

adjacent circular bottom holes, usually full of crabs and even lobsters, on the way in.

We had a good number of divers and a cox'n, so it looked feasible to get a good shot at finding the entry and sharing the experience of the classic Diamonds dive with our newer members. We had been greeted at the site by a school of dolphin and our excitement was high. This site is currently mentioned honourably in the O'Neill wet suit adverts citing "for cold water dives from the Monterey Trench in

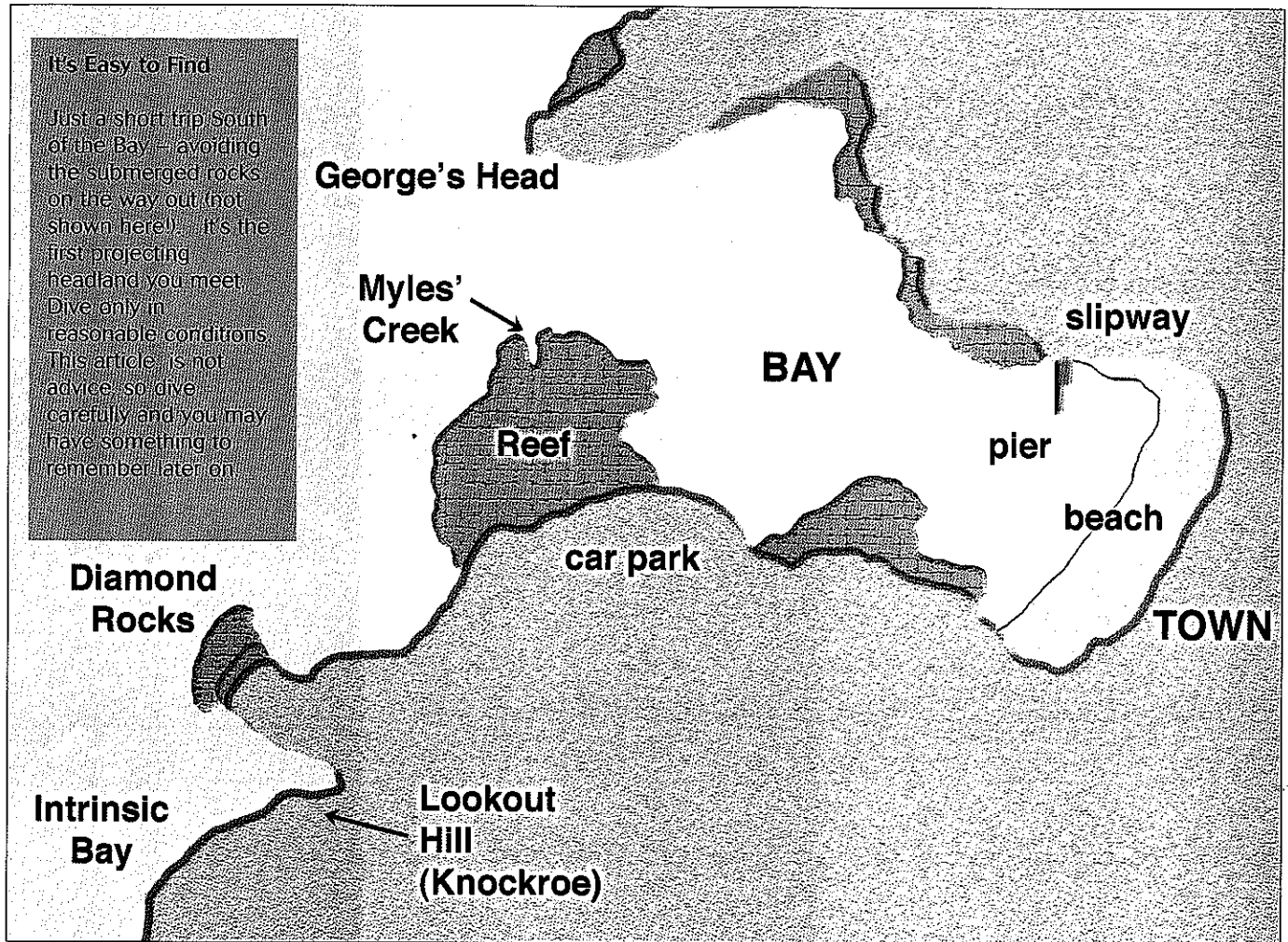
California to the Diamond Rocks in Ireland". I credit Joe Devanney of the Kilkee Dive Centre for this, but am confident that the expected hordes of seekers of this diving paradise will fail in their quest. After all, they would need a competent dive guide like myself to show them the way in. Well, wouldn't they?.....

So, safe in the confidence this attitude gave, I outlined the proper approach to diving the site. Unfortunately, there were starting delays and perhaps we wind-drifted a bit north of the usual place.

When my buddy and I descended onto the rocks below in a cloudy sea and followed the rock face towards our destination, things looked a little different, but not that much, so we kept going. An opening into a valley appeared, not the usual spectacular moonscape entrance, but nevertheless interesting enough to tempt us onward. The valley was narrower and perhaps not quite as deep, although we clocked 27 metres, but different and full of life. I counted 19 lobsters, about one third of them with a single claw, on our journey through this valley and attribute this to internecine squabbles and perhaps rampaging conger eels and, indeed, trigger fish, rather than rogue divers and hope I am right. The Kilkee Reefs are a protected area and we should

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encourage reporting of all diver predation, as well as mass consumption of Trigger Fish, a recent enough fishy predator. You could eat these with cabbage for extra indulgences on Fridays. A shoal of mackerel passed above us and there were hordes of wrasse and tinier fish in abundance. It was Summer after all, not like on the surface this July. We went on through the valley, while the outer cliff face changed its shape gradually from indented and ledged to smooth and over-leaning and covered in colourful anemones.

When the air dried up or began to disappear, we decoed on the reef holding the kelp in the bouncing swell – very exhilarating too. Then a quick shallow underwater swim out off the reef to find ourselves over the real valley, we had been seeking in the first place. Then we crossed onto the next reef shallow and surfaced. The adventure had been very satisfying – a lovely dive – despite the miscalculation of the idiot dive guide. It did not

end there, though. The cox'n was miles away waiting north of the system, as instructed by the last departing diver from the boat, whereas the dive took most of us southward. He could not see us with the swell and being somewhat inexperienced, did not expect us. I waved

and whistled, shouted and sang – my last SMB was lost trying to recover a heavily weighted shot line the previous week and the only colourful item to hand was the yellow second stage of the octopus reg. He later admitted hearing voices! Meanwhile the walking humans on the

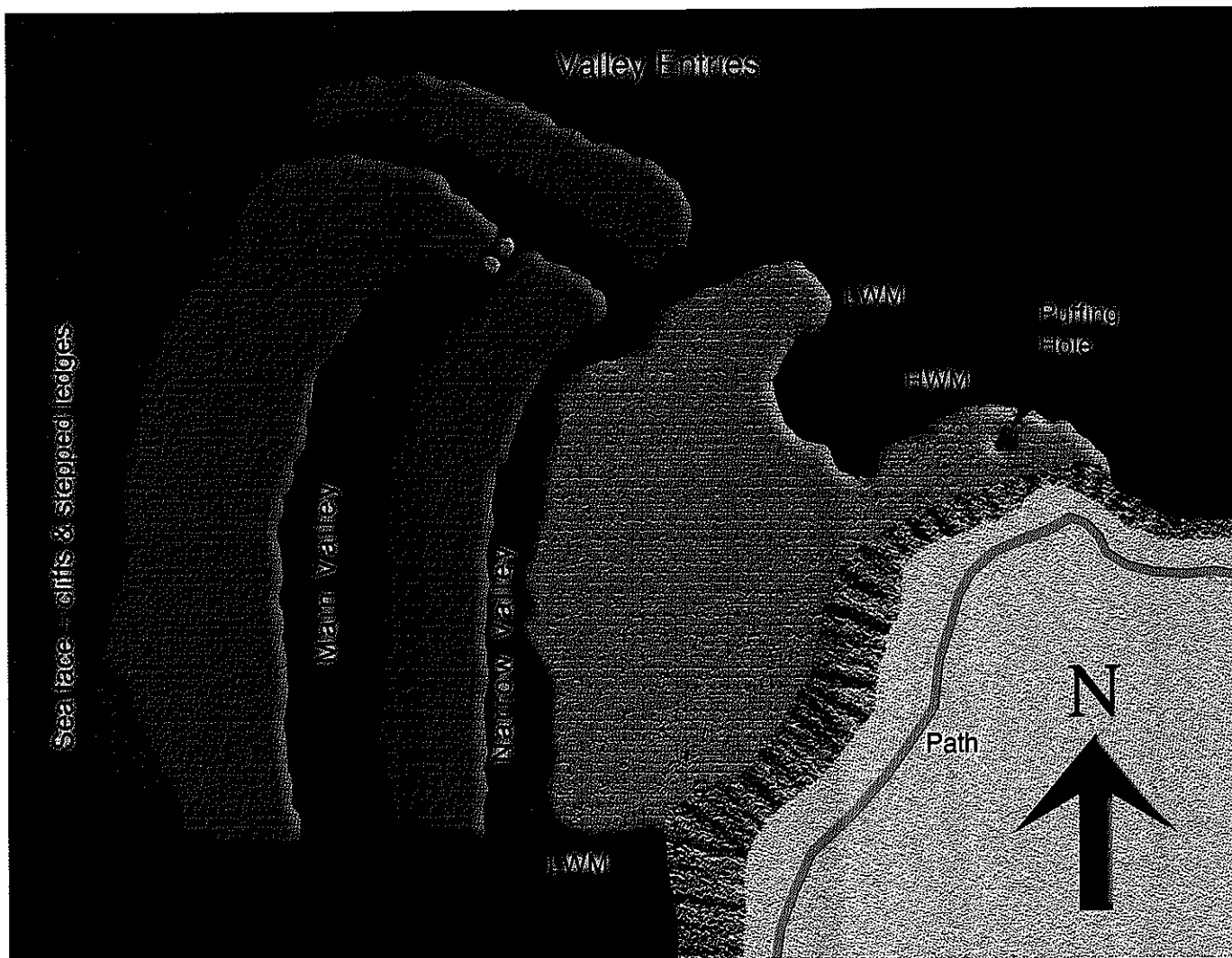
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Diamond Rocks plan.

nearby cliffs called out the Kilkee Rescue Service for the snorkellers (sic!) in trouble! The only trouble I knew of was urinary in a drysuit, but fortunately we were spotted and picked up by our own boat, which then went north to pick up the divers at that end. The tauchoffizier and buddy were still south having surfaced later and unknowingly repeated our earlier boat-hailing procedure before the cliff

onlookers, who, decent citizens as they were, apparently called out a posse and the fast response rescue boat & crew came whizzing out only minutes after we jerked the last two divers into the boat, thus avoiding severe embarrassment.

The lesson this week was- don't overestimate yourself or underestimate the capacity of a dive site to reveal hidden charms, dear readers. Also buy

O'Neill suits (from Joe) as long as they advertise Ireland. The site is an exceptional one and deserves due recognition and protection, as well as correction of previous misleading maps and the opening up of the 'new' valley to our diving colleagues. Thanks to the rescue service for their usual good service and the good citizen on the cliff too. We all need each other.

SUGGESTED APPROACH TO DIVE SITE

The Large Valley – you really should experience the dramatic valley entrance on the north side with its water-smoothed curving cliff sides and the two Snake Pit holes.

To do this locate the sea face of the outer reef on the west and descend to about 20 metres. Follow the cliff on your right and you should reach your goal. The closer you are at the start the better. Surface drift can throw you off.

ALTERNATIVELY... You could simply find the reef top, drop onto it at 6 or 9 metres and head east to the valley and then explore it as you wish. The same applies to the inner valley. However, the northern approach is more dramatic- the opening of a mystery. There is of course more to the site than these two valleys. In good clear conditions the outer reef face is excellent and drops away gradually to depth with various cuts and channels. I recall seeing a huge crawfish there once, about the size of a small child's rockinghorse- he certainly

startled this writer, questions arose – should I mount and ride away or was he considering an attack? Perhaps, it was the soporific effects of the nitro at depth.

Anyway, we tend to go for the valleys, as the water is often more clear, but there are also some nice shallow cuts and holes in the terrain north of the site and on the south is Intrinsic Bay, where the great ship went down in the 1830s, watched helplessly by hundreds of onlookers. Her holds were open, she took in water and also one anchor fluke apparently broke off (in a violent storm). All were lost, but the cargo and hull sheeting were recovered by divers the following year – a fascinating story too, told well by Cormac Lowth in *SubSea* some years ago and further expanded by local historian Patrick Nolan in *The Other Clare*, 2009, who makes a startling connection with the *Mary Rose*. The broken anchor is on display in Kilkee. There is reportedly another on the site somewhere, but you are getting perilously close to a municipal outfall, as you get further south.