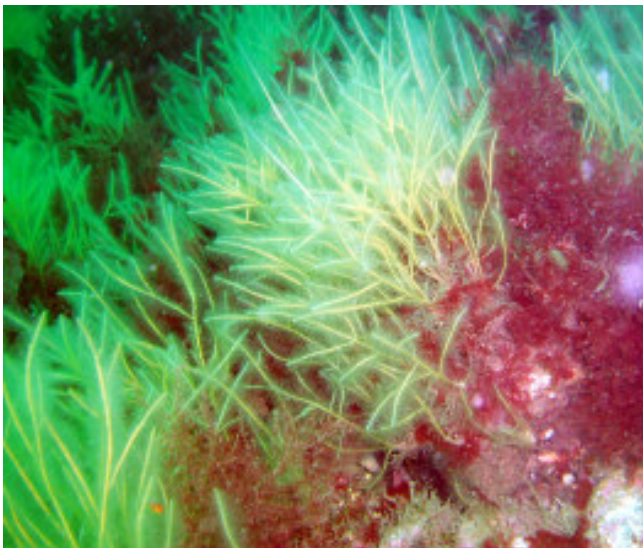


**Sanda Island
05/06 July 2006
Summary Report**





The distinctive hydroid *Nemertesia ramosa* was very abundant at site 4



Typical Sanda seabed with mixed red algae, sea fans and light bulb tunicates.



Pink sea fingers were an exciting find.



Puffins were frequent companions during the diving.

Sanda Island sits about two miles off the south coast of Kintyre and 13 miles by sea from Campbeltown the nearest harbour. The island is frequently used as a stopping point by yachtsmen rounding the Mull of Kintyre, a notoriously rough area of sea. From Sanda it is another 8 miles to the Mull and a further 16 miles to the safe harbour of Gigha on the west side of Kintyre. Powerful currents, tide rips and remoteness explain why there has been no seasearch records returned from Sanda until this expedition.

The main island, Sanda, has a couple of smaller islands to the north west namely Sheep Island and Glunimore as well as numerous submerged reefs and drying islets. The Sanda islands have been designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest since 1995. This is mainly due to the populations of breeding birds which include puffin, storm petrel and manx shearwater as well as internationally important populations of shag and razorbill. A bird observatory is active on the island and has been recording breeding bird success and population numbers for several decades. In contrast to the wealth of data on the seabirds present virtually nothing has been recorded about the marine life surrounding the islands. Anecdotal evidence reports tide swept rocky reefs and rock walls covered in life with the potential presence of many southern species which are rare elsewhere in Scotland.

In July 2006 a small fleet was assembled to carry out the first seasearch diving at Sanda. The motor vessel Easter Dawn travelled from Largs to Arran where it picked up a RHIB while the ketch Faxi sailed down from Tarbert, Loch Fyne with all three vessels meeting up in Sanda Bay in the late afternoon of July 5th. The first dives were carried out that evening with further diving the next morning. More diving was planned for the afternoon but a forecast of NE winds forced the boats to abandon the anchorage and head back towards Arran. However, 5 dives were carried out in some spectacular underwater scenery with some very interesting finds recorded.

Site 1 Glunimore East 55° 17.136 N 05° 33.263 W

The first site dived was an excellent introduction to Sanda diving. The seabed was extremely rugged reef with deep gullies on a sloping rock seabed. Kelp forest continued down to 14 metres when it was replaced by a mixed cover of red algae and dead mans fingers (*Alcyonium digitatum*) with the dead mans fingers providing 90% cover from 17 to 22 metres. Most interesting find at this site was a couple of colonies of pink sea fingers (*Alcyonium hibernicum*). Pink sea fingers are quite common in sea caves in the south of the Isle of Man but there are only a few records from Scotland.



Sanda with Sheep Island in the foreground

Location of Dive Sites

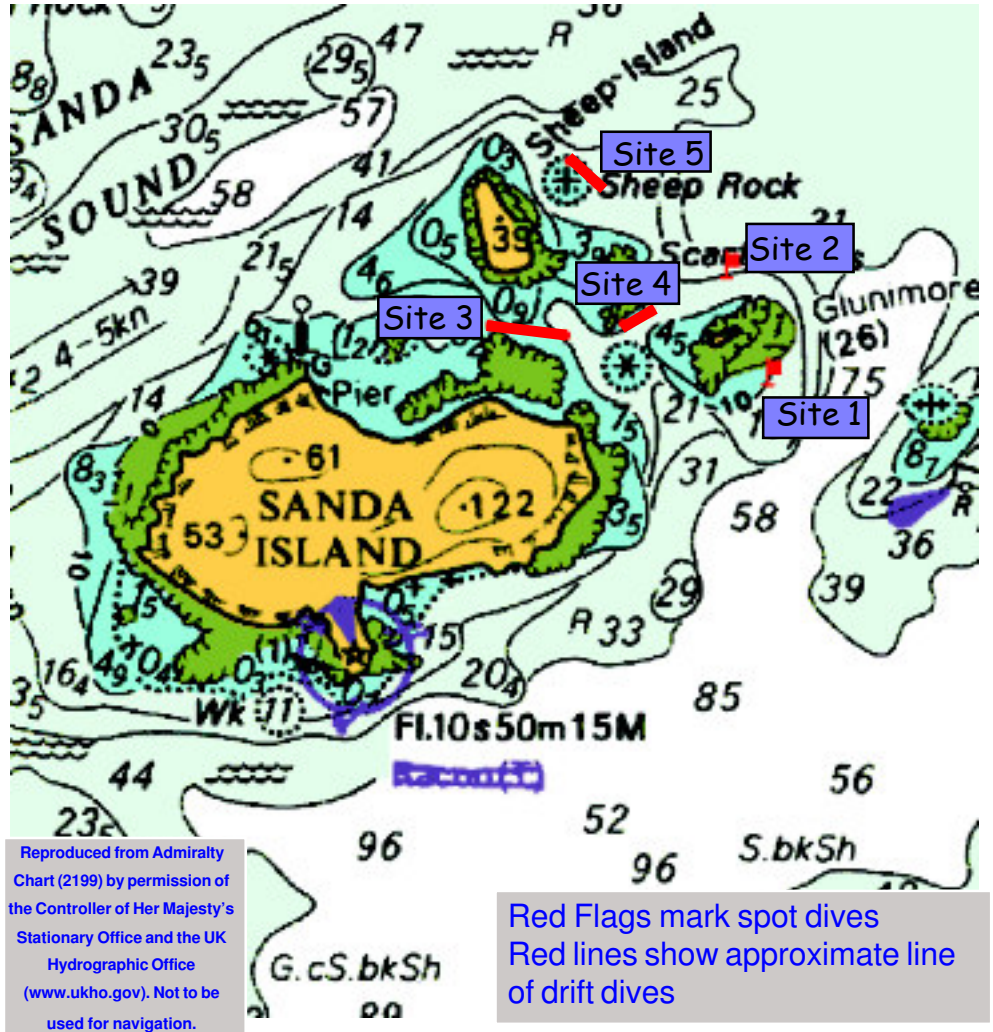


● Sanda Island

Sanda lies 2 miles south of the Kintyre coast, 13 miles by sea from Campbeltown.



MV Easter Dawn



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Red Flags mark spot dives
Red lines show approximate line of drift dives



Large numbers of plumose anemones were recorded

Site 2. North Side Glunimore Island

55° 17.386 N 05° 33.436 W

At site 2 a flat kelp covered reef gave way to a vertical cliff dropping from 9 metres to 19 metres. At the base of the cliff there was a flat gravel/cobble/boulder seabed. The cliff was covered in a colourful display of dead mans fingers, plumose anemones and cup corals. Cobbles and boulders on the flat seabed were covered in the hydroid *Nemertesia antennina* while the sand between the boulders held populations of the burrowing anemone *Cerianthus lloydii* and the burrowing sea cucumber *Neopentadactyla mixta*.

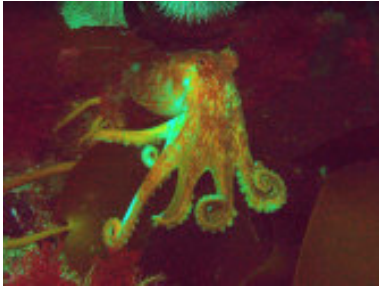
Site 3 North Sanda Island

55° 17.251 N 05° 34.101 W to 55° 17.278 N 05° 34.413 W

The shallower part of this dive was over kelp forest on bedrock and large angular boulders. At 15 metres the seabed changed to gently sloping gravel and pebbles dominated by kelp park. Sea beech, *Delesseria sanguinea* was common in this area as was the edible urchin, *Echinus esculentus* which was quite rare at the other dive sites. Shoals of Pollock and Saithe were frequently encountered here as were individual wrasse.



Sandy creeplet anemone and parchment worm at site 1

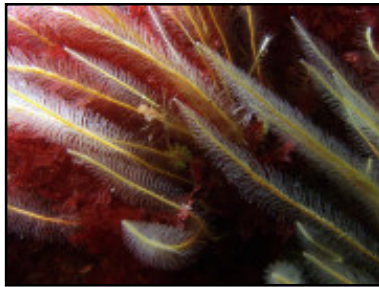


Curled Octopus

Site 4 West of Scart Rocks

55° 17.311 N 5° 33.75 W to 55° 17.279 N 05° 33.865 W

All though every attempt was made to dive at slack water the currents around Sanda are unpredictable and during this dive the survey team encountered a powerful current which made surveying difficult. The dive started on the edge of a steep bedrock slope covered in kelp. This gave way to a zone dominated by red algae and hydroids with the red algae becoming sparse at around 15 metres. The deeper parts of the dive were dominated by the hydroid *Nemertina ramosa*.



Sea firs dominated the deeper areas surveyed

Site 5 North of Henrietta Reef

(55° 17.608 N 05° 33.967 W to 55° 17.662 N 05° 34.083 W)

At this site the surveyors found a large rocky reef covered in kelp forest, mainly *Laminaria hyperborea* and *Saccorhiza polyschides* but with some sea oak, *Halidrys siliquosa*. The reef dropped steeply to around 16 metres with the seabed at the base of the cliff being very rugged dominated by large boulders and gullies. Below 10 metres the kelp disappeared replaced by red algae and animal turf, mainly dead mans fingers, (*Alcyonium digitatum*), hydroids *Nemertesia antennina*, plumose anemones *Metridium senile* and cup corals *Caryophyllia smithii*. Small patches of sediment between the boulders supported burrowing anemones *Cerianthus lloydii* while large shoals of Pollock *Pollachius pollachius* swam over the kelp forest.



Sea oak provides a home for many other plants and animals

Human Activities and Impacts

The island infrastructure has undergone a considerable amount of development over the last few years with new holiday accommodation, the opening of the bird observatory and even the provision of a pub. However this has all been in keeping with the scale of the island and most activity is seasonal in nature. At the time of the seasearch survey there were 8 boats at anchor in the main anchorage though most of these only stayed for one night. It is unlikely that the low level of recreational activity on and around the islands has any significant impact on the marine life. One exception could be the use of high powered RHIB's and other power boats travelling through rafts of resting birds at speed. This practice is probably unintentional and best tackled through education.



Shoals of pollock and saithe were present at all sites

The strong currents around the islands limit the amount of fishing activity but there were creel buoys evident at site 1. Few crustaceans of marketable size were seen during the survey but crayfish have been recorded as being abundant in previous years. One of the dive team reported that on a dive at Sanda some fifteen years ago he had picked up 4 crayfish within ten minutes of dropping into the water. No crayfish were seen at all during the 2006 survey.

Species Summary for Sanda Island

| Phylum | Common Name | Number of Species | Common Species |
|----------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------|---|
| Porifera | Sponges | 3 | Elephants hide sponge <i>Pachymatisma johnstonia</i> |
| Cnidaria | Anemones, Hydroids, corals, jellyfish | 17 | Dead mans Fingers <i>Alcyonium digitatum</i> Plumose Anemones <i>Metridium senile</i> Sea fir <i>Nemertesia antennina</i> |
| Annelida | Segmented Worms | 3 | |
| Crustacea | Lobsters, Crabs, Barnacles | 3 | Velvet swimming crab <i>Necora puber</i> |
| Mollusca | Shells, Sea Slugs, Octopus | 7 | |
| Bryozoans | Seamats | 4 | |
| Echinodermata | Starfish, Urchins | 8 | Spiny starfish <i>Marthasterias glacialis</i> |
| Tunicata | Sea Squirts | 3 | Light bulb tunicate <i>Clavellina lapadiformis</i> |
| Pisces | Fishes | 9 | Pollack <i>Pollachius pollachius</i> |
| Algae | Seaweed | 10 | Kelp <i>Laminaria hyerborea</i> |
| Other | | 2 | |
| Marine Mammals | | 2 | |
| Total Species | | 71 | |



Morvern-human alarm clock and lookout

Conclusion

Sanda is a challenging site to dive but offers some spectacular underwater scenery and is very rich in marine life.. The weather over the 5th and 6th July was exceptionally good with light winds and sunshine. Even so the anchorage had to be abandoned on the afternoon of the 6th due to a poor weather forecast and both vessels experienced a very uncomfortable passage back to Arran. Despite the limited number of dives over 70 species were recorded and given more time this total would no doubt increase significantly. The sites dived were generally medium to high energy sites and future expeditions could profitably investigate some of the more sheltered sites on the NW side of the island as well as the even more exposed southern cliffs.

This seasearch survey was organised by Howard Wood.

Seasearch Surveyors were:
Howard Wood, David Butcher, Don McNeish and Owen Paisley.

Special thanks to Howard Wood for providing a RHIB, Davie for towing the RHIB to Sanda behind Easter Dawn and Morvern for acting as alarm clock and lookout.

Text by Owen Paisley, Photographs by Howard Wood.



Seasearch is a volunteer underwater survey project run by MCS which encourages recreational divers to contribute towards the conservation of the marine environment. Financial support for the project during 2006 has been given by:

The
Sealgair
Trust



| Species List for Sanda July 2006 | Site | | | | | | Site | | | | |
|----------------------------------|------|---|---|---|---|------------------------------------|------|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Brown Algae | | | | | | Gastropods & bivalves | | | | | |
| Laminaria hyperborea | * | * | * | * | * | Calliostoma zizyphinum | | | * | | * |
| Laminaria digitata | | | | | | Pecten maximus | | * | | | |
| Laminaria saccharina | * | | | | | Circomphalus casina | | * | | | |
| Halidrys siliquosa | | | | | * | | | | | | |
| Alaria esculenta | * | | | | | Nudibranchs | | | | | |
| Saccorhiza polyschides | * | * | * | * | * | Coryphella browni ? | | * | | | |
| | | | | | | Polycera faeroensis | | | * | | * |
| Red Algae | | | | | | Janolus cristatus | | | | | * |
| Delesseria sanguinea | * | * | * | | * | | | | | | |
| Ptilota plumosa | * | | * | | * | Cephalopods | | | | | |
| encrusting red | | * | * | | * | Eledone cirrhosa | | | * | | |
| Unidentified red algae | * | * | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | Bryozoans | | | | | |
| Sponges | | | | | | Flustra foliacea | | * | | | |
| Pachymatisma johnstonia | * | | | | | Alcyonidium diaphanum | | * | | | |
| Hemimycale columella ? | * | | | | | Membranipora membranacea | | * | | | |
| Unidentified sponges | | | * | | | Encrusting orange | | * | | * | |
| | | | | | | Starfish & brittlestars | | | | | |
| Hydroids | | | | | | Porania pulvillus | * | * | | | * |
| Nemertesia antennina | * | * | * | | * | Asterias rubens | * | * | | * | * |
| Nemertesia ramosa | * | | | * | * | Marthasterias glacialis | * | * | * | * | * |
| Obelia geniculata | * | * | | * | | Crossaster papposus | | | * | | |
| hydroid sp | * | * | | | | Henricia oculata | * | * | | | * |
| Tubularia indivisa | | | * | | * | Ophiura albida | | | | | * |
| | | | | | | Urchins and sea cucumbers | | | | | |
| Anemones and corals | | | | | | Echinus esculentus | * | * | * | * | * |
| Actinothoe sphyrodeta | * | | | | | Neopentadactyla mixta | | * | | | |
| Metridium senile | * | * | | * | | | | | | | |
| Sagartia elegans | | * | * | * | | sea squirts | | | | | |
| Epizoanthus couchii | * | | | * | | Ascidia virginea | * | | | | |
| Cerianthus lloydii | | * | * | * | | Ascidia mentula | | * | * | | |
| Hormathia coronata | * | | | | | Clavellina lepadiformis | * | * | * | | * |
| Caryophyllia smithii | * | * | | * | | | | | | | |
| Urticina felina | | | * | | | Fish | | | | | |
| | | | | | | Syngnathus acus | | | * | | |
| Soft Corals | | | | | | Pomatoschistus pictus | | | * | | |
| Alcyonium digitatum | * | * | * | * | | Crenilabrus melops | | | | * | |
| Alcyonium hibernicum | * | | | | | Centrolabrus exoletus | | | | | |
| | | | | | | Ctenolabrus rupestris | * | * | * | * | * |
| Jellyfish | | | | | | Labrus bergylta | * | * | * | * | * |
| Aurelia aurita | * | * | * | * | * | Labrus mixtus | | * | * | * | * |
| Cyanea capillata | * | * | * | * | * | Pollachius virens | * | * | * | | |
| | | | | | | Pollachius pollachius | * | * | * | * | * |
| Worms | | | | | | Birds & mammals | | | | | |
| Chaetopterus variopedatus | | | * | * | | Phoca vitulina | * | | | | |
| Pomatocerus lamarki | | | * | * | | Halichoerus grypus | | * | | | |
| Sabella pavonina | | * | | | | Other | | | | | |
| | | | | | | Rock boring bivalve ? | | | * | | |
| Crabs & lobsters | | | | | | Mermaid purse | | | | | * |
| Galathea squamifera ? | | | | * | | | | | | | |
| Necora puber | * | * | * | * | * | | | | | | |
| Cancer pagurus | * | * | | * | | | | | | | |