

11,000 dives and still going strong

AS DIVING LIVES GO, it's a long-running love affair that one diver has had with the sport.

Laurie Cummings, from County Durham, has turned 70 and has also passed the milestone of 11,000 dives, all meticulously logged. By his own calculation, he has spent "about a year of my life under water".

Surprisingly, Laurie took up diving only as a 50-year-old, with County Durham's Bishop Auckland BSAC branch, where he qualified as an Assistant Instructor.

But following his retirement from the police force in 1994, and as a divorcee, he dedicated himself to the world of diving adventure.

He spent 11 years working as a dive guide in Turkey, during which time he met his partner Judy, also a dive guide there. "My decision to go there was taken after visiting Bodrum and its remarkable marine antiquities museum," he told **DIVER**.

"I ended up working for the town's Aegean Pro Dive Centre. On dives you never saw a great deal of fish but always a lot of archaeological material, mostly amphorae.

"I published a book detailing the area's most interesting dive sites."

In 2005, Laurie and Judy decided to move to Egypt's Sharm el Sheikh. Judy hung up her fins but Laurie took work as a guide with Colona Divers, where he remains today.

A marathon runner whose final hurrah was to place ninth in the world after 1992's veteran world championships in Birmingham, he says he has always maintained a modest weight and a high level of fitness.

He has kept it "straightforward" as a diver, never exceeding BSAC and PADI



Assistant Instructor qualifications and working as a dive guide to a maximum depth of 30m.

"Years ago I would push the limits, diving several times a day," he said. "But I never once suffered decompression illness, probably due to pretty efficient gas exchange.

"Nowadays I dive on 32% nitrox, on which you can go safely to about 33m, while diving to the same air profile as my guests. You need to do that because you're often diving more each day than any single client is."

A favourite dive site is the *Thistlegorm*. "It was built, launched and sunk in 1941, the year I was born," he said. "I always have a special feeling for it."

But how has he kept his passion for diving alive over so many years?

"I always put maximum effort into it, and I can honestly say that there has never been a day when I didn't want to go on a dive," said Laurie.

"I've wanted never to miss out on what might be there to experience.

"Even when you dive the same site over and over again, it's never the same twice. There's always something different to see, and I never tire of wanting to see it." ■

MYSTERY DIVER



DIVING APPS FOR FREE

MORE THAN A DECADE AGO, I remember dive-centre owners telling me that websites were an expensive inconvenience. How wrong they were!

Today they face a whole new challenge in the world of application software, commonly known as "apps".

Apps enable users to access software with single or multiple functions at the touch of an icon. Divers can access information about diving conditions in their locality, or find out where the nearest dive centre is, all through their handheld device.

To see how the use of apps was shaping up in the diving world, I keyed "scuba" into an app store and checked out the first 100.

About half of the apps were available for a fee; it was the other free half that interested me.

What struck me was the lack of dive centres in the UK offering their customers apps. The only one I found was Divemaster Scuba Centre in Nottingham.

Its app provides its users with access to news, photos, locations of dive sites, events and the ability to send them a message.

It was launched only this March, so still requires a bit more work to make it fully functional.

I liked the way users could keep up to date with forthcoming events and dives, but it's the "contact us for more information" or "see our Facebook site" sections that need attention.

An app should mean that I don't have to go out of the site to look something up – it should be a one-

stop shop. However, this is a really good example of what can be achieved, and Divemaster Scuba should be congratulated for venturing into this world.

As you would expect, PADI has an app (BSAC doesn't yet), which will use your location to guide you to the nearest dive centres. Once you click on a centre, it will bring up its contact details and website.

Disappointingly, this is all the app will do; in my opinion PADI (and BSAC) are missing out on an opportunity to link the user with advice, support and links to the commercial side of the business.

Leading the way in my search was London Diving Chamber's app, which provides, as you would expect, a list of chambers closest to your location, as well as a host of other useful tools.

These include a virtual logbook (other apps charge for this), a pre-dive checklist, a really informative A-Z of dive medicine and a means of recording diving incidents directly with the LDC.

This app kept me interested the longest and this and Divemaster Scuba are probably the only ones I will keep on my handheld device.

I also found plenty of apps that didn't do what they said they would or had little content, all of which underlines that this is still a developing world.

Like many others, I use my handheld device more than my computer, and apps are what makes this experience faster and smoother. Ignoring their use is not an option for diving-related businesses. ■

August Diary

27/28 **St Abbs Splash-in**, St Abbs and Eyemouth Voluntary Marine Reserve, Berwickshire, an event now in its 24th year. Three prize categories cover portraiture, atmosphere and humour. Entry costs £20 per person and, while registration is possible on site on 27 August, advance booking is advised for the 45-capacity event. Details: www.marine-reserve.co.uk. Marine Ranger Georgia Conolly can be emailed via the website, or called at 018907 71443.

28 **Dive Fest and Clean-Up**, Leybourne Lake, West Malling, Kent, run in association with its new dive school, Oasis Scuba. The event, in what is in fact a pair of lakes covering 30 acres, includes an underwater treasure trail, raffle prizes and a hog roast. Underwater attractions include a buoyancy challenge involving rings and squares to squeeze through, a pirates area and gnome garden. Details: www.oasisscuba.co.uk, or call Leybourne Lake Watersports on 01634 246006.