

The table shows how many species were recorded in each group and some of the most common ones.

Sponges

The erect cup-shaped *Axinella infundibuliformes*, typical of deeper rock, was the most recorded sponge. Others of note included the nationally scarce *Phakellia ventilabrum*, and the unusual *Haliclona viscosa* (pictured).



Anemones, corals and hydroids

Devonshire cup corals were found at every site except Rubh A' Chairn Mhoir. On Oberon Bank, hydroids were common, with sea beard (*Nemertesia antennina*) most recorded. The scarce white cluster anemone *Parazoanthus anguicomus* was frequent on mixed ground, the southerly species red fingers (*Alcyonium glomeratum*) recorded as 'rare' to the south and the northern sea fan *Swiftia pallida* frequent all over Oberon Bank.



Fan Shells and Scallops

No fan shells (*Atrina fragilis*) were found. King scallops (*Pecten maximus*) were at all sites except the steep east Oberon Bank.

Phylum	Common Name	No. of Species	Common Species	
Foraminifera		1		
Porifera	Sponges	13	Cup sponge	<i>Axinella infundibuliformis</i>
Cnidaria	Anemones, corals, hydroids, jellyfish	31	Sea beard	<i>Nemertesia antennina</i> <i>Obelia geniculata</i> <i>Kirchenpaueria</i> sp <i>Caryophyllia smithii</i> <i>Swiftia pallida</i>
Annelida	Segmented worms	6	Devonshire cup coral Northern sea fan Keelworm	<i>Pomatoceros triqueter</i>
Crustacea	Crabs, lobsters, barnacles	15	Sandmason Harbour crab	<i>Lanice conchilega</i> <i>Liocarcinus depurator</i>
Mollusca	Shells, sea slugs, cuttlefish	19	Grey topshell Tower shell Common mussel	Barnacles indet <i>Gibbula cineraria</i> <i>Turritella communis</i> <i>Mytilus edulis</i>
Bryozoa	Sea mats	13		<i>Membranipora membrinacea</i> <i>Securiflustra securifrons</i> <i>Porella compressa</i> <i>Antedon bifida</i>
Echinodermata	Starfish, sea urchins, sea cucumbers	20	Feather star Feather star Edible urchin	<i>Leptometra celtica</i> <i>Echinus esculentus</i>
Tunicata	Sea squirts	9		<i>Diazona violacea</i>
Pisces	Fishes	24	Cuckoo wrasse Goldsinny Saithe Poor cod Sand Goby	<i>Labrus bimaculatus</i> <i>Ctenolabrus rupestris</i> <i>Pollachius virens</i> <i>Trisopterus minutus</i> <i>Pomatoschistus minutus</i>
Algae	Seaweeds	28	Oarweed Furbelows Encrusting coralline algae	<i>Laminaria hyperborea</i> <i>Saccorhiza polyschides</i> Corallinacea indet <i>Heterosiphonia plumosa</i> <i>Phycodrys rubens</i> <i>Cutleria multifida</i>
Total Species		179		

Bryozoans

The branching bryozoans *Porella compressa* and *Omalosecosa ramulosa* were recorded from deeper parts of Oberon Bank.

Echinoderms

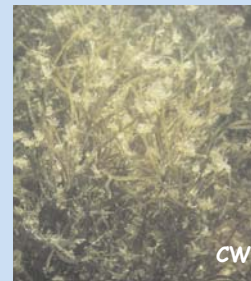
Featherstars were recorded at most sites, although *Leptometra* only on Oberon Bank. The sea cucumber *Holothuria forskali* is found on east Oberon Bank.

Seasquirts and fishes

The football seasquirt *Diazona violacea* was widespread on Oberon Bank. Fish were also numerous, particularly goldsinny, ballan and cuckoo wrasse and poor cod among the kelp park.

Seaweeds

Carpomitra costata (pictured), a nationally scarce brown seaweed, was found among the kelp on one dive to the east of Oberon Bank.



Giant protozoan

The giant naked foraminiferan *Toxisarcon alba* was recorded from muddy sand at Rubh A' Chairn Mhoir, Sound of Arisaig. This is only the fifth recorded sighting in Scotland.

Nationally Rare and Scarce species		
Species	Designation	Where found
Sponge	scarce	N, S and E Oberon Bank
<i>Phakellia ventilabrum</i>		Rare / Occasional
White cluster anemone	scarce	N, S and W Oberon Bank
<i>Parazoanthus anguicomus</i>		Frequent / Common
Brown seaweed	scarce	E Oberon Bank
<i>Carpomitra costata</i>		Occasional

This Seasearch survey was organised as part of the Marine Conservation Society's Member's Dive Programme. Funding for dive costs was provided by Scottish Natural Heritage, Fort William Office. Surveyors taking part were:

Calum Duncan and Chris Wood (organisers), George Brown, Frank Fortune, Don MacNeish, Sue Scott and Howard Wood. Photographs are by George Brown, Calum Duncan, Sue Scott, Chris Wood and Howard Wood.

This report by Calum Duncan (MCS).

Many thanks to John Payne for the use of his boat.



Seasearch is a volunteer underwater survey project for recreational divers to contribute to the conservation of the marine environment. Financial support for the project during 2003 and for the production of this summary report has been given by:



Supported by the
Heritage Lottery Fund



Shot on Oberon Bank CD



Football sea squirt GB

Oberon Bank Survey August 2003 Summary Report



Sponge *Cliona celata* HW



Axinella Sponge and sea fan HW



Featherstars *Leptometra celtica* SS



Cushion Star SS

Oberon Bank

On top of the submerged Oberon Bank, bedrock ridges run north-south at 16-21m and are covered in kelp park (*Laminaria hyperborea*) with red seaweeds (including *Heterosiphonia plumosa* and *Delesseria sanguinea*), frequent poor cod (*Trisopterus minutus*), goldsinny (*Ctenolabrus rupestris*), red cushion stars (*Porania pulvillus*) and seven-armed starfish (*Luidea sarsi*).

Seasearch Oberon Bank was organised by MCS on 15-18 August 2003 to search for the protected species *Atrina fragilis* (fan shell). Although none were found, 10 Seasearch dives provided some of the first information about marine life on the bank. During poor weather, sites in the Sound of Arisaig were surveyed.



Priest Rock

At the mouth of Loch Ailort, Priest Rock is crowned at 3m with kelp forest, beneath which urchins (*Echinus esculentus*) have grazed the understorey. On the surrounding seabed, hydroids, scallops, common starfish (*Asterias rubens*), seven-arm starfish and sandmasons are common.

Ardnish

A cliff covered in featherstars (*A. bifida*) is crowned with mixed kelp forest (*Laminaria saccharina*, *L. hyperborea* and *Sacchoriza polyschides*). At the base, a steep slope of boulders covered in the seasquirt *Ciona intestinalis*, with squat lobsters (*Munida rugosa*) in crevices, descends to a shell gravel and mud slope at 23m. Here king scallops and the burrowing anemone *Cerianthus lloydii* are common.



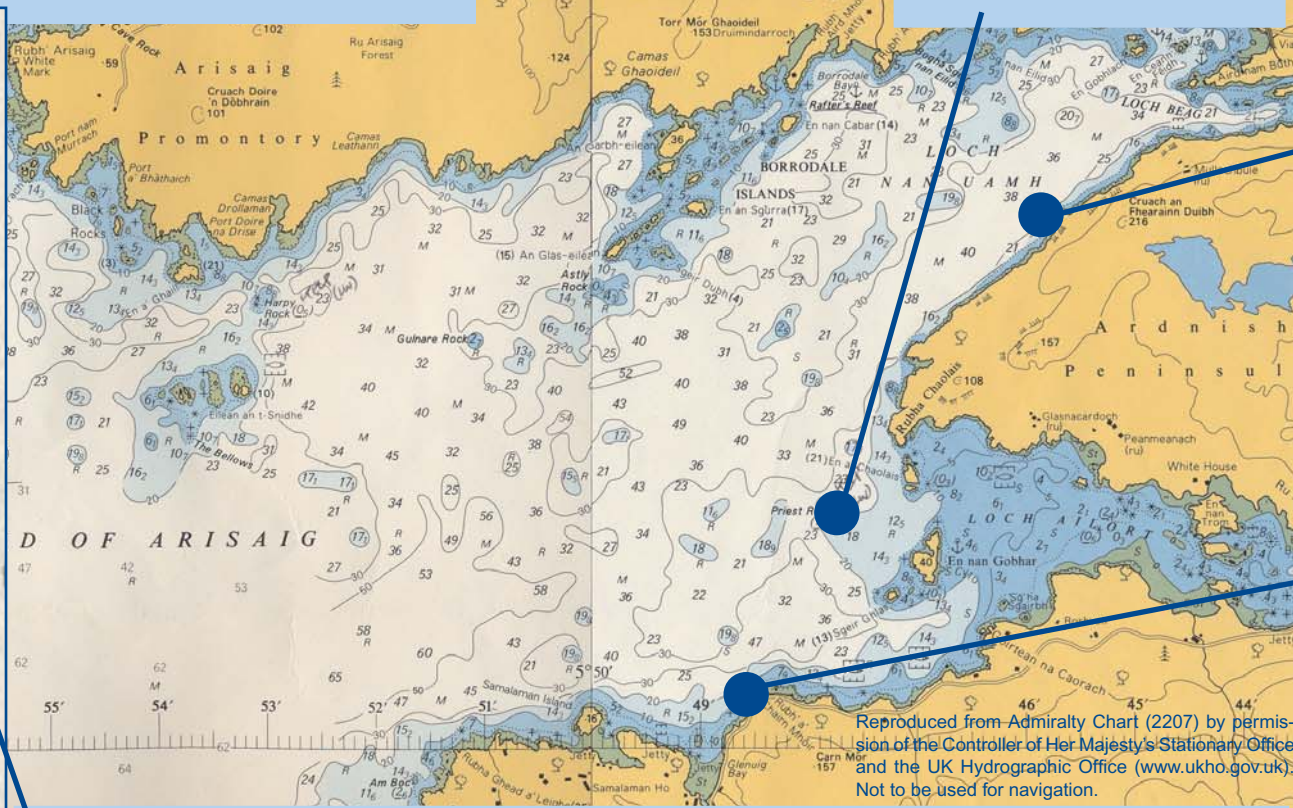
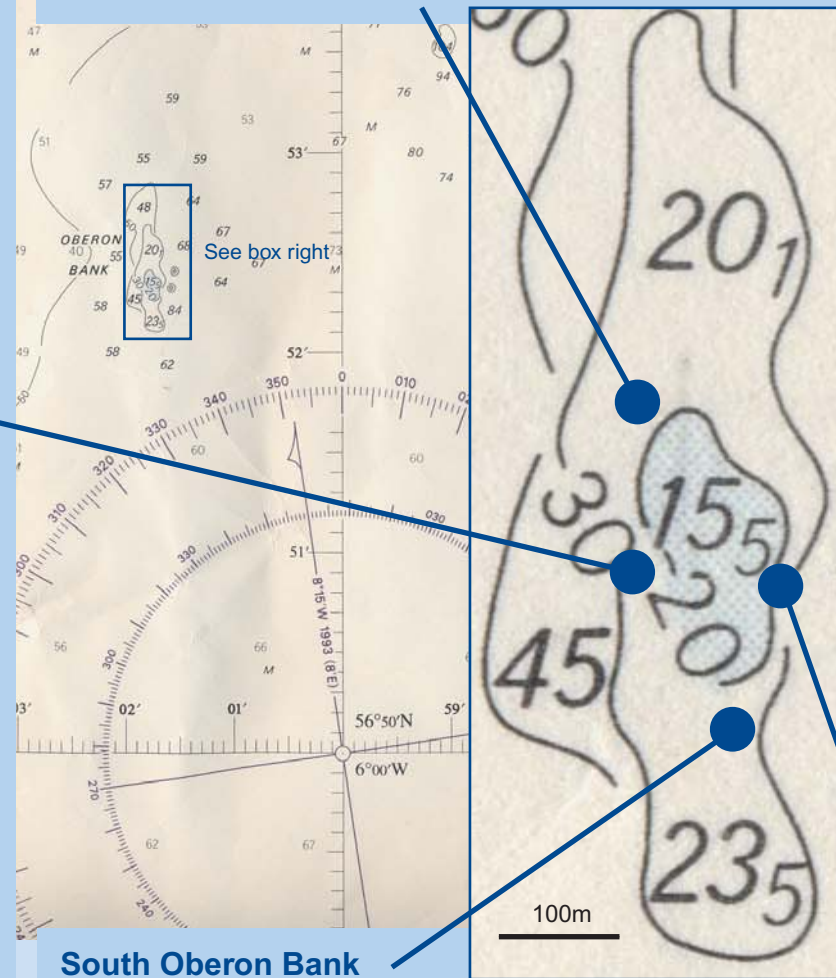
Hermit and cloak anemone GB

West Oberon Bank

Below the seaweed zone to the west, bedrock is covered in barnacles, sea beard (*Nemertesia anteninna*), bryozoans, Devonshire cup corals and the featherstar *Leptometra*. At 22m, small boulders, cobbles, pebbles, coarse sand and shell descends gradually west. Sea beard, featherstars, white cluster (*Parazoanthus anguicomus*) and sandy creeplet anemones (*Epizoanthus couchii*; see below) grow on boulders and cobbles. Queen scallops (*Aquepecten opercularis*), dragonets (*Callionymus lyra*), sandmasons and a even a lone sea pen (*Pennatula phosphorea*) live on or in the sand of this very diverse site.

North Oberon Bank

In deeper waters to the north (27-30m), bedrock is covered in Devonshire cup corals (*Caryophyllia smithii*), encrusting and foliose (*Securiflustra securifrons*) bryozoans and featherstars (*Antedon bifida* and *Leptometra celtica*). A mixed sediment plain supports hydroids (*Abietinaria abietina* and *Kirchenpaueria* sp), sandmasons (*Lanice conchilega*), colonial anemones and king scallops (*Pecten maximus*).



Reproduced from Admiralty Chart (2207) by permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationary Office and the UK Hydrographic Office (www.ukho.gov.uk). Not to be used for navigation.



GB



Pennatula phosphorea GB

South Oberon Bank

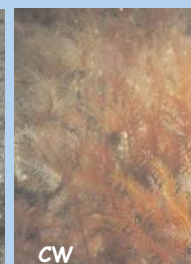
Bedrock at 20-28.5m is colonised by barnacles, Devonshire cup corals, sea beard and featherstars with some football seasquirts (*Diazona violacea*), northern sea fans (*Swiftia pallida*) and bryozoans, including *Alcyonidium*. As to the north and west, below 28.5m boulders, cobbles and pebbles in muddy shell gravel support hydroids (sea beard and *A. abietina*), sponges, featherstars, colonial anemones (white cluster and sandy creeplet), sea fans, colonial seasquirts (football and *Botryllus schlosseri*) and king scallops. Spiny starfish (*Marthasterias glacialis*), wrasse and poor cod are also found here.

East Oberon Bank

To the east, Oberon Bank is markedly different. It descends in a series of steep, rounded bedrock faces with varied filter-feeding animal life. In some places the hard, branched bryozoans *Porella compressa* and *Omalosecosa ramulosa* dominate, in others featherstars. The erect cupped sponges *Axinella infundibuliformes* and *Phakellia ventilabrum*, Devonshire cup corals, northern sea fans, featherstar *Leptometra* and football seasquirts increase with depth. Although at 30m the coarse sand ledges where fan shells had previously been reported were located, during this Seasearch trip no *Atrina fragilis* were seen.



Bryozoa and sea fan HW



CW



The sponge Phakellia CW

