

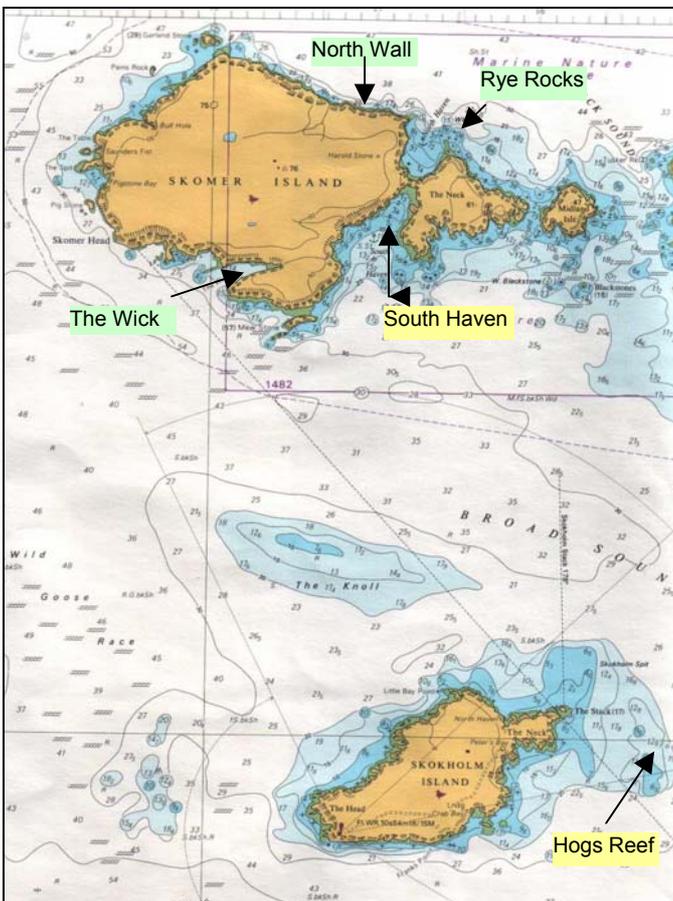


MARINE CONSERVATION SOCIETY



Skomer Weekend 23rd-25th August 2003

A Marine Conservation Society dive weekend was held in Pembrokeshire over August Bank Holiday weekend and diving took place in the Skomer Marine Nature Reserve (SMNR) and also near Skokholm, the neighbouring island. The diving involved a variety of tasks including urchin and starfish surveys within the marine reserve, and Seasearch surveys in South Haven on Skomer and Hogs Reef east of Skokholm. The main purpose of the South Haven survey was to look for the fan shell, *Atrina fragilis*, which remained elusive.



Skomer is formed from grey volcanic rock with high cliffs around most of the coast and in many places the steep terrain extends underwater. The North wall slopes steeply down to a depth of 50m; at Rye Rocks rocky steps and ledges are separated by patches of sediment; the Wick is a V-shaped gully exposed to waves and surge; South Haven is a sheltered sediment-filled bay.

The Wick can only be dived when the sea birds have flown after the nesting season. It is notable for an abundance of the scarlet and gold star coral, *Balanophyllia regia* which is found on the boulders along the bed of the gully, and the sea squirt *Denrodia grossularia* is common on the wall.

By complete contrast, Skokholm is composed of old red sandstone with steeply angled strata and very rugged cliffs; Hogs Reef is a continuation of this geology. This is an exposed site that is swept by strong tidal currents.

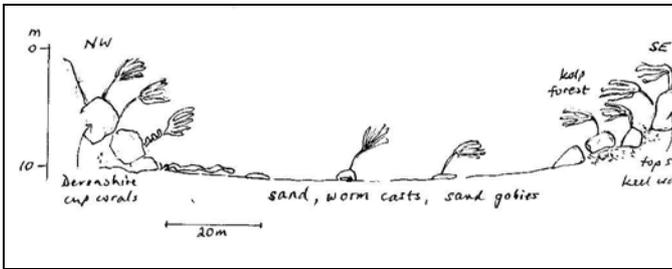
Chart showing Skomer and Skokholm: Seasearch and sea urchin survey sites

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During the urchin survey, 16 common sea urchins *Echinus esculentus* were recorded and measured, mostly at Rye Rocks, and the data have been added to the SMNR data collected during the summer. 23 spiny starfish were also recorded at Rye Rocks and North Wall.

Scarlet and gold star coral	Gooseberry sea squirt	Yellow cluster anemone
<i>Balanophyllia regia</i>	<i>Dendrodia grossularia</i>	<i>Parazoanthus axinellae</i>

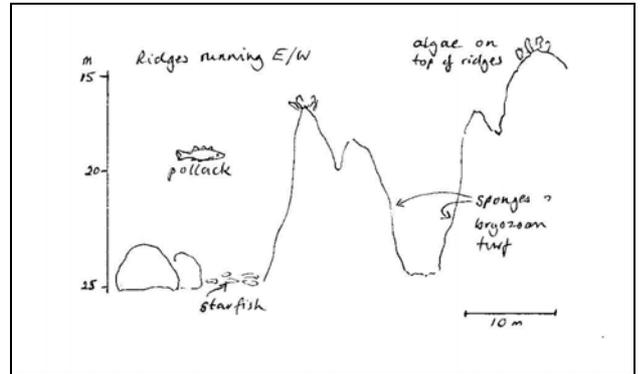




Profile of South Haven, Skomer

Hogs Reef (right) is a dramatic site with steep-sided gullies and sharp ridges extending in an east/west direction. The shallowest point is at a depth of about 9m. Various red algae grow on top of the ridges, bryozoan turf and sponges are common on the gully sides. Many Pollack, *Pollachius pollachius*, were seen. Notably, one pink sea fan, *Eunicella verrucosa*, was recorded, and a large colony of yellow cluster anemones *Parazoanthus axinellae*, was found here.

To the left is a profile of South Haven towards the north end where it is about 10m deep and the seabed is of fine sand. Kelp forests grow on the rocks at either side. Divers were dropped off at intervals along the east side of the bay and swam along transects towards the NW. As depth increased southwards, the sediment turned to muddy sand, then to mud at 19m.



Profile of Hogs Reef, Skokholm

Phylum	Common Name	No. of species	Common Species
Porifera	Sponges	19	Elephant hide sponge Carrot sponge Boring sponge
Cnidaria	Anemones, hydroids, jellyfish	17	Devonshire cup coral Dead men's fingers
Platyhelminthes	Flat worms	1	
Annelida	Segmented worms	6	Keel worm,
Crustacea	Crabs, lobsters, barnacles	10	Spiny spider crab
Mollusca	Shells, sea slugs	10	
Phoronidae	Horseshoe worms	1	
Bryozoa	Sea mats	6	
Echinodermata	Starfish, urchins, sea cucumbers	8	Ross coral Common starfish Bloody Henry
Tunicata	Sea squirts	9	Star ascidian
Pisces	Fishes	13	Pollack Leopard spot goby
Algae	seaweeds	11	Kelp or curvie
			Sea beech
	Total species	111	

Species recorded:
A large number of species was recorded from these two sites which are very different in physical attributes and degree of exposure, though only about 2.5 km apart. 38 species were common to both sites, 41 were only recorded in South Haven and 32 were exclusive to Hogs Reef.

The weekend was organised by Vicki Billings and participating divers were Alison Bessell, Sam Cook, Christine Harling, Darren Murray, Chris Pirie, Angela Read, Dominic Smith, Tim Theobalds, David Vinicombe, Chris Webb and Chris Wood.

Text by Vicki Billings, photos Chris Wood.

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:

