

## RICHARD CULLEN - SCUBA DIVING INSTRUCTOR



Many of you already know that Richard Cullen has become Aquatic Element's first home grown PADI Open Water Scuba instructor. For me it is a very proud moment as Richard is my first Instructor Development Course (IDC) student to go to Instructor Exam (IE) since I became a Course Director.

Becoming a PADI Instructor requires a good deal of hard work and dedication combined with a mastery of diving skills. Richard followed a really good route to becoming an instructor, after his Advanced Open Water Course, he completed speciality courses in: Peak Performance Buoyancy, Dry Suit, Wreck, Deep, Drift, Navigation and Nitrox, together with the Equipment Speciality, Project Aware and Emergency First Response. Because Richard dives a lot both in this country and abroad he soon earned his Master Scuba Diver rating, with 50 dives, five specialities and completing his Rescue Course. Those of you who came to the Aquatic Element Club Night when Richard spoke about diving Scapa Flow will know that he is also a technical diver.

Richard was in no hurry to finish his Divemaster training which he started in July 2007 and finished last September, if you know Richard, you will know that he just loves diving and will go anywhere to gain new diving experiences and dive with anyone and help those with less experience. Most of you will have either dived with him, or been on courses when he has been helping out as he first became involved with Aquatic Element just after the Dive Centre opened. Despite having two hips re-surfaced in less than nine months Richard is still putting in a lot of diving.

Richard has worked very hard to earn the excellent feedback he was given at his two day Instructor's Exam in Peterborough last weekend and deserves all our congratulations.

### AN ACCOUNT OF A PADI INSTRUCTOR EXAM - RICHARD CULLEN

As I rapidly approach my 60th birthday I have just added another notch to my belt by successfully completing my PADI Instructor's Examination (IE) and I

thought you might want to share in my experiences. I am very proud to be the first person to pass an IE after undertaking an Instructor Development Course (IDC) with John Carlin since his elevation to the ranks of PADI Course Director. For me there is an added bonus that John has become one of my closet friends. I am Aquatic Element's first home grown instructor.

I have previously written about my IDC with John last October and you can find my report on the Aquatic Element website testimonials' page. If you are a PADI diver through and through you get to the IE by firstly being a Divemaster, then successfully completing the IDC. Once you have completed the IDC, which is challenging in itself, you apply to be a candidate on the IE. For a variety of reasons I couldn't do an earlier IE having passed my IDC in early October last year. John kindly gave me top up sessions both in the pool in terms of my skills and in the classroom in terms of my knowledge development presentations.

My IE was held over the weekend of 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> March 2010 in Peterborough and I suppose got off to a poor start when a journey that should have lasted 1 hour 20 minutes took near on 3 hours 30 minutes, solid traffic and driving rain. But after a good night's sleep it was breakfast at 06.30 on the Saturday and into registration at 07.30. I was with sixteen other candidates however the number of Course Directors and Staff Instructors who were present outnumbered us. The two Instructor Examiners were from PADI HQ in Bristol; Erika Hoffman and Richard Somerset. The atmosphere is extremely intense for some of the candidates this is a life choice and success in the IE is all important and consuming. I could afford to be more laid back, I wanted to become a PADI Instructor for personal satisfaction and to help John and Aquatic Element out but in terms of remuneration I am in a position that I don't need to earn money from diving. So if I had failed I would have been disappointed but not devastated. I also knew that I had been really well prepared for what lay ahead by John. Getting to this stage had been real hard work for me and I have learnt so much and there is no one better or more caring than John in developing your skills as both a diver and dive professional.

Richard and Erika worked really hard to put the candidates at ease, this is really difficult but the point was made that as we moved into pool work people would start to relax and enjoy themselves.

You are assigned a team on this occasion either Red or Blue and a number within that team, I was in Red Team. This means you have a pre determined schedule of activities, skills and tasks to perform. A candidate is asked to give a number between 1 and 10 and this determines the skills that both teams have to

individually perform for their skills circuit. For my Knowledge Development Presentation I had to prescriptively teach from the Open Water Course.

You have to do this presentations in a way set by PADI and are scored not just on your content but how you present and how many of the structured points you cover. There is a system where if you score under the pass mark you can do a 'make up' in my case this would have been to present another OW question.

But first and there are two exam sessions, this I think is the most challenging part for many candidates. The first (closed book) covers theory examinations in Physics, RDP, Physiology, Equipment and Dive Skills with a pass mark, in each, of 75%. This is followed by a PADI Standards exam which is open book but you have to know where in the vast Instructor Manual to find the specific standard to answer the question. The questions are either multiple choice or true/false answers. I find the theory bits easy so I finished early as did a number of other candidates but this can be off putting for those who possibly struggle with the academics.

At the end of the examinations I was told I had passed as did most of the other candidates. You can fail on only one of the theory exams and if you do you have to sit a make up exam the next day prior to you open water.

It is then into Knowledge Development presentations and again a success but you have to sit through other candidates' presentations to make up the audience, not a chore but erodes some free time that might otherwise be available. Some people who have to do make up exams are looking a bit gloomy.

In the afternoon it is off to the local leisure centre to do our confined water teaching and skills circuit. I taught my skill and you are judged on your briefing, your demonstration of the skill and how you identify any problems the students have. The examiner tells the students what they have to do wrong. The speed that you respond to problems is important as is how you correct them. Erika was responsible for Red team and she hovered above us snorkelling to assess our teaching. Each of you performs your given subject and we then moved on to our skills circuit, the five skills chosen at random were - regulator recovery, mask removal and replacement, CESA, fin pivot and alternate air source stationary. You have to get a minimum of 17 points from a total of 25 and no one skill can score less than 3. A 3 means you performed the skill but that it wasn't demonstration quality so your aiming for 5s or as close to that score as possible to show mastery of the skills.

So day one ended and I was left reflecting on how well Richard and Erika had managed the day, had done all they could to relax us, had encouraged and supported us but always in the knowledge that you had to meet the PADI Standards, no ifs and buts, you had to nail it.

Early to bed and next morning and early morning trip to Gildenburgh, a local dive site in an old brick quarry, not dissimilar to Wraysbury where the staff were very welcoming. Briefings from the examiners and then we had to give our briefings for the skills we would supervise. I had a skill from OW Dive 2 and one from Adventures in Diving. There is just a huge range of skills and tasks you can be asked to perform from any of the courses you can teach as an OWSI. But first we had our rescue demonstration to complete, near disaster my dry suit hose would not detach, it took some of the staff and a CD to get it off, so I had to do a make up after the skills had finished on the platform.

Down to the six metre platform and I taught my skills, suffice it to say it went really well and I surfaced to redo my rescue demonstration. Nailed it and so it was out of the water, got changed, kit away, debrief our skills and then the handshake from Erika and a big well done. Some people were really emotional. All I know was that I was exhausted the mental and physical exertion had drained me. There is a ceremony to award certificates of completion and saying thank you to lots of people.

I want to say a huge thank you to Erika and Richard for making the IE such an enjoyable and memorable experience, although it is rightly challenging it is fun and there is a real sense of achievement in the fact you are for that exact moment of time PADI's newest Open Water Scuba Instructor (OWSI). I had a real sense that they wanted us to be successful and would allow us every opportunity, within the rules, to prove ourselves worthy of the title PADI OWSI.

For me I am now going to do the Speciality Instructor programme and when I have certified enough people get my MSDT and on to do my DeepTec Instructor's Course.

I emailed Erika and Richard this morning to say thank you and got some really positive feedback - John you should be very proud of that comment because that is a reflection of the hours of hard work you have put into my development and your skills as a PADI Course Director, thank you.

**RICHARD CULLEN**