



LOCHBAY PINNACLES – by night and day

Around the coast and closer to home are the less magnificent but still very enjoyable Lochbay Pinnacles. Situated directly across the loch from the dive centre they are an ideal site for trainees, and sheltering behind a huge cliff, are dive-able in almost all prevailing bad weather. Divers are frequently and pleasantly surprised on the weather days, we can safely dive here. The Pinnacles, one of two, sit in the water like an enormous shark's tooth rising from the seabed at 23 m to 6 m. Mirrored on the hillside by another almost identical pinnacle, it makes dive planning and buddy briefing easy.

When the weather is not good enough to be on the west coast we often do two dives here, combining an exploratory day dive with a first experience of night dive from a boat. So today that's what we'll do. A long lie and bacon buttie behind us, a short trip across the loch and we're there.

We descend the shot to 6m, onto the large round pinnacle top. It's a great platform to steady an inexperienced diver, check equipment and choose a route down the rock-face. Due west and east the cliff face is sheer, while north and south gives a more gradual descent down a 45 degree slope. Either way you can spiral down and around this site all the way to the seabed and back up again in one good long relaxed dive with no tide to consider. Descending the rock-face it's simply covered in life. The usual enormous plumose anemones but 300cm tall, massive elephant ear sponges, loads of dead men's fingers beckoning deeper, dancing featherstars, creeping brittle stars, a huge colony of shimmering electric light sea squirts, sunstars, cushion stars, bloody henry's, starfish, sea urchins, spider crabs the list is endless. All the way around the pinnacle we explore rocky ledges and crevices which host beady eyed crustacean, squatties, and edible crabs, frantically swimming velvets with drunken red eyes, swift shy octopus, scarlet sea scorpion and Fred the lobster who has been on this site for at least 25 years! Crimson and scarlet dhalia anemones the size of dinner plates, lie on the seabed with flatties well disguised. Vis at this site is less good, in the range of 8m, the seabed dramatically changed over the last 15 years due to the ill considered location of a local fishfarm. However, this gives reason for a good lesson in buoyancy control. Throughout the dive we're accompanied by cheeky cuckoo wrasse used to being fed, who'll often butt your mask until you give in and break an urchin. Tapping the rock brings them out and perhaps a curious conger too!

In the same place at night that's more likely. Enjoying a night dive later that day, we knew where we wanted to peek and ending our second dive we ascend the rock face and onto the pinnacles top to find the shot. On the surface we enjoy the calm and the glorious view of the starlight night sky often missed in urban locations. A quick steam across the loch and 10 minutes later, kit off, a 2 minute walk from the jetty we're in the Stein inn despite our smelly thinsulates rewarding ourselves by a crackling fire with a delicious rusty nail! Yet another incredible day!