

DIVING THE HIGHBALLS

The HIGHBALLS in Loch Striven all lie in 30 metres or more on a silty sea bed, and the water is usually clear but very dark. The dive is therefore for experienced Sports Divers or above, comfortable with the inevitable decompression stops required from a deep square profile dive.

The dive site is not marked by lines or buoys, and can only be found by boat with a GPS and sounder. The nearest slipway is within the private Glen Striven Estate (www.glenstriven.com) and is only accessible by prior arrangement via Max on 07909 582219.

After launching from the slipway, head south down the loch until you are level with the white lodge on the eastern shore, and use a GPS and sounder to search for the side charge in c30 metres at 55° 56.972' N 05° 04.283' W. Drop a shot on the side charge, and descend carefully to begin your dive; halting a couple of metres above the bottom to avoid a silt storm. Spend a few minutes looking around the side charge jettisoned from a midget submarine, then head directly west and slightly deeper.

After about 15 metres you will reach a group of three HIGHBALLS close together; despite the short distance between them, you'll need a good torch to see from one to the next. Have a closer look at them, then continue due west for another 15 metres and you will reach a very heavy duty anchor chain, very close to another HIGHBALL 2/3 metres to the west of the chain.

From the anchor chain you have three options:

1. For those qualified and prepared for a deeper dive, cross over the anchor chain and head north west. As the slope descends, from around 40 metres onwards you will find groups of HIGHBALLS lying close together in the silt. Once you've seen enough you can ascend from deep, or reverse your dive and swim south east until you reach the anchor chain from where you can follow it either way.
2. The most interesting way is to turn north, and follow the anchor chain as it runs slightly upwards and curves towards the east. On the way you will see another 2 HIGHBALLS lying 4/5 metres to the west of the chain, and after about 10 minutes you will arrive at a huge bruce anchor in c30 metres (55° 56.988' N 05° 04.306' W). This anchor is from a later period, and is unconnected to the HIGHBALL trials. From the anchor, inflate your DSMB and ascend to your deco stop and then on to the surface.
3. Alternatively, turn south, and follow the anchor chain as it runs broadly straight in c35 metres. You will pass a handful of HIGHBALLS on either side of the chain, and after about 10 minutes you will find the chain turning sharply to the left and heading up the slope. The anchor chain ends 5 minutes later in c22 metres (55° 56.908 N 05° 04.191 W), and from here ascend under your DSMB to complete your deco before surfacing.

Whichever dive you choose to complete, think carefully about gas planning and decompression. Unless you choose to cross the anchor chain and go deeper, your dive will be around 30 minutes plus decompression. A 30% nitrox mix will maximise your time along the chain, and this is an ideal dive for accelerated decompression for those qualified.