

# MYSTERY DIVER



## ABYSS, STOCKPORT

**A**S I APPROACHED the village of Hawk Green in the hills of Stockport, home to the Abyss Dive Centre, I couldn't stop thoughts of how the shop might not serve me because I wasn't "local" enough running through my mind.

The centre is tucked away to the rear of a grim-looking converted mill – not the sort of location that would generate enthusiasm in my *alter ego*, someone who had dreamed of learning to dive for years but never got round to it.

However, a well-presented retail area and a cheery "How can we help you..." from Marcus, one of the centre's assistant instructors, soon made those initial thoughts disappear.

Marcus started with a general overview of the services Abyss offers before focusing on the training side of the business.

I found him adept at using the displays as visual aids to explain how my journey would start with the PADI Open Water course. This was followed by 10 minutes going through the PADI crew pack and what it would involve.

I really liked the way Marcus explained the process; how the learning objectives linked in with the manual, and how they would be translated into practical experience in the pool and open water.

Following one of my comments about "murky waters" around our coastline, Marcus pulled out some fish guides for the UK and compared them with those for the Red Sea, "the UK's marine life might not be as colourful, but it

tends to be larger and more interesting. You'll find the UK to have some of the best diving in the world, with some incredible wrecks," he said enthusiastically.

Marcus also took the time to show me where the classroom sessions would be conducted (upstairs, in a purpose-built and well-equipped room) as well as some of the equipment I would use.

This gave me the opportunity to take a look at what appeared to be a well-maintained air bank and basic-equipment-repair area.

Marcus was so enthusiastic that he almost got me to the point at which I would signed up for the Open Water course. What stopped me was a question about the local BSAC scene – could I qualify as a diver with that agency?

This question normally elicits an answer deriding BSAC in favour of PADI, but what Marcus provided was a very balanced answer: "PADI and BSAC, as well as other training providers like CMAS and SSI, will all get you to the point where you will be able to dive safely," he said, "The difference is the route they use to get you there."

There followed an explanation of the pros and cons of BSAC and PADI, sufficient to allow me to make an informed decision.

The Abyss Dive Centre was well presented, but this wasn't what made my visit memorable – it was the quality of service provided by Marcus. Enthusiastic, professional and trustworthy, it proved what I have always believed, that it's exceptional staff that make for exceptional dive centres. ■