



The Manchester Cruising Association

Diving the Titanic: 13th January 2005

Steve Rigby

Steve is something of a Titanic fanatic and when he was offered a surprise, free dive to the liner over dinner at the annual convention on Titanic-ists in 2001, he couldn't believe his luck. Slightly alarmed that he could not get insurance for the venture, he nevertheless found himself leaving St John's, Newfoundland on the Akademik Keldysh (a converted Russian survey ship) a few months later headed for the spot where the pride of the White Star Line sank. The dive would be made in one of the ship's two submersibles (Mir1 and Mir2) enclosed in a 6 foot diameter titanium pressure sphere with tiny portholes. The wreck is 2½ miles down and the journey would mean that Steve became just the 67th person ever to go that deep(while more than a 1000 people have been into space.).

The subaquanauts first had to fast for 24 hours – there are no heads in this vessel – and then faced an 11 hour dive with two others in the 6 foot sphere. They were given a cyanide tablet each – maybe in case they didn't get on – and spent 2½ hours going down. The two submersibles went down together (as a somewhat desperate safety measure presumably) and in the 6 hours on the bottom they saw the deck, the bow, Captain Smith's bath, chandeliers, toilet bowls and cups.

The debris was spread over an area the size of London. Skeletons (is this too much information for seafarers?) dissolve in just 18 months but the tannin in leather means that shoes and suitcases last almost forever. The wreck is crumbling quietly away at an ever faster rate; whole chunks of the deck are ready to collapse.

The high point for me was when the two subs accidentally collided while creeping about beside the hull. A loud bang apparently. I'm not a natural panicker but I'd have swallowed my suicide pill there and then. Fortunately Steve didn't and 2 ½ hours later emerged into the sun.

This was an extraordinary tale, well-told and well illustrated. Afterwards everyone I spoke to agreed that it was not a trip for them. Three people for eleven hours at near five hundred atmospheres pressure in something the size of a VW Beetle without facilities was just too much. It made sailing seem sane.

Steve? He's going down again this summer. But he really wants to dive to the Bismarck. She's resting on a mountainside about 5 miles down in the Atlantic. So that will be a real adventure.