



Kit List:-

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BCD ✓

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Exposure Suits

● Drysuits ✓

● Wetsuits

Regulators ✓

SMBs ✓

Reels

Lights

Kit Cat Tips on a catalogue of kit

SMBs



A brightly coloured device on the water's surface lets everyone in the vicinity know there are divers below. It allows your boat cover to keep track of you (reducing divers lost at sea) and marks where you will be surfacing (stops you being hit). If you can you should always use one. A Surface Marker Buoy (or SMB) is the most commonly used but a folding flag designed for the purpose can also be very effective. On drift dives you want to have one right from the start, but when you are diving anywhere where entanglement might be a problem for example on a wreck or under a pier you should deploy a delayed SMB when you are clear of the obstruction ready for your safety stop.



They come in a range of styles. There are traditional buoy shaped ones pre inflated on the surface where they stay, generally with a flag as well.



And then there is the long open ended sausage. When deployed they are anywhere from 1-2m long but rolled up in your pocket or in a dedicated pouch are perfectly compact. Some buoys, designed for use from the shallower decompression depths, come supplied with a suitable length of line and drop-weight, but others need to be used with a spool or reel, loaded with a length of suitable line (that's another KitCat in itself). Preferably get one that has a rigid opening at the bottom and a method to keep the air in once you let go. There are designs with a small weight to help keep the open end down or a built in constriction. Without this, if a buoy falls over at the surface, the air can escape and it will come back down to meet you, bringing with it a tangle of deployed line.

Another feature to look for is a dump valve so you can roll it up again easily ready for you next dive.



There is a technique to inflating a sausage and it can be fiddly. You need to hold it open and using your alternate second stage (octopus) purge sufficient air to send it up proud on the surface ensuring the line is clear to run. Do remember your old friend physics. If you are at 10m by the time the SMB reaches the surface the volume of air in it will have doubled, and from 20m three times greater. Most SMBs will allow some to escape but they can split under extreme pressure. But equally no-one wants a limp sausage. Work with your buddy whenever you can – teamwork really helps. And practice. Ask us at the club when we're next going. It will let you try several different types and if you've never used one let you see what it's like to actually move along with one. In calm water they can cause drag, but the counter side is they can pull you in a current. Your buddy will need to keep pace.

There is a product called DelayedAid which forms a funnel to facilitate inflation although it has mixed reviews.



If all this sound too complicated or you don't have enough air to spare especially if you are sending the buoy up to signal for help there is another solution. You can get a DSMB with its own independent air source. Affectionately known as "crack and go" they use either a one-off use CO2 cartridge or a small cylinder (100-400ml) matched to the buoy size. Air is decanted from your main cylinder before you go. Please please remember use a full tank to do this - you want the full 200+bar pressure.

And finally what colour. Much research has been undertaken to evaluate what visual marker is best under different conditions. Day-Glo orange was a favourite among divers for a long time but some scientific tests revealed that yellow was more easily distinguished in UK sea conditions. There is an unwritten code that the common red or orange is simply "Here I am" where yellow indicates "I'm here and need help" but this is not an internationally agreed signal. You can get a two-sided buoy (one yellow one red) and some tests have shown when it moves the alternating colours can be more visible.

Whatever shape, size or colour you choose, mark it clearly as yours. You want to take the right one from the other half a dozen or so piled in the corner by the skipper as he helps everyone back on board.



**The Dive School
Bloomfield Hatch
Farm
Bloomfield Hatch
Mortimer
Reading, RG7 3AD**

**Phone:
0118 933 1792**

**Fax:
0118 933 1851**

info@thediveschool.co.uk

**We're on the Web!
www.thediveschool.co.uk**