



Name: Steve and Anna Sutcliffe.

Date: August 1987.

Location: South Haven, Skomer Island.

Title: Leatherback turtle stranding at South Haven, 1987.

Memory:

“It was spotted floating in South Haven near Seal Cave by Mike Brooke who alerted Anna Sutcliffe at the wardens’ house. Anna and Mike got a long rope and Anna swam out to it, secured it with a noose so that Mike could pull the turtle in with Anna swimming and pushing it. It was low tide as there was beach to stand on and land the turtle. The turtle came to rest at high tide mark on South Haven beach.

After a number of phone calls via the then VHF system which was routed via Isle of Wight, the National Museum of Wales got quite excited and Piers Langhelt and Peter Morgan arrived to try and rescue the skeleton. So a number of very smelly and oily days ensued while they stripped off the carapace and then all the flesh (putting it into plastic bags) and gradually got down to the bones which were carefully catalogued and eventually taken back to Cardiff. The bags of flesh and entrails were carried over the cliff and down into North Haven where they were loaded into the island dinghy which was then towed out into St Brides Bay behind the inflatable followed by several hundred Fulmars attracted by the stench. We slit the bags and dumped it all into the sea and the consequent feeding frenzy was amazing to watch.

We maintained a dialogue with the Museum who spent many months degreasing the carapace and bones, at Gerards in Amgmering, West Sussex. Eventually, two or three years later, the turtle was mounted on a board and, for some years, was on display in the information barn on Skomer (still dripping oil), with a bit of history about the life of these turtles and the cause of death of this one - almost certainly hit by the propeller of a ship.

In 2018 the whole skeleton was a centre display piece in Oriel y Parc at St Davids (see <http://www.countyecho.co.uk/article.cfm?id=120640&searchyear=2018>).

The following year Mike Alexander (Skomer Island Wardens before Steve and Anna) found another leatherback turtle in north Wales.”