

THE VISITOR

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Helicopter crew snatch three from icy waters minutes before sunset

Divers rescued in Bay drama

THREE people missing for five hours after a weekend diving expedition went wrong, were snatched to safety by helicopter only 18 minutes before sunset.

The two men and a woman were spotted bobbing in the water during a massive air and sea search in Morecambe Bay, on Sunday.

David Watkins, 29, of Homfray Avenue, Morecambe, Beverley Kilshaw, 27, of Highland Brow, Galgate, and John Grant, 41, of Lancaster Road, Cabus, were treated in hospital for the effects of hypothermia.

Clear water

Members of Morecambe and Heysham Yacht Club diving section, they were operating in an area popular for its clear water and proximity to a number of wrecks. They were horrified when they surfaced to find their escort boat was not in sight.

Yacht Club Commodore, Mr Ted Bradshaw, who described the three as proficient divers, said a meeting had been called for last night to discuss the incident.

Liverpool Coastguard co-ordinated the search after an alert at 2.15pm warning that the trio had failed to surface from a 40-minute dive two hours earlier.

A Coastguard spokesman said there

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was confusion about the exact position of the incident.

Four rescue boats were launched, a Royal Navy Sea King helicopter was scrambled at Prestwick, and Hydrocarbons (Great Britain) threw one of their Morecambe gasfield Bond helicopters into the hunt.

The boats concentrated on the Duddon estuary, while the Bond and Sea King helicopters, operating at 500 and 300 feet respectively, searched a six mile square box.

With sunset rapidly approaching, the Bond helicopter spotted the three divers in the water, more than four miles due west of the northern tip of Walney Island. Captain Ian Wall, piloting the Bond, radioed the Sea King which diverted to the location and winched the divers on board.

They had been in the water - the sea temperature was 13 degrees Celsius - more than five hours, but fortunately were wearing their diving gear.

Capt Wall, who joined the search from Blackpool with co-pilot Mike Hullyer and two

observers, Stan Todd and Christine Kirby told The Visitor: "When we saw them they were waving and were obviously all right. They were extremely lucky. They were four-and-a-half miles from the nearest landfall and it was less than half-an-hour to nightfall."