



Course Report: Advanced Wreck, January 2010

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As anyone who has done any training course with Jamie, Mel or Andy knows, there are courses, and then there are courses. Some places show you enough to get the certification, Tech Dive takes it to the next notch. The Advanced Wreck is one of those courses where not knowing it could be the difference between life and ...

The morning started quickly, leaving promptly at 8:30 with Jamie, Mel, Tony, Astrid, Ben, Mike, me, Troy and Tris all out to play on the HMNZ Waikato. Mel and Mike planned to map the wreck, which no doubt will be a long term project, while Jamie planned to drill Tony and I on how to be better wreck divers.

Dive One... as agreed on the trip out we were to build on our skills of laying lines, then as a team (yes, a buddy pair IS a team) return on the path laid, only do it blindfolded to simulate a zero-visibility situation. With Tony heading the trip, tying off through the hanger, down the torpedo bay and out the starboard side hatch, it was to be a very easy path. Or so we thought. It became apparent that there were excessive tie-offs in our line laying, and just how difficult it can be to follow back out. With very little nitrox left in the tanks, we headed up the line, while Jamie shot back and collected the line before meeting back up on the boat.

Back on dry land, we discussed in great detail our experiences and planned what would happen next dive as we waited for our tanks to be filled. Onto the boat, and a few extra people turned up to join the day. Mel switched drysuits, claiming hers was leaking, and James had brought a spare for her. Which once the neck seal was fixed with some DIY (did you get your knife strap back, Tony???) seemed to suit her nicely ('scuse the pun). [photos anyone??]

Before long everyone was gearing up to get in for step 2. It was just as Mike was about to pull his kit onto his back that someone felt the need to ask him "Would you like your drysuit closed before you get wet?" This from someone who thought he'd have to drag Mel to the surface!!

Dive Two... since Tony had the first honour, I had the dubious task of leading. However with hindsight of Tony's attempt, I guess I had it easy to pick on where to tie off, and we got through quicker, though still slow by Jamie's high standards. Again we then followed it blind, only this time had enough gas to retrieve the line.

Mike's mind must have still been in holiday-land as again he needed to be reminded about his drysuit zip... to the amusement of all onboard.

Dive Three... since the first two dives had gone smoothly and Jamie hadn't managed to totally freak us out yet, now we had to enter the hanger, go 'blind' then search for the line. Easy?? Think again. It makes you really think about how hard you breathe, go through the steps in your mind, then take a chance and head out of the hanger. It was easy to judge with the Waikato's heavy list portside to make the call which way to go. By the time Tony had completed his search, both of us were getting close to

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our deco limits, but still had time to do one more drill... sharing air in confined space, and follow the line out. So the benefits of joining the 'long hose brigade' were welcomed with much appreciation!!

Jamie never fails to be able to tell real-world tales of how being prepared and regular practice can mean lives saved or lost when things go wrong.

Sitting round the table at Schnapper Rock, we were more than ready for a couple of drinks, and talk soon drifted round to the next adventure... some ship down in the Malborough Sounds... Russian, I think.

Many thanks have to go as usual to our skipper of the day, Jeroen, the good sorts at Dive! Tutukaka (nice to see you let the boss out occasionally), and Jamie.

It feels even better knowing that we're the second ever group to go through and survive the Tech Dive/PADI Advanced Wreck Specialty – there I said it!! Now get out there and dive!!!