



Course Report: PADI Self Reliant Diver, 4-6th December 2009

Sean Comber

What a great weekend!!

On Friday I hooked up with Rob, Sel, and Andy (who was down in Wellington to put me and Chels through his SRD course) and we headed out to Rocky Bay for a bit of a sightseeing dive. It was only my second dive in 9 weeks, and my second dive in a drysuit, so I spent most of the time concentrating on where I was in the water rather than on what other stuff was in the water with me. But the viz was a pretty good 8 metres and the water a toasty warm 15 degrees. It was quite humbling to be in the company of people who can pretty much be exactly where they want to be in the water column and be completely relaxed about it... I felt more like I was flying one of those little remote control helicopters - when I was exactly where I wanted to be it was more a fluke than any real control. But for the first 40 minutes or so I managed to bluff my way through... it was only when the batteries (tank pressure) started to run down that I started to lose control. But it is all about experience and learning!

Friday night was the pool session for the SRD course. Talk about an eye opener! I had only intentionally taken off my mask in the water once since my OW course 15 months ago, and to be doing it on purpose while NOT kneeling on the bottom was quite a challenge. Andy must have thought he was in for a long weekend when he saw my skills. Communication in the pool was pretty difficult thanks to the pool party in the main pool (complete with DJ and bouncy castle - shame they started to pack it all away before we could assault the castle in full equipment!). We worked on kicking techniques (frog kick, back kick, etc); pony bottle deployment; mask swaps; OOG drills; and trying to stay stationary in the water. The session only lasted 2 hours, but I was knackered at the end of it!

Saturday morning dawned clear and we headed to Kau Bay for the first open water dive of the course. The northerly wind was chopping things up a bit, and there was a reasonable current running, which made life interesting for some of the skills. I needn't have worried about whether I could open my eyes in the salt water because even if I had done that I wouldn't have been able to see anything - viz probably peaked at 1 metre. We ticked off a few of the skills... the extra depth and better weighting must have helped a bit because I didn't find things as hard to do in the sea as in the pool. Having said that, it was probably only the lack of viz that stopped us from seeing Andy with his head in his hands in despair at a couple of the more bumbling attempts at SMB deployment!

For dives 2 and 3 of the day we hopped onto the other side of the carpark into Mahanga Bay, where there was less current and slightly better viz (2-3 metres at times) and made our way through the remaining skills. I was stunned to find myself being able to do the skills within the required constraints - a testament to the quality of instruction and the fruits of some pretty hard work and concentration! Heading into the course on Friday night, I didn't give myself much of a chance of being able to swap to my backup mask without moving more than a vertical metre in the water - unless I was at the surface or stuck to the bottom.

Sunday morning was when we were to put it all together and have a bit of fun with what we had learnt. Unfortunately, this time the viz was clearer and I COULD see Andy shaking his head in dismay. You know that you are on a hiding to nothing when your dive plan starts with "we will start at the anchor



and head east", and you spend 40 minutes under water without even finding the anchor. Still, from a recreational-dive point of view it wasn't a bad dive. It just meant that we had to get back into the water once again to prove that the muppets were not diving in Wellington that day.

Thankfully, the next dive was much better. We ticked off the last remaining skills, and then Andy spent a bit of time with me working on some drysuit skills. I had some trouble re-connecting the drysuit inflator hose with my gloves on and spent a solid few minutes wrestling with it. After a bit, the glove came off and the hose went on quite easily. I didn't really realise it at the time, but Andy pointed out later that the whole time I was wrestling with the hose, I was staying pretty much stationary in the water column rather than crashing to the bottom or popping to the surface... something that I would NOT have been able to do before the SRD course... that to me was the crowning moment of the weekend!

All in all, it was a fantastic weekend, and a brilliant course. If anyone is thinking of doing it, I would highly recommend it - the course content and quality of instruction were superb. My two pieces of advice would be:

- 1) don't make it harder for yourself by trying to do it in drysuit with only 2 drysuit dives under your belt. The course is challenging enough as it is without making it even more difficult!
- 2) be a complete sponge - suck the marrow out of the course... you won't be disappointed.

Thanks to Andy for a great course, and Chels for being awesome to do the course with.