

## GUE Tech 2 at the Cowshed: 24th – 27th September 2010

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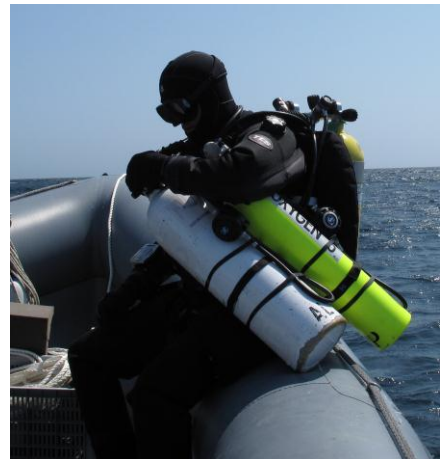


Are you a depth junkie? Ok, so it's not a fair question, the junkie tag implying an unhealthy addiction or obsession. But let's be honest, how deep have you dived? I bet you know. I also bet you know all the other details of that dive: the location, your dive buddy etc. I would even go so far as to bet you know the depth of your second deepest dive, but why is this? Apart from a few extreme depth hunters most of us would claim that depth is irrelevant, but somehow we know this is a lie.

I think the reason we all know how deep we've been relates back to our initial training and dive experiences. When you start to dive you chafe at the limits imposed on you. You look down enviously at the more experienced divers blowing bubbles far below and you just know it's more exciting down there. Encouraged by the various training agencies we pay for additional certifications, accepting that somehow the nominal figure they present us with will protect us as we go deeper. (Certainly this is how insurance companies seem to think.) We even start to ask our buddies how deep they've been as a way of gauging how experienced they are.

Inevitably this leads to some slightly dysfunctional behaviour early on in our dive careers and again let's be honest. How many of you have done a bounce dive where the sole aim was to see a big number on your computer screen? Did you see anything? Does it really make you any more experienced? Are you a little bit proud of the 'big number'? Whatever your answers to these questions don't feel bad about them, as the desire to go deeper is firmly rooted in the psyche of all of us. The important point is what you do about it.

Depth is the single most limiting factor in terms of our ability to explore the full extent of the underwater world. It is a fact (assuming you are not a believer in conspiracy theories) that more people have visited the moon than have visited the deepest part of our oceans. As we go deeper it gets darker and colder, our gas supply diminishes faster, the decompression obligation increases rapidly, narcosis becomes ever more pronounced and the distance to safety should something go wrong becomes a serious issue. If we really want to do more than a bounce dive, going deep requires some serious planning.



Back in July 2006 I did the GUE Tech 1 class. This was a great class for me, providing a strong platform for planning and executing deeper dives. It was also great to have a clear head at depths of up to 50m, a sensation I had never experienced on my occasional bounce dives up to that point and for a couple of years this was as far as I wanted or needed to go. However by the start of this year I was beginning to chafe at my limits again. A trip to dive the President Coolidge in Vanuatu in 2008 and a trip to the Solomon Islands in 2009, where I did the Aaron Ward, whetted my appetite for 'going deeper'. In addition Jamie's exploration of a cave system in the South Island of New Zealand which requires dives to 60m+ and a few other sites which I started to hear rumours about, all convinced me to sign up for the Tech 2 class.

# TECH DIVE New Zealand



Building directly on from Tech 1, much of the focus of Tech 2 is managing the extra complexity generated by the additional gas and decompression requirements. For dives in the 'normal' Tech 2 range (50m – 75m) a commonly used configuration is twin 12s and an 80cf stage for your bottom gas and then two deco bottles, one of EANx50 and the other 100% oxygen. Simply carrying these extra bottles generates task-loading, but when you factor in multiple switches, multiple potential failures and the fact that you now have two cylinders which would be lethal if breathed on the bottom, your first few dives are less than relaxed.

Of course another reason for nerves might have been the fact that for this course there would be 4 GUE instructors and 1 GUE Instructor candidate in the water with me – Jamie and James doing the course as students, Liam Allen and Marcus Werneck interning, and Richard Lundgren actually running the course. However, given how relaxed Richard is and the fact that I couldn't really have hoped for stronger team members, I think I was generating most of the stress myself.

The mechanics of the course are much the same as all other courses, with a significant theory and equipment component as well as lots of practice dives. As you would expect the dives started shallow and simple, only 10m for dive 1, but rapidly developed into deeper and more complex dives. Our final course dive was to a maximum depth of 72m, with a bottom time of 20 minutes, definitely not a bounce dive. And just like all the other GUE classes I've done, the progression from day 1 to day 5 was astonishing. Tasks which took us 20 minutes to complete as a team on day 1 were completed in less than 2 minutes on day 5, and in mid water whilst dealing with actual decompression obligations. By the end of the class I started to feel like a dive ninja again.

However, the question still remains, am I a depth junkie?

Were we in court the case for the prosecution looks strong. I have a qualification to a nominal depth of 75m. Here in NZ trimix is very expensive and difficult to obtain. At many of the main dive locations what you see at 20m will be identical to what you will see at 70m. Case closed? But let's look at this a different way. There are dive sites in NZ which are deep – particularly many unexplored wrecks. Obtaining trimix is no longer an issue – I have part shares in a portable compressor and can now blend and recycle my own. And right on NZ's doorstep is the southwest pacific, an area with many deep wrecks from the Second World War. I started diving because I wished to explore – I still wish to explore. Case dismissed!

To summarise, GUE Tech 2 is a great class and has opened up an area of the underwater world previously out-of-bounds to me. It was not cheap and it was not easy – but for someone who values the quality of their time underwater this course is priceless. I would recommend it to all budding explorers.

