



Course Report: TDI Adv Nitrox and Decompression Procedures, December 2009

Jamie Obern

It's 6am on Thursday morning and my day is starting. Ahead of me lies a 650km drive followed by a 3 hour teaching session. For a few moments I wonder whether it would not be easier to do as my mum keeps suggesting and get a 'proper job', but I forget about all that once I realise that the sun is shining and it looks like another beautiful day to continue being my own boss.

The reason I have to drive 650km - I am waking up in Auckland but due in Wellington by mid afternoon, to teach the very first TDI course that Splash Gordon have run. Unfortunately as this is the first course and only one of the students has any prior technical training, I'm providing all of the diving equipment - back plates, wings, double tanks, stage bottles and lots of regs. This is the only reason why I'm driving for 8 hours instead flying for 1 and with all this gear my poor car is looking forward to the drive even less than me.

Thankfully SH1 is empty and by 3pm I'm in Welly.

We start the course with the usual introductions and paperwork and then I go straight into the theory session. We go through a very quick review of nitrox (one of the course pre-reqs is basic nitrox) and then I run an equipment session. Everyone on the course is either full-time or part-time staff at the shop, but even so the gear is all new. I explain the double tank set up; why I prefer manifolded doubles to two independent tanks; why a back-plate and wing; how the regs are set up; why we have a long hose; why why why - a reason for everything. Finally by 9pm I let them all go home - unsure of who looks most tired, me or them.

Friday morning 8.30am and it's time to start diving. For once Welly is not living up to it's windy reputation and conditions are perfect for diving Mermaids Kitchen. Having dived in Welly the previous weekend Andy had warned me to expect rubbish visibility, so when I slipped below the water to 8m vis I was pleasantly surprised. The plan for this first session was to let everyone get comfortable with all the new gear and then to try some of the drills - valve shut downs, out of gas, swapping to back-up masks whilst neutrally buoyant, SMB deployment and various positioning kicks - quite a lot for a first dive. Everyone looked pretty tired by the end of it all.

Our second dive was very much a repeat of dive one, although this time I had added in stage bottles for everyone, with some associated skills - drop/retrieve and gas switch. For a first day this may seem like a lot, but this is a very comprehensive course and to get everything done to the required standards makes for a very intense experience. If you are wondering how intense let me give you an example: during the skills an inquisitive orca came right up to us and the only person who saw it (apart from the 100 or so people watching from the shore) was Pete. Glad to see that I can hold students attention when I'm teaching. We finish our day with more theory.

TECH DIVE New Zealand

Saturday morning and I awake to howling winds and rain – another day living the dream? – typical windy Welly weather I wonder. Thankfully it is an offshore wind so again we can enjoy great conditions at Mermaids Kitchen. I've scheduled two more dives, although on this day we'll be heading out quite a bit further - to a depth of at least 15m. I want to run through ascents, mid water gas switches, buddy breathing deco regs, free-flowing deco regs, plus a lot of problem solving exercises. We also have more theory to run through – this time dive planning.

By the end of the day when we've gone through all the skills with multiple ascents and problems we've completed almost 200 minutes in the water over the course of both dives. I'm not sure about the students but I know I'll have no problem getting to sleep.

Sunday morning and our luck can't hold for a third day. The wind is howling, the sea has a significant chop on top of the swell and somehow we've got a 30m boat dive to complete. We defer to Dave's experience and wait for a couple of hours as the wind is supposed to drop. I take the opportunity to run through decompression theory – I can tell everyone is pleased by that..! Unfortunately the wind doesn't drop, so we head out looking for the most sheltered spot we can find. The mood on the boat is one of nervous anticipation: time for everyone to put what they've learned during the last few days into practice.

Kitting up is interesting and definitely a team exercise. We decide to enter the water without our stages and then have then passed down to us – I do a lot of swimming between the buoy and the boat – but eventually we are all ready. We descend into peace and quiet and yet more good vis, 8-10m on a dive site called sharks tooth. Clearly Andy had a bum deal last weekend. After 30 mins at 30m Abbey hits her turn pressure and I call the dive. We pop a couple of SMBs to the surface and start our staged ascent, with stops at 15m, 12m, 9m, 6m, a gas switch and a final stop at 3m. Everything runs like clockwork.

Back on the surface the weather has deteriorated further and recovery onto the boat is a challenge. Dave impresses us all with his boat handling skills and once onboard everyone relaxes, looking forward to hot drinks back at the shop. However, we're not quite done for the day. Dave casually asks how much air I have left and whether I would like to see the F69, as we are passing right by it on our way home. I can't pass up such an opportunity and so three of us are quickly back into the water. As a wreck it's more like the Tui than the Waikato or Canterbury, but it still makes for an interesting dive. Seeing all the damage and knowing that it has only been down for 4 years I marvel at the power of the ocean down here and how lucky we are up north.

We end the day with – you guessed it, more theory.

So how did everyone do? Well, despite all the skills and theory that we've already covered, the course isn't even over yet. Part 2 runs in mid January, so keep an eye out for that.