

Minato Maru Trip Report: 26th December 2010

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You know how it is, there's always something else you need to be doing and things get put off. This is a wreck I've wanted to dive for several years, in fact ever since I first heard about it in early 2007, but somehow I've never found the right time. But on Boxing Day we finally got organised and headed out from Half-Moon marina to go searching.



The Minato Maru was a Japanese Long-line fishing vessel, which sailed out from Auckland harbour on 6th Sept 1983. According to the records it was a clear and clam day, but somehow whilst motoring at full speed she rammed into Shearer Rock, one mile east of Tiritiri-Matangi Island. I don't know the rest of the story, but what was bad luck for them is good luck for wreck divers. The wreck is intact, in only 30m of water and easily accessible from Auckland - in Mike's boat it was about 30mins.

We had been told that the coordinates given in Spot 'X' were actually 100m out, but we got some marks off a friend who had dived the wreck before - they were spot on. (If you've ever searched in vain for an elusive wreck and ended up diving HMNZS Seabed you'll know how wonderful it is to have good marks!)

SOUTH: 36 41 129

EAST: 174 55 044

After a couple of passes over the wreck using the echo sounder we were certain we had found it and dropped our shot. (We landed it just behind the wheel house - pretty good.) If anyone else is planning to go searching for this wreck it is easy to see on the echo sounder as the rest of the seabed is flat and the wreck stands up at least 10m in some places.

Whilst Mike looked after the boat Mel and I got kitted up, excited by the 5m+ vis and blue water. Unfortunately the vis didn't last, as we dropped below 9m a cloud of brown water enveloped us and vis dropped to 1-2m maximum. Both of us had the same thought - this is just like a bad day in the UK. As we reached the bottom we also hit a couple of thermoclines, with our computers showing a drop in temperature from 20 to 17 degrees. Unfortunately it didn't help the vis any.

Mel took the lead and headed off towards the bow, although in the bad vis she wasn't sure where she was. After 5 minutes she signalled for me to lead, as I had looked at pictures of the wreck before. Thankfully the wreck is sitting almost upright, with just a 10 degree list to starboard, which makes navigation fairly easy once you start to recognise things. I guided us towards the wheel house and taking it in turns we had a look inside, admiring the huge crayfish lurking in a corner. Just behind the wheel house there was an open hatchway, presumably leading down to the lower deck - but as this was our first dive we didn't go any further.



Photo courtesy of Bob Hogg

From the wheel house we headed further aft, passing several more open hatches which definitely lead to the lower deck areas. Again we didn't attempt to enter any of these – in back mounted double cylinders it would definitely be tight – probably far better to go with side-mount. However, the rear section of this vessel is far more open and we could both swim inside at this point, exiting through the large opening at the back, which you can clearly see in the picture above.

By the time we surfaced Mike was getting desperate to know what it was like down below, so for the second dive Mel and Mike dived together whilst I sunbathed. This time Mel took the lead and showed Mike around the same area we had visited on the previous dive. By the end of their dive the current had started to pick up a little, but nothing too bad.

Points to note if you want to do this dive. Firstly be aware of all the old lines strewn around the wreck, plus a fair bit of fishing line abandoned by anglers. Be careful with your anchor - we saw several newish 'lost' anchors and I had to go down at the end to release our anchor. Also plan your dive for high water slack as this should give you the best vis. According to someone who has dived the wreck several times you do occasionally get very good vis - we're just not sure how occasionally that is.

We'll definitely be going back to dive this wreck again, although I will be taking my side-mount gear so I can get through the hatches to the lower deck - anyone keen to follow me?

Finally -I'd like to say a big thanks to Mike for a great day out. Apart from the very long wait to get out to this wreck it's good to finally get here.