

Trip Report: August “Skive Dives”, 18/19th August 2009

On Tuesday night, eight of us gathered at Tutukaka marina around 8pm. Earlier in the week, I was watching the weather forecasts like a hawk - hoping, and wondering, whether the conditions would play ball. They did. There was not a breath of wind and the reports from earlier in the day were that the ocean was calm. Myself, Jamie, Mel, James, Matt, Mike, Chris and Aaron loaded all of our gear on to Bright Arrow with a sense of barely concealed excitement and Luke eased the boat out of her berth and cruised out into the moonless night.

The ocean was like an oil slick, dark and thick with just gentle lapping sounds as it caressed the boat's hull as we moved through the water. The Four Seasons are going through my head..... "oh what a night", "I was never going to be the same".... I couldn't believe how lucky we had been.

Arriving at the location of the Waikato, it took a while to find the buoy and moor up. And then we were in to it. James and I hit the water first and descended down into the dark waters. Shortly the wreck appeared out of the gloom. it took a while to get properly orientated, the lights only showed glimpses of well known features and superstructure of the shipped lurked in the shadows giving rise to a very mysterious feel. We slipped into the hanger like two ghosts from the past, making our way carefully past the dangling cables and through into the confines of the ship. Handling the camera and strobes took some patience, and without the glimmering light shining through hatchways and portholes to guide us, we relied on our knowledge of the wreck to slowly work our way through to the break. Rising up a couple of decks we made our way back to the hanger area, passing Chris and Mike on the way who had barely suppressed grins on their faces. As we neared the hanger, James indicated that he was ready to head up, and after a brief discussion he made his way up the line. I carried on spiraling my way through the superstructure, with loads of bare metal showing it appears that some of the recent storms have caused more damage. I took some shots as I went, and then caught the lights of Jamie, Mel and Matt in the distance. We crossed paths and then I was alone again in the dark. A quick check of gas, 100 bar left in the twinset and 25 minutes of no deco time left - you've gotta love nitrox! I slowly made my way back to the line, and ascended leaving the wreck below in her solitude with the fish and dark, the Four Seasons still playing in my head but with a few changes to the lyrics - "Oh, what a dive. You know I didn't even know her name, But I was never gonna be the same, What a lady, what a dive".



The next morning dawned calm again, and we loaded all of our gear on to Calypso for the trip out to the Knights. Luke was our skipper again, what a legend - working till late the night before, then in the shop filling tanks at 6am! As usual, I snoozed on the way out to the islands - we had hopes of getting to some specific sites, and had slipped the notion to Luke on the way out. We ended up at the Tunnel for our first dive, which gave Jamie and Mel plenty of opportunity for their dive plan - with a twinset full of trimix each, they headed through the arch and hit their max depth



TECH DIVE New Zealand



of 57m and spaced their deco schedule out returning through the arch. James and I followed them, with our max depth of around 30m coinciding with Jamie and Mel's first deco stop. Looking out of the arch, the blue of the water filtered in giving a real sense of darkness to the environment - yet the encrusting life was prolific, somehow clinging on to an existence with what little light filters into the arch.

As we finished our dive, the other customers were just starting theirs - giving us plenty of time to enjoy some hot soup and plan our second dive. A quick chat with Luke and he agreed to at least have a look at Taravana Cave - but with northwesterly winds forecast he didn't want to promise everything. When the other divers returned, we upped the anchor and cruised around the islands.

As we passed by Matt's crack and through the gap between the islands we surveyed the scene.... it didn't look like the wind had picked up, and Luke agreed to drop us off at Taravana after which he would anchor in Butterfish Bay.

A quick chat with Chris, Mike and Aaron who were keen for a cavern dive in the cave. Everyone had plenty of lights, and were fully aware of the limits of their dive. Myself, James, Mel, Jamie and Matt had plenty of gas and were planning to go to the back of the cave. James, Matt and I descended first and headed into the main entrance of the cave at around 30m. The title of Martin Farr's book really says it all, "the darkness beckons". There is something primeval about caves, that either repulse you or call you in. For us, the call was strong and we slid gracefully in to the embrace of the cave.

The darkness hits you straight away, and the light from the entrance quickly dwindles from an intense blue, to a gentle glow.... to nothing. The only light was what we carried with us, with James' and Matt's lights every now and again crossing my field of vision as we cruised ever on in to the dark. As we got deeper into the cave, the walls narrowed and became devoid of life. It takes about 15 minutes of swimming to reach the back of the cave, and as we neared it a number of huge snapper loomed out of the darkness. So stern, they looked upset that their solitude had been disturbed. At the back of the cave, I handed off my stage cylinder to Matt and had a look at the crack wondering how much further it might be possible to get.... but after a couple of metres it narrowed to the impassable. We turned, and headed for the light - passing Mel and Jamie on the way.

As the glow of the entrance started to appear, we turned into the secondary entrance. The character of the cave changes almost instantly - the main cave has a huge vaulted ceiling, but the secondary entrance is low and almost oppressive. It is still deep, at this stage we'd spent nearly 30 minutes at 30m or deeper and the lightness called us forward to our deco stops. At the exit, we headed left towards Butterfish Bay and as we completed our deco we were joined by Mel and Jamie, five big grins after an awesome dive.

Many thanks to Luke and the rest of the D!T crew, who really made this a skive dive to remember.

