

HMNZS Waikato Mapping Trip Report: 3rd April 2011

By Christian Stimson

The omens were good as Mike and I sat eating pizza in Mission Bay going over the Waikato plans. The list of unresolved areas or 'big picture' things to validate on Decks 1, 2 and 3 was now getting very short. Deck 4, the bow and the Engine Room/Boiler Room were a separate task list and on the radar for this winter.

And the weather was lining up nicely – SwellMap giving around 50cm on Sunday morning, with 5kn offshore breezes and both slowly building in the afternoon, with clear skies and temperatures in the low 20's. So a quick ring around got Tony and Astrid signed up without much trouble! Chris B was fence sitting – or sofa sitting as it turned out, with a hang over. No sense of commitment, these nippers! Mike booked us on the boat with D!T and we were good to go! A last minute check that the clocks actually went back on the Sunday morning meant the 05:00 shake out wasn't too painful. Living north of the Bridge has its upsides sometimes as Mike bemoaned his 1hour earlier start! So Saturday was spent fettling, charging lights and generally prep'ing all the gear.



The drive up treated me to the most spectacular sunrise – they don't tell you about this on the PADI Open Water course when discussing the benefits of diving! I just had to take this pic on the Waipou flats. The other three were driving up in Tony's car and, having overtaken me at Warkworth, I knew were out of earshot as I sang along to the radio!

We all got to Tuts by 08:00, and setting up our kit on the Henrick J, we chatted over the laminated plans Mike had prepared. He wanted to get into the Sonar and Operations Control rooms to document the more complicated cabinets and consoles that had so far defeated all attempts to map out! Astrid buddy'd with

him to record the event with her new HD video camera and housing – jeez, you gotta love Trade Me!

Tony would give me a guided tour of the Engine Room and Boiler Rooms – spaces I'd not yet ventured into and that were a big empty void in the 3D model we were putting together. So my aim was to get an overview of the machinery and pipes in there, and come back on a subsequent dive to start sketching it out.

Once on the buoy, we splashed and planned to descend as a team with Astrid filming from above. We settled in on the hangar deck, confirmed all were 'OK' and off we went. Tony and I dropped down the torpedo loading hatch into Deck 2 then in to the Engine Room on Deck 3. Mike and Astrid headed of forwards. Mike reports with a grin that he had an 'excellent dive' yet made little progress in clarifying some key points – mmmm, methinks Trimix is the answer! Astrid's footage is very sharp, but she tells us the task loading is significant, especially when trying to keep up with and film Mike ferreting around.

In the machinery spaces Tony did an excellent job of leading the way, yet staying out of my way and showing me the key chunks of hardware. He reports some of the overhead ducting has settled to the floor following recent storms. We cut through into the Boiler Room through the emergency hatch low on the port side and



had a good look around. Tony signalled he was coming up on 5 minutes of no deco left, so we exited through the cut-out high and forward on the starboard side.

From there we ducked into Deck 3 forward of the Boiler Room and cruised through some spaces I'd not been in previously, noting some hatches down into Deck 4 for next time. Exiting under the Bridge we swam up and aft, back the hangar, meeting Astrid and Mike on the way – perfect! Tony and I managed to pull off a rather smooth ascent, even if we do say so ourselves. Back on board we saw that Tony had encountered some form of marine life that had taken a fancy to him – a significant histamine reaction around his lips that later resulted in a trip to hospital to be checked out. He's all OK now, but I wish he'd let us post a picture of him.....

Topsides at Schnappa's were the perfunctory bowl of chips and hot chocolate, followed by topping up the twins, pumping the bilges and we're off out again. The breeze was getting up by now, as was the swell. The plan this time was for us to map out the bow break on the aft section and get a good idea of what was open, blocked, twisted metal or bulkhead. Astrid was to film some of my sketching the break, but first she'd enter the wreck on the port side of Deck 2 and film the three of us coming in and dropping down to Deck 3 through a floor hatch.

Well, they say if you don't have a plan, it can't go wrong.....how true! We swam outside the 01 Deck super structure to the bridge and dropped down and round the corner – into pea soup! Viz dropped from around 5-8 metres to less than 1 metre in the time it took to swim from starboard deck edge to under the middle of the bridge. It was like a good day's diving in the UK! We all clung to the bow break while deciding how to proceed. I let go to turn to signal to Astrid, only to look back and not be able to see the wreck that I'd just be holding on to! Half a fin kick and there it was. Phew, this was not good!

Tony stuck his nose inside to see if conditions got any better further in, and came out wagging his finger. I decided to go a little further, using a rack welded to wall as a handhold and visual reference. I pulled myself two or three armfuls in along the rack. I reckon my fin tips were just inside the break, and looking back I could just about make out the loom of the opening, but none of the can lights that I knew were there somewhere. Looking forward I could see my outstretched hand but not much beyond it. There goes that idea. So Astrid and I headed back to the hangar and she filmed in and around, practicing scooting through the overhead hatches while filming and not getting hung up – which is actually very tricky. I had a good look at the inside of the hangar roof, something not often looked at. We met up with Mike and Tony as they wound their way back to the line, and ascended together.

Back ashore, we assessed what we had just encountered. While we didn't get the mapping done that was on the list, we'd checked out a few other places that actually posed yet more questions! Mike had taken measurements over time to observe the angle of the wreck. He has determined that over the last year or so she's gone from 32 degrees to 42 degrees of list to port. We still have a load to do, and we're hoping to put some time in over the winter as the viz improves. There's still the entire bow section and Engine/Boiler rooms to map as well as aspects of Deck 4 – so plenty of dives required. We learned from previous weekend trips that throwing manpower at it does work, and with a co-ordinated plan, areas assigned and a methodology in the reporting we can crack through quite a lot very effectively. So anyone interested in joining the project please feel free to contact Jamie or Mel, we'd love the help!