



Course Report: PADI Wreck, 21-22nd November 2009

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The PADI Wreck course taken by Dean, Aidan and Aaron was taught in Tech Dive manner, which fulfils all of PADI requirement but places additional emphasis on teamwork. The blind line following drills are not part of the PADI wreck course. The Tech Dive mentality is that just meeting the standards is not always sufficient and as the level of skills of the team were higher than the average wreck students, these extra skills were added to the dives after the official course had been finished.

One of the great things about diving the Canterbury wreck in Northland is not greatly worry about whether the weather will be good. If it's bad on one side, then we dive the other side of the peninsula. But, driving up, it was super to see clear skies and know the Canterbury waited.

Dive planning was carried out by our instructor, Mel, on Saturday morning. She gathered up Aidan, Aaron and I to brief us about the aims and plans of our PADI Wreck Diving Course - with special emphasis on teamwork. The first dive would be to reconnoitre the wreck so we could relate the schematics we studied with the real-life layout of the area of our dives. It also gave us a chance to get dive-refreshed and sort out any equipment issues. If all went well and time/air was okay, she might run one line along the starboard gangway so we could see the method.

Dive one got off to a good start with my usual fast drop landing on the top of the helicopter hanger on deck 1. I was working on a new BCD so had over-weighted (found out later I dropped like a stone). We had a look around, watching for layout, access points and areas of interest or concern. All was fine, so Mel ran a line along the gangway and we trainees got to swim alongside it with a loose circle of finger and thumb. Up and back on land and Mel gave me a gentle "what sort of teamwork was that?" grilling. Teams go down together and come up together, of course. ☹ Aw, shucks yes, m'am! Won't happen again.

Dive 2 was planned for the designated leader to run line with the rest of us following behind until he signalled to return. After learning the roles of each of the TEAM-members, it was simple for us to swap roles and try the equipment. Underwater, we all had the opportunity to see just how difficult a simple reel can act. But, it was fun and we all came back up to Dive Northland's helping arms hauling onboard our weighted BCDs so we had an easy climb aboard. Good food, easy boating and they haul/carry gear, too!

Back on land, our group (TEAM) again went through the PADI manuals to check that all were familiar with the information and now had a better understanding of the realities of equipment use under water. Mel went over mapping theory with us and tossed in some personal anecdotes to make the training more realistic and entertaining. Then, back outside to lay lines around trucks, bushes and other things to get that sea-worthy "feel". There was lots of laughter as we encountered bushes and fence gates. Then, Mel pointed out areas to consider if these were under-water lines. Things like lines leading under obstructions or into what might appear a blind or tight hole if one was silted-out and couldn't see the obstruction. After being shown how the leader-on-the-line needed to feel forward and ward-off unseen



protrusions and discussing the dangers of being number 2 and how to protect one's head, we were ready for a trial "blind" run. As the three of us circled the trucks and yard, the laughter from other diving friends warned us we were looking strange. Sure enough, on finishing (in about 9 times as long as the time it took with our eyes open) we learned the elephant appearance of the front man was as strange as the bent-over bodies of the hind end guys. But, we were now ready for blind line-following!

Dive 3, on Sunday, went as planned. We mapped the hanger, laid lines and were shown some of the resulting hazards. With sufficient time/air, we got to feel "blindly" at junctions with our eyes shut. Up top and over lunch, Mel continued with more briefings. Our various map-drawing skills gave us all much laughter; but, all were sufficiently similar and understandable that we could remember what/where/accesses and other interests. I was personally surprised at my concerns about not being able to check air-levels with monotonous regularity. Diving blindly certainly has many challenges.

Dive 4 planned for a good run along lines with eyes shut to test our reactions to an extended run. We went along well until the leader lost a line hold. He handled it well by returning to me (as I was number 2 man) and working along my arms to the line. Then resettling himself as leader. The biggest problem I had was trying to figure why I was suddenly feeling somebody's head when I knew it should be a leg or waist. Very strange, this blind line-following; but, greatly enjoyable fun while in training mode.

Back onshore, Mel gave us a de-briefing and expanded on more benefits of working as a team. Sharing planning and outcomes certainly expands the enjoyment of the exercise. The amount of laughter as we talked over our experiences and reactions highlighted the just-plain-good-fun part of the PADI Wreck Dive Course. I recommend it.