

Tech Dive NZ

Newsletter September 2011

www.techdivenz.com, info@techdivenz.com

WELCOME TO OUR MONTHLY NEWSLETTER



Welcome to the September edition of our monthly TDNZ newsletter. This has probably been our quietest diving month for a long time, but that doesn't mean it hasn't been interesting. In case you're wondering about the picture - it's a satellite image of Hurricane Irene, which hit the east coast of America at the end of August. And just about the time this picture was taken was when Jamie was supposed to be flying out of Boston airport - his flight was cancelled of course. Jamie was fine, but had to spend an

extra week in America whilst the backlog of cancelled passengers was cleared. Thankfully he could stay at his sister's house, unlike some passengers who slept on the airport floor.

But that's not all Jamie has been up to this month, he's also been across to Italy to visit a factory which makes scooters (DPVs). His stated reason for the visit was to do the technical maintenance course, but with the factory located conveniently close to Venice we're sure it must have been really tough for him. (Hmm, Italy in the summertime - oddly enough we don't feel too sad about the hurricane!) However, if you have any questions about scooters he apparently knows it all now.

Looking forward to the next few months and we are back to full speed again. We have our final 10x10x10 weekend, 2 GUE Fundies classes, a trip to the Lermontov, the Auckland marathon and a week of cave surveying and teaching a full cave class - all happening before the end of October. Plus it's Jamie's 40th birthday as well. Things are going to be busy. In November there is the Oceanz conference and in December we have our big Blue Creek Expedition.

Finally of course we have to mention the Rugby World Cup which has started at last. Here at TDNZ we're hoping for an All Black's vs England final, preferably won by

LOCATION HIGHLIGHTING A GREAT NZ DIVE SITE

This month our featured dive site is again a location more associated with the famous above water scenery than the underwater world. In case you haven't recognised the picture, we're talking about Napier, specifically Pania Reef, which lies only a short boat trip from Napier harbour. We first dived the reef in 2007 and were pleasantly surprised by what we found.

The reef is about 1,5km long, with depths ranging from 3m - 18m. Visibility in the summer can be as good as 20m, but you need the right weather conditions. Visibility of 3-5m is more normal. The best conditions are usually found in the summer, with offshore winds from the west preferred. Winter diving can be a bit hit and miss due to the exposed nature of this part of the east coast, but can be excellent when conditions are right.

The fish life is quite diverse, with all the usual species represented - we saw leather jackets, Red Moki, Kahawai, Kingfish and more. The shallowest part of the reef is usually covered in mussels, however it is the many vertical faces and crevices which are most worthy of exploring. There is a huge variety of invertebrates, jewel anemones, sponges, hydroids, bryozoans and other encrusting life. Macro photographers will have a ball.



Locating the reef is pretty easy - it starts 0.5km due north of the Port of Napier and runs to the north east. Both ends of the reef are approximately marked by large shipping buoys, installed to keep all the container ships safely away from having an extended stay in the bay. Unfortunately these buoys have been very successful, so there are no wrecks to dive in the area. Most boats which head out to dive the reef leave from the inner harbour.

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DIVING TRIP OF THE MONTH

Great Barrier Reef - Australia July 26 - 29th

A good diving instructor does more than simply teach the basics. They act as equipment counsellors, explain further training opportunities and most important of all, try to convey their passion and enthusiasm for diving. Done well this last attribute is surprisingly powerful and often has a lasting effect on students, particularly when an exciting diving destination has been highlighted. Although more than 20 years ago now, I still remember my NZ based Open Water instructor waxing lyrical about the Great Barrier Reef. He showed a few grainy washed out pictures he'd taken (no digital cameras or computer software available back then), but it was enough to firmly place the GBR on my 'to do' list. After completing my backpacking tour of NZ my next stop was Australia and I very nearly got to the GBR, getting as far as a couple of dives at Byron Bay (close to the border between Queensland and NSW) before being thwarted by massive flooding. Unfortunately my time was limited and I had to leave Australia and head back to the UK before the floods subsided. Although I continued to dive regularly in the years that



followed, the GBR somehow slipped down the priority list, almost forgotten as I explored other sites around the world.

However, whilst planning a recent trip I realised our route would take us in and out of Cairns and because we were using two separate airlines it was possible to break our trip at no cost. Hmm – we're in Cairns, we have enough time to extend our holiday and it's by far the most popular place for heading out to the reef – finally I had the perfect opportunity to deal with one of my longest

standing 'to dos.' As several of our friends had visited this area before we asked for their advice and booked a live-aboard. Diving in this way has three major advantages – you avoid the crowds, you generally get more time underwater and you get to see reefs which are much further out, which usually means better visibility and better coral conditions due to less diver damage. We booked a four day trip through Deep Sea Diver's Den in Cairns, heading out on a boat called Taka Dive. Our itinerary would give us a maximum of 10 dives and take us as far north as Cod Hole. (To get out to Osprey Reef you need a 5 day trip.)

We joined the boat at the main wharf in Cairns at about 4pm on the first day. After finding a spot for our dive gear and getting a safety brief the boat headed out for the overnight passage up to Cod Hole. There was a stiff breeze and some swell, particularly when we were outside of the reef, but as much of the trip is in the lee of the reefs it was easy to get some sleep. The next morning we awoke at Cod Hole, raring to get in the water. As usual the first dive of any trip is set aside as a shake down, but because Mel and I had been diving only 3 days earlier we were able to head off and enjoy the whole dive. The visibility was great, there was only a very slight current and navigation was easy.

The second dive of the trip was at the same

site and was the signature dive of this 4 day trip – the Cod Feed. Everyone goes in together and forms a big circle in the sand, at about 10m, while the guide feeds the large Potato Cod, trying to ensure they get the food and not his fingers. During the dive the guide moves around the circle bringing the food with him, so everyone gets a close up view of the feeding cod. After about 15mins everyone was free to head off and explore the reef, although we hung around for a bit watching as the smaller fish cleaned up the scraps.

And then we started our long trip back towards Cairns, diving at various spots along the way. We did two more dives on this second day, one of which was a night dive. On our third day we did two dives at Steve's Bommie, probably the most colourful spot on the trip and also where we saw the most life. We ended day 3 with another night dive, which had some entertainment, with the



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small inquisitive white tips scaring several of the more nervous divers when they suddenly appeared out of the darkness. On day 4 we did our last two dives on the reefs closest to Cairns and then headed back into port, getting in at about 2pm. This gave the crew only a couple of hours to clean, refuel and re-provision, before the next lot of guests arrived at 4pm.

The Highlights

First and most important for me, I saw sea life I hadn't seen before; a sinuous olive sea-snake, several new species of reef fish and the Potato Cod (for which Cod Hole is famously named). These fish were impressive, especially up close during the feeding dive. And we also got to see quite a lot of sharks, both during the day and at night. Although I've seen sharks hundreds of times before, they are always wonderful to watch. On one of our dives on Steve's Bommie we were lucky enough to have a couple of Grey Reef Sharks circling us for the entire 60min dive. On one of our two night dives we were joined by a big school of snapper, grouper, trevally and other predators, which used the light from our torches to hunt the now sleepy day time prey. Once I had seen a couple of small fish torn apart I took great care not to let my torch beam linger on any other small fish. It was also uplifting to see the coral in such good condition, particularly as the great visibility (30m+) allowed us to take in

large swathes of reef in one big panorama.

I also liked the organisation of the boat. The dive area is well arranged, giving everyone plenty of space, even with 18 paying guests and the crew all diving at the same time. We didn't have to dive in a group (something I passionately hate) and we had nitrox for all our dives – really great when you are doing 4 dives a day. Plus all the crew were very friendly, helpful and relaxed – and the food was good.

The Niggles

Of course everything can't be perfect and there were a few niggles. As an experienced diver I found the rules around the diving somewhat wearisome. Each dive was a maximum of 60mins duration, regardless of how much gas you had left and 50bar was the minimum reserve, even if you were simply exploring the very top of the reef in only a



couple of meters of water . (At one stage I thought they were trying to ensure I didn't overstay my time by giving me a 9 litre tank – but this got changed after a couple of dives.) And the 4th dive of the day was a maximum of 14m, regardless of what your computer or tables might allow. But the rule I disagree with most was the 'no reverse profiles rule', which is a Queensland government mandate. The problem with this rule is that although it is supposedly there for safety reasons it actually leads to dysfunctional and unsafe behaviour – with bounce profiles being recommended, simply to get a particular depth registered on your computer, so your next dive isn't restricted. Spending 15mins at 10m during the feeding dive, bouncing to 25m for a few seconds and then spending the rest of the dive above 15m doesn't really count as a 25m dive in my book....

However, my biggest issue with the trip was that although I got to see some new stuff, I was very disappointed by the general lack of life on the reef. Apart from a couple of isolated little spots the life was nowhere near as prolific as many spots I regularly dive in New Zealand and have dived elsewhere. The last two dives of the trip, on the reefs close to Cairns where the day boats go, were particularly dreadful – damaged coral, bad visibility, almost no life (except a couple of enormous green turtles) – which meant we ended the trip on a bit of a damp note, if



you pardon the pun. And don't look forward to getting the DVD at the end of the trip – although the footage is ok I think it is totally overpriced at AU\$120.

Other points

Although we did our trip during the period where Dwarf Minke Whales are usually spotted we weren't lucky enough to see any, but that's diving in my experience. Sometimes you get lucky sometimes you don't, I have no problems with that. On our trip back the weather was quite rough.....

This report continues on our website:

www.techdivenz.com/reports.html

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DIVING

WHAT'S COMING UP

GUE Fundamentals

October 20-24th [Auckland - Labour Day]

Learn how to back-kick, how to hover and why many of the world's dive ninjas all wear the same equipment configuration. This class is the gateway to all GUE training and an excellent starting point for would-be techies.



The course is a very intense 4 days, but you will have a great time and you will learn loads. In fact Jamie is so confident you will learn a lot he offers a money back guarantee: a full refund if you don't think the course was worthwhile. How good is that?

Please note, course numbers are strictly limited - this class has one space left.



10 x 10 x 10 - FINAL TRIP

September 24-25th

This is our final trip and also the trip where we'll find out who has won the free weekend - will it come right down to the wire and a mad rush to get in the water first? This trip is also Jamie's 40th birthday (he thinks he looks younger) so make sure you bring your best party clothes if you come along.

Cave diving live-aboard trip

October 4-6th

We are running a 3 day (mid-week) trip to the Poor Knights, specifically to target the caves. Our main aims are to do multiple dives in the longest two caves - Taravana and Scary, weather permitting. We will also be doing some full cave training dives and some surveying work in Taravana.

This is an excellent opportunity to explore the 'hidden' Poor Knights and/or get an insight into what Full Cave training involves. Due to the sheer size of Taravana, multiple dives are required in order to truly appreciate and explore it fully. Trips such as this one are the only practical way you can do this.

Mikhail Lermontov

October 14-17th

This is NZ's biggest and most totally awesome wreck dive! It has 12 decks, lots of artefacts and areas to explore and it's all located in a max. depth of only 37m - perfect. Having done 4 trips in the last year we've now learned how to access some of the wrecks best kept secrets - but they will remain a secret unless you come on this trip. Some of the areas you can visit include:

- Leningrad Restaurant
- Sadko Bar and Duty Free area
- Kitchens & Crew's Mess
- Swimming Pool and Neptune Bar
- Library, Cinema and Projection Room
- Bolshoi and Panorama Lounges
- Bridge, Captain's Cabin, Radio Room
- Gym & Sauna



Auckland Marathon

October 30th

Come and cheer for all the TDNZ club members who are running.



Oceanz Dive Conference - Tauranga

November 12-13th

This is NZ's only dedicated diving conference and exhibition and will be held at the Baycourt Complex in downtown Tauranga. There will be equipment and training providers exhibiting, a photography competition and a range of speakers, including Jamie from TDNZ. Hopefully this is the start of a great and regular NZ event. See page 4 for more details.

Blue Creek Resurgence

December 1-8th

Following our very successful exploration in February this year we are going back for another trip. We have divers visiting from all around the world for this trip so it's a great opportunity to pick their brains for advice and expertise. And don't worry if you're not a cave diver, we also need willing helpers for carrying stuff to and from the cave - it's only 1.7km each way so not too bad.....

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OCEANZ DIVING CONFERENCE



After a long absence NZ will soon be getting it's only dedicated diving conference and exhibition back again. Initially conceived by Dave Moran in 1974 this conference used to be one of the highlights of the NZ diving calendar, so it's great to see it returning. And if you go to see Dave's talk you'll get to hear about the history of this event.

Based at the Baycourt Complex in downtown Tauranga over the weekend of 12/13th Nov. This conference promises something for everyone, or all divers at least! There will be equipment manufacturers, wholesalers and retailers exhibiting, training organisations, conservation groups and dive clubs all represented. There will be a photography competition, diving events and a gala dinner. There is also an entire program of speakers, who will present on a wide variety of topics, including technical diving, conservation and environmental activism, free-diving and spear-fishing, commercial diving and more.

This should be a regular event in NZ, but in order to make it successful we need your support. Check out the website, get your tickets and tell your friends. We're going to be there - we hope you will be too.

LATEST UPDATES:

Photo competition prize pool is currently worth over \$11,000.

There are now 25 scheduled speaker presentations.

The August newsletter update is now available.

Speakers list (we will keep adding to this list as more speakers are confirmed.)

DARREN SHIELDS

Six times NZ Spear fishing Champion

DR ROGER GRACE

Marine biologist and photographer

PETE BETHUNE

Founder of Earthrace Conservation

PETE MESLEY

Photographer and Rebreather Instructor

STEVE TREWAVAS

National Director of the C.D.A.A

JAMIE OBERN

NZ's only GUE and Cave Instructor

RICHARD TAYLOR

Sales and training rep. for TDI Australia

DAVE MORAN

Editor of DiveNZ and founder of Oceanz.

SHANE WASIK

Technical diver and Oceanz'11 organiser

LT CDR LESLIE

Commanding officer RNZN Op. Dive Team

KEITH GORDON

Kiwi diving legend, RMS Niagara expert

SNR SGT ADAMS

Senior Officer Police National Dive Squad

10 x 10 x 10 WINTER DIVING CHALLENGE

We have reached the final weekend of our winter diving challenge. The standings are as follows:

7 sites done (already won a free day)

CHRISTIAN STIMSON

JOHN LEE

5 sites done (1 away from a free day)

HAMISH McKAY

4.5 sites done (1.5 away from a free day)

CHRIS BARDON

Remember everyone who dives 6 of the 10 sites gets a free days diving, AND the first person to complete all ten sites gets a FREE weekend.

And if we don't visit all 10 sites due to the weather, then the diver who has visited the most wins the free weekend - so given the scores above it is all still to play for. The last weekend should be fun!

FINAL WEEKEND

Saturday 24th and Sunday 25th September

The standout dive so far is still 12-Fathom Reef, but it is facing stiff competition from the caves - Taravana and Scary, which everyone seems to love.

www.oceanzdiveconference.com

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PROFILE

CLUB MEMBER OF THE MONTH

Here we profile one of our dive club regulars, find out a little more about them and see if they have any recommendations for us.

JAMES CROKER



Profession/job? Organic food retail

How many dives have you done? 1,500 ish (I stopped logging.)

What qualifications do you have? PADI Staff Instructor, GUE Tech 2, GUE Cave 1

When did you start diving? When I was 18, in 1993 (I know I look younger...)

Favourite NZ dive site? Blue Creek Resurgence. Cold, clear, challenging and very beautiful.

Which course would you most recommend? GUE Cave 1. I learned a huge amount during this class, more than you would think possible in 6 days. My comfort level in the overhead environment changed completely.

What do you love most about diving? Escaping to another world and the freedom that provides. Once underwater I can forget completely about any problems above the water and truly relax.

What do you do when you are not diving? I enjoy being out in the wilds tramping, otherwise you'll find me watching Aston Villa. [A rubbish UK soccer team - Ed.]

What is the next course you plan to take? GUE Cave 2

Where is your next planned dive trip? I do a lot of diving, but my next big trip will be Blue Creek Resurgence in December.

Any other information we should know about you? I recently got engaged - I guess I should have included that in the 'what I do when I'm not diving' section. I'm into conservation, both aquatic and terrestrial and I think I'm probably one of very few people who has actually seen a Kiwi (bird) in the wild. I helped DOC do some trapping and tagging on the West Coast (South Island)

DIVE FACTS

DID YOU KNOW?

Divers have been using scooters to help them cover large distances underwater for almost 100 years. The first well documented use of such vehicles was in 1918 when two men from the Regia Marina (Royal Italian Navy) rode a very primitive torpedo into the Austro-Hungarian naval base at Pola (Istria), where they sank the Austrian battleship Viribus Unitis and the freighter Wien using limpet mines.

However, the use of such naval attack methods truly came to worldwide attention on 19th December 1941, when another group of Italians attacked Alexandria harbour and badly damaged the UK battleship HMS Valiant and 8,000 ton freighter Queen Elizabeth,

causing them to sink in shallow water and putting them out of action for many months.

In 1955 a film starring John Mills was even made about such daring attacks - Above Us The Waves - which told the story of a Royal Navy mission to attack the German battleship Tirpitz. Although the film is loosely based on real life events, the actual naval operation, code-named 'Title' was a total failure, with both attack torpedoes being lost at sea prior to deployment.

Today scooters are used for a variety of non-military purposes, from cave exploration to environmental monitoring and simple pleasure dives. Although there are still some ride on scooters the majority of today's DPVs (diver propulsion vehicles) are tow behind models.

