

Horahora Power Station; trip Report: 17th October 2011

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Time seems to be moving quicker, which worries me, as it's exactly what my grandparents used to say. If I was feeling pessimistic I'd think it was because I was getting older, but as sunshine always makes me feel optimistic I'll console myself with the thought that I'm really just very busy. Whatever the reason our last trip to Horahora in May this year seems like a long time ago. Indeed Mike from Karapiro Cruises had been asking us to come back for another visit for a while, but with many other commitments and a few cancelled trips due to the weather it hadn't been possible. Thankfully when we awoke early Monday morning the weather was perfect – it was time to dive again.

We had three aims for this trip. Firstly Mike had discovered a local landowner who had a large scale architect's model of the old power station which we were going to have a look at. Secondly we wanted to get some decent photographs of the site, both for us to use and for Mike to be able to show to his customers. And finally I personally wanted to get further into some of the rooms, particularly the main generator room, to see how much was still visible and not buried under 64 years of silt.

We arrived just as Mike was mooring up – great timing – and once we had loaded the boat we headed straight off to have a look at the model. I wasn't sure what to expect, but it certainly wasn't a 4m x 4m model showing the entire valley, power station, slip ways, nearby buildings and other features exactly as it was prior to the whole area being flooded in 1947. As an aid to understanding what exactly we were diving on this was invaluable and I was able to finally make more sense of what I had seen last time. Tom who was going to be diving with me had not been on the last trip so I explained to him where we would be diving and what features to look out for. Since our last trip I had also discovered through more research that the locals had removed all the roofing materials whilst the station was slowly flooding – hence why we hadn't been able to use the sloping roof as a landmark last time. Together with the sonar images we had and my previous dives I was at last getting a good picture of the whole layout underwater. It was time to get wet.



Architect's model

As we had done last time our plan was to use the first dive to lay lines, explore and locate suitable areas for photos, which would be the focus of the second dive. Again we were using a surface marker buoy and reel to give us a guideline back to the surface and once we were both ready we descended about where we thought the centre of the main building would be. Dropping through the very silty water actually felt quite comfortable for me, as I knew what to expect, but I could still remember my first dive here so wondered how Tom felt.



Unfortunately the visibility wasn't as good as last time and with a slight current we drifted away from the building and found ourselves reaching a sloping bottom at 20m, not quite the start I'd hoped for. However by following the slope uphill we found the main building and after a couple of minutes I started recognising some of the features and knew where we were.

For the next 45mins Tom and I explored the outside of the building, tying off on interesting features, mentally making notes of what depths to find certain windows and exploring a little way inside. The visibility was terrible, only 1-1.5m and although I'm pretty certain I found the way into

the main part of the building we abandoned our inside excursions when Tom got his manifold tangled in old copper wires. This could have been a very nasty situation, but Tom followed his cave training, stayed calm and very gently extricated himself by reversing his movements. It was a great example of why we do lots of training. After another 10mins of exploring it was time to head back to the boat.

During our surface interval we discussed which photos we wanted and how to get them given the terrible conditions. We also enjoyed Mike's BBQ sausages and mugs of tea. Then it was time to dive again.

We spent another 45mins underwater on this second dive, taking lots of pictures and at the end recovering our lines. Again this was another good example of why we train hard, as the last thing you want in low visibility is more silt and bad communications. However, with a good plan, good technique and an understanding of what Tom (who was taking the pictures) needed me to do we were able to get several good shots.



The glass is stained, but it's definitely a window pane.



Old electrical fittings



Our modern cave lines leading from an old electrical insulator

So what next?

Clearly we still have plenty more dives to do on this site. As a part of NZ's rich pioneering history I really want to get some good photos as a record, before the site decays any further. However for that we need good visibility, so all we can do is be patient and wait. Of course that doesn't mean we stop researching – in fact only a couple of days ago we were in contact with someone who might be able to get us building blue-prints. Things are going to remain exciting for a while yet.