

## Trip Report: Poor Knights Trimix Diving, 25<sup>th</sup> April 2010

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Whenever I dive deeper at the Poor Knights the visibility gets better. Even on days when the visibility is awesome in the shallows it is still more awesome at depth – and whilst that isn't the only reason to go deep it does make for a superb experience. This Anzac Day at the Knights was no exception – at 45m I could clearly see the surface and the fish life cruising along the wall above me – I was buzzing even without narcosis!

Mel and I were diving with Dive! Tutukaka, aboard El Tigre with Matt and several other of the Dive Centre staff who were enjoying a day out. Also diving with Mel and I was Hemi, grabbing some last 'non-working' scenic dives before he heads back to Malta. Amazingly given that he's been at D!T for 5 years we still managed a new site for him and us – our first dive: Giant's Staircase.

We anchored on Landing Bay Pinnacle, which is a great dive in itself, but also provides easy access to Taravana Cave and Giant's Staircase where we wanted to dive – something for everyone in other words. As we entered the water and swam out across the surface we knew it was going to be a cracker of a dive – the ocean was that perfect shade of blue that sets all divers and dreamers hearts racing. The water temperature was still a lovely 19 degrees and there were plenty of fish checking us out. As we drifted slowly down the wall I felt supremely relaxed – you don't really get more perfect conditions for technical diving.



In case you were wondering the name Giant's Staircase comes from the profile that the underwater wall has as it juts out from the island – like a series of steps that a big person, a giant possibly, might use. The wall ends in a white sand bottom at about 45-50m and is covered in growth and life. As you swim northwards, away from the pinnacle, the wall becomes less sheer as you enter Landing Bay itself, although you are still at 40m on the sand. Heading southwards towards Taravana Cave the wall remains sheer and the bottom drops away until you reach the spur that leads to the pinnacle itself. Basically navigation is easy.

As we were using double tanks and EANx50 deco bottles we had the luxury of plenty of time at depth – time to enjoy the view and simply meander along taking it all in. If you are thinking that maybe trimix isn't for you – well how about 25mins at an average depth of 40m in spectacular vis and without any other people? That said, although I spent the majority of the dive almost in slow motion I did have a sudden burst of enthusiastic speed when a Bronzie came over to check us out – again something that is far more common on deeper dives.

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Finally to round the dive off perfectly, just as Mel and I did our gas switch at 21m a small Green Turtle came over to see what we were up to – only my second ever turtle sighting at the Knights and Mel's first. You know it was a good dive without me even mentioning the stingrays, morays and other colourful life.



Our second dive was also a new dive site for Mel and I: Jan's Tunnel – and yes you guessed it, the site is named after (extended drum roll) - a tunnel. Not that we started at the tunnel, but instead headed north again along the bottom of the wall, which met the sand at 40m. As before the three of us cruised slowly along taking everything in, although this time we spent more time looking out across the sand rather than up at the wall. The Long-tailed Stingrays were clearly having a committee meeting of some sort as there were dozens of them zipping back and forth – the most we counted at one time was 8. I even had a male short tailed ray head straight at me, possibly thinking I was something female and for more interesting, before recognising me as a boring human being.

We completed the bottom section of our dive at the base of the wall (again 25mins at 40m) and then did the majority of the ascent portion and gas switch on the pinnacle just south of the tunnel, which is a far more interesting way to ascend than the normal blue water ascents that most technical dives end with. But it gets better, for our extended 6m stop we were able to explore inside the tunnel itself – which is of course the main reason for diving this site. Once through the tunnel the open pool at the back is one of the few places on the island where you can surface and look up to see trees and soil just above you – actual living land rather than the rocky cliffs that predominate elsewhere. It's very cool and it feels a bit like you've stumbled upon a hidden place - definitely a very different dive site from most of the others at the islands. We will definitely do it again.

So there you have it – trimix diving at it's easiest. Thanks to Sam and Neil for looking after us and all I can say is I hope you don't miss New Zealand too much Hemi.