

## Trip Report: Matai Bay, 10-12<sup>th</sup> April 2009

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The Easter break saw six divers (Jamie, Andy, Natacha, James, Matt and Cas) head to the far north for a weekend of diving in Matai Bay, a wonderfully relaxing weekend with Andre from A-Z Diving in Whatuwhiwi. The weekend was blessed with three days of blue skies, calm seas and good visibility.



After a late arrival the night before, a later start was more than welcome! We loaded up the boat around 9am and headed out to the first dive site of the day, Matai Bay Pinnacle. This is listed in the Lonely Planet guide to top dive sites in New Zealand, and it certainly deserves the entry! In calm seas and at low tide, the top of the pinnacle just pokes out of the water, and has a maximum depth of around 55-60m – though no one was planning to dive to the base today. The seaward side of the pinnacle is relatively barren due to the pounding it receives from the open ocean. The landward side is teeming with encrusting life and a whole range of fish species, including demoiselles, leather jackets, snapper and the occasional porcupine puffer fish. The second dive of the day was in and around Cray Cave – a fantastic dive, mostly open to the surface allowing non-cave trained divers to explore a little way in to the cave safely. A deeper exploration by Jamie and James showed that this is in fact not a cave, but a tunnel connected the two sides of the headline, which was news to Andre who has dived the area for several years. Even though the sea was calm, the restricted nature of the tunnel produced a lot of surge which prevented the pair from exiting past a boulder that blocked the tunnel, but tomorrow was another day! Finishing diving at lunchtime left us free for a fantastic lunch at Karikari Estate vineyard, which has a view that is difficult to beat!



First dive of the second day was Moki Playground, a large boulder in the south of the bay that is home to a host of large red moki and other fish life, including huge schools of demoiselles that were so thick that it was difficult to see. At the end of the dive, a playful seal made a brief appearance - but with even less swell our thoughts were occupied with a return to Cray Cave for the second dive. An inspection of the far side of the headland showed a reasonable amount of water movement, but a possible channel to provide an underwater exit after the blocking boulder was passed. Alas, upon reaching and passing the boulder from the main entrance showed that there was still too much water movement to be able to exit safely – a dive to leave for another day when it would be flat calm and high tide!

On the final day, we returned to the Moki Playground which again was teeming with life. The second dive of the day was one of the signature dives of the area, Demoiselle Arch, names because of the usual schooling demoiselles that make it their safe haven. Being the end of the nesting season, they weren't filling the arch, leaving plenty of space for a school of blue mao mao to make it their home.

All in all, the trip was three days of great diving, great company and a relaxing break away. This area is well worth a visit if you are looking for something a little different, yet still with great diving.

