

Trip Report: Riwaka Resurgence, 17th September 2009

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Several months ago Dive New Zealand magazine published an article I had written about modelling for cave diving photos and how such photos are so important in answering the continual ‘So why do you do it?’ question. The article showed a beautiful photo taken in one of the world’s most decorated caverns – Nohoch Nah Chich, in the Yucatan area of Mexico. The problem was that whilst everyone was happy that Mexico might have fantastic caves, they weren’t so sure about New Zealand. So how to start answering that question – start taking people diving in NZ’s caves of course.

Riwaka Resurgence, located only 20km from Motueka, is a perfect 1st cave dive. Access is quite straightforward; the car-park is only a five minute walk from the cave entrance and DOC have provided a very convenient set of steps to get you down to the water. The cave itself is easy to navigate, fairly shallow, but still has the atmosphere. Stalactites drip from the ceiling, crystalline white flowstone is draped across large areas of the walls and it’s dark – a proper darkness that only a cave can provide.



Tempted yet? Well now add in some fabulous South Island scenery, an entrance pool with crystal clear water and the knowledge that once inside you’ll see what very few other people ever get to see. If you are still not tempted then go and check your pulse, or better still sell your dive gear and take up knitting.

I had done Riwaka once before in early 2007, with a local guide that turned out to be a little less experienced than I expected. On returning to the exit our guide had got ahead of us and had removed his line, so that it didn’t get left behind. We were left to navigate out of the cave by memory - I was less than impressed! Taking James for his first proper cave dive I was planning to be a lot more professional about things.

First we sorted out our tanks and lights and took these up to the entrance. Then once into our dry-suits we did a final check that we had everything before carrying the last few bits of gear to the cave. As we floated in the entrance pool we did quick run through of our plans and then James tied our line to a large rock just outside the cave and we sunk beneath the water.

The dive is in two parts or sumps as they are properly known. The first sump has only a very short distance that is actually fully overhead, although you can swim for about 100m before it gets too shallow. This section of the cave is quite large and there are lots of nooks and cracks to investigate. Next comes the tricky bit – take off your fins, climb out of the water wearing all your kit and then negotiate a rock pile before getting back into the water on the other side.

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The second sump is a bit deeper with a 'U' shaped traverse to a depth of approximately 9m. As this is well out of the reach of unprepared divers this sump has a permanent line, which means that you can look around at the cave a bit more. When we got there we found that the start of the line had come loose, so we fixed this up before continuing. The second sump is entirely overhead environment and is about 60-70m long. Once through this the cave opens into a huge chamber and provides an extended dry caving experience if you have the time.



After a short time enjoying having a whole inner world to ourselves we retraced our steps and exited the cave. Exiting is always easier – there is no need to navigate if you've laid the line properly and the flow of the river pushes you along. We even exited to sunshine and warmth – pretty good for very early on in the spring. And if that wasn't good enough, just down the road is a micro brewery, serving some very interesting local brews. Does life get any better than this?

In case you are wondering what James thought of his first proper cave dive - he felt exactly like I did after my first cave dive. I quote: 'Oh man this is really addictive!'

So who wants to go cave diving with us next time?