

Trip Report: Poor Knights Liveboard, 22/23rd August 2009

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I love live-aboard diving. It's so relaxed and the opportunity to do more dives is a huge bonus. When you combine it with some of NZ's best dive sites and superb winter visibility it is definitely one of my favourite ways to spend a weekend. Finally add in the fact that on every dive we either saw sharks or got to explore caves; as you can imagine I was really enjoying myself.



I was out with Kevin from Oceanblue on their boat Mazurka, which is an incredibly cosy live-aboard, perfect for small groups that really want to explore the islands. As well as just enjoying some great dives, my plan was also to explore a couple of new caves, to investigate which were the most suitable for running a cavern course later in the year. As Kevin is also a cavern instructor it was a great way for us both to have a really good look into some of the places that you can't always take tour groups.

With the wind on Saturday giving great conditions at Northern Arch we decided to enjoy this most scenic of spots first. It did not disappoint. About 10 minutes into the dive a large Bronze Whaler Shark swam right up to my buddy Craig and really checked him out. Whether Craig looked too bony or whether his singing into his reg in an effort to attract my attention sent the shark on its way I'm not sure, but it was the closest I've seen a big bronzy in NZ. Very cool.

Our second dive saw us exploring Landing Bay pinnacle, which had the best visibility I'd ever seen at the site. The wall dropping to 55m+ was crystal clear and coming out of the swim through into the middle of the sheer face was spectacular. As we headed up the wall my 'singing' buddy was at it again – this time because a very active carpet shark was cruising about.

Our final dive of the day was in Big-Eye cave, which is destined to become very familiar to any of you that decide to do a cavern course. It is very picturesque – and that's about all I'm going to say. No point ruining the surprise.

Sunday morning saw us back at Northern Arch and again my buddy starting his singing. By this time I was attuned to his frequency and got a good view of another bronzy before it cruised off into the blue. As I've said many times before and will say many times more – NZ diving in the winter is fantastic!



For our second dive Kevin, Craig and I explored Crystal Cave, also known as Scary Cave. Again the wildlife was out to impress, with a large star-gazer lurking in the entrance and a big short tailed stingray that decided to join us for most of the dive. As we reached the restriction 80m back in the cave I was wondering what we would do if the ray continued to follow us – the gap between roof and sand was simply not big enough for the both of

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us - thankfully it wandered off elsewhere. Having not been in this cave before I wasn't expecting such a large chamber beyond the restriction, nor the vast amount of fresh water, which when mixed with the salt really reduced visibility. With the possibility of losing our bearings in the murky water and half expecting the sting ray to return we decided to exit at this point.

Our final dive of the trip took us to one of my favourite sites, Red Baron. Here there are 3 very large cracks that run from 20m right up to the surface and offer some great photo opportunities, plus a little bit of exploration right at the back of crack number 2. Again, I'd expect us to visit this site on the cavern course, weather permitting. Unfortunately we had a bit of surge on this dive, so trying to examine the tiny passage at the very back proved impossible – something for the next trip.

Many thanks to Kevin for looking after me on the trip – although not for the slightly fuzzy head on the Sunday night. Thanks also to Craig my shark spotting buddy – I would definitely have missed out if it weren't for the 'singing'.