



Trip Report: Alderman Islands, 29/30th August 2009

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I hate to go on and on like a broken record, but winter diving in NZ really is superb. We had sunshine, great visibility and another shark sighting – that makes two weekends in a row now. We chose the Alderman's because we haven't been there for a while and because it provided the opportunity for people to come along for just one day. Also when the diving is good it really is good! (Mike reckons it's as good as the Poor Knights.)

We had a lazy start on Saturday, with ropes off at 10am, which gave everyone an easy drive from Auckland. Astrid even made it all the way without having to stop. Taking advantage of great sea conditions we headed straight out to Sugar Loaf Rocks, which are isolated to the north of the main island group. Dropping off to well over 60m we had a lovely wall dive, with 20m+ visibility. It was whilst hanging slightly off the wall at 35m that Mel saw the shark.

The second dive was behind Orca Bay, exploring a cave, some swim throughs and hunting for crays – although the hunters came back empty handed. Mel and Jamie had a gentle pootle of a dive, enjoying the very different scenery of the shallows. Thankfully their dive wasn't too long because Tony's mask strap had snapped and he was able to borrow Jamie's and continue his dive. Get a slap strap Tony!

On Sunday we decided to start an hour earlier as the weather report was for strong winds later in the day. Despite some grumbling everyone arrived on time and as we headed out towards the bar at the harbour entrance it was clear that the sea conditions had started to deteriorate. The bar was far more "interesting" than it had been on Saturday, although with his many years of experience Tony our skipper still made crossing it look easy. Thankfully once we were out into open water it was still calm enough to visit the best sites, so we headed for another isolated pinnacle, Len's Reef. This is to the south east of the main group, has very sheer walls and doesn't break the surface, so finding it and anchoring took a little while. However, once underwater it was clear the wait was worthwhile.

Cruising along the main wall at 30m we could see the bottom at 60m+ and the surface above us. Clouds of Pink Maomao and Demoiselle swirled around, broken occasionally by the electric blue flashes of wrasse darting about. And it was clear that spring is definitely on the way because the wall looked spectacular, covered in thousands of Blue Bell Tunicates. We even spotted a pair of Lord Howe Coral-fish, something I've only ever seen at the Poor Knights before now.

During our lunch break we spotted a couple of seals, so Francois our French tourist, slipped in to get some close up photos. I think his quote afterwards summed up our whole weekend "I Love this country." Our second dive was on nudibranch wall, which was a more sheltered site with a wall dropping to white sand at 30m. Again we had 20m+ visibility, definitely winter diving at its very best. As usual the 'imports' outnumbered the Kiwis –all of us wondering why Kiwis don't take more advantage of such fantastic diving conditions. But don't worry if you missed out on this trip, we will be going back again soon.