

Trip Report: HMNZS Waikato “Skive Dive”, 22nd December 2009

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When talking about technical diving, most people assume that it’s all about going deeper... but for me, some of the best technical dives I’ve done have been in recreational depths but with bottom times that exceed the no stop times of most tables or dive computers. Today was one such day, with two fantastic dives on HMNZS Waikato thanks to Dive! Tutukaka.



It was a fairly impromptu “Skive Dive”, with the forecast at the end of last week looking perfect with little to no swell, and light variable winds – though in reality the wind ended up shifting around to the south east, just putting a small but manageable chop on top of the swell. Despite this, Mike, Tony, Tim and Ben joined Jamie and myself for two dives under a gloriously blue skies. Jamie and I were planning two long dives, utilising nitrox and oxygen to manage our decompression obligations. Using multiple gasses makes it entirely feasible to spend an hour and a half in the water for a moderate depth dive, and we were hoping to make the most of that time by exploring some sections of the wreck that we had not spent that much time in before.

Once we’d arrived, analysed all our gas and loaded up the boat, Ben our skipper eased us out of the marina and to the buoy marking the wreck.

Jamie and I quickly geared up as we didn’t want our extended dive time to mean that everyone else

should have to sit on the boat in the sun for two long! Our dive plan was to use pure oxygen to deco on our first dive where we were using EAN32 in our twin tanks, but we also took an EAN50 mix as contingency in case we came back to the bottom of the line with insufficient gas to make it to our switch to the oxygen. Descending down the line, we clipped off the EAN50 and with me in the lead we headed towards the stern and entered the wreck. We wanted to spend as much of the dive on the lower decks as we could, so we slowly worked our way forwards making sure that we didn’t stir up the silt. Making it into the boiler room, Jamie spied a narrow gap that neither of us had been down before – during service this must have been a conduit for air conditioning or cables. It was tight, moving my deco tank “just so” and angling my body “like that”, I used my fingers to squeeze my way down the gap. At the end, I looked back and checked that Jamie was following before working out how to make my way through the restriction and down to the lower level. A twist, a turn and a tuck at the waist and I was through into a fairly confined section behind one of the boilers – from above it had looked like there was a passageway through to the generator room but it appeared to be blocked. I signalled to Jamie to turn around and I tried to make my way back through, but the deco tank was catching and stopping me from making my return to the narrow gap. Unclipping it, and holding in front of me I tucked my shoulder in tight, breathed in and squeezed back around the corner. It certainly goes to show that there are parts of the Waikato left to explore – just not for the faint hearted!



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Exiting the boiler room, we continued forwards and dropped in to the generator room to see whether we could locate the area we'd just explored – but the passageway was obviously blocked by a fallen ladder. Instead, we headed over to the bow where Jamie noticed a closed hatch. Opening the hatch was like a glimpse in to the past as the room beyond was cleaner than much of the wreck, with the original paintwork still visible. Checking time, we'd been down for forty minutes and had about 15 minutes of deco to do. We headed back to the main section of the wreck and slowly worked our way back to the line through the upper decks and started our ascent after having spent around 60 minutes of our 65 minutes of bottom time inside the wreck. Making our way up to 6m, we switched to oxygen and watched computer re-calculate our deco time – what had been nearly a 20 minute stop was more than halved to 9 minutes, with a total run time for the dive of 80 minutes. This is the real joy of technical diving in this depth range – long bottom times with minimal decompression needed! Surfacing, everyone else was back on the boat and we headed back to shore to fill the tanks, grab some lunch and soak up more of the sunshine.



After lunch, Ben ferried us back out to the wreck for our second dive for which we were using air for our back gas which meant our deco obligation would rack up much more quickly, so opted for a shorter bottom time and just EAN50 as deco gas. Dropping down the line, Jamie led us through the hanger in the main section of the wreck. The interior is surprisingly complex, and we started to link various passageways and sections together – over our next few trips here, we're going to start mapping the wreck and annotating changes from the deck plans, the condition of the interior and which passageways are navigable and which are blocked. This is certainly going to be both fun and challenging! Again, we exited the wreck after having spent nearly 45 minutes in the overhead environment and having a 20 minute decompression obligation. Switching to our deco mix, we started our ascent and finished the dive at the same time as Tony and Mike – perfect timing for us to head back to shore and grab a second lunch at Schnappa Rock before starting the drive home. Another great “skive dive”, and thanks to Dive! Tutukaka for helping make it happen!