

THE MOKOHINAUS (ALIAS THE HEN AND CHICKENS)

After our usual late start we were finally out of Auckland with another incredibly bad forecast for the weather. Natasha then proceeded to insult every Ford driver on the road and every other driver was called a dickweed (if we were in the States we would have been shot dead on at least ten different occasions), we finally arrived at Marsden Point. The skipper Balls-ache (politely known as Greg, but he's not polite and neither are we) abused us for being late and we set off and parked ourselves up on the bow with glasses of wine, and Natasha likened it to being on the cruise ship - I'm not sure when her delusions were shattered; it could have been when the cold wind started howling, or maybe when we rounded Bream Head and waves started crashing over the bow, accompanied by that rocking and rolling sensation we all know and love. So in our dreams the 200ft cruise liner breezed out to the Hen and Chickens and we retired to sipping cocktails in the observation lounge. Alright, a slight exaggeration; we drank a few beers up on the bridge.

We anchored in Starfish Bay for the night and 3 of us hopped in for a night dive, which was mildly entertaining but I didn't see any starfish and flooded my torch. The next morning brought pouring rain so nobody jumped out of bed in a hurry. It was too rough to get out to the Mokes so plan B was to dive here. Soon dolphins came around the boat and most people jumped in with them for a snorkel. They came so close the guys were worried about certain parts of their anatomy and somebody claimed witness to dolphin sex. But it was time to stop fantasizing about the dolphins and go for a dive. We chose a reef offshore from the Chicks that came up to 100ft and went down to 140ft. Most of us piled in and descended into the cool clear water. Looking down after awhile it appeared that the bottom was moving and soon it evolved into thousands of fish. There were massive schools of golden snapper and blue maomao interspersed with splendid perch. We cruised along the edge of the reef constantly surrounded by fish. Poor Paul must have worried about his air supply when he jerked his thumb up and down violently. What was he worried about? We only had a 13 minute deco stop and he was going to steal my air anyway. We all popped up spread out over the ocean and up came the safety sausages - now where were those dolphins...? Next it was off to the tip of Coppermine Island with more underwater adventures in store. We jumped in and headed towards the shore into a bay and before we knew it were surrounded by a big school of blue maomao. Paul and I looked at each other in revelation and both had the same spiritual vision - sizzling maomao in the frying pan. Big schools of kawhai buzzed us and large silver drummer zipped by. Eventually the vision faded, to be replaced by a mounting pile of maomao fillets to be cleaned, so we turned back out to deeper waters and at one point stopped to look at a big school of yellow-tail surround us. All of a sudden they took off in a panic - had they finally spotted Paul?, or... was it a predator? My heart-rate doubled and I thought "kingie" and out of the corner of my eye behind me a large shape appeared. Damn it was close, and it got bigger and bigger. Just before I made a mess of my wetsuit and turned around and shot Paul so "it" would eat him, a large bottlenose dolphin eyeballed me and several of them surrounded us at 55ft. I looked at Paul and his eyes were as big as mine must have been, as the dolphins buzzed around and eventually decided to go catch up with the yellow-tail. Not long after we spotted a mottled moray and while I was admiring it, Paul decided that a sling up its ass was more entertaining. It wasn't impressed and started to chase us, so we beat a hasty retreat and looked for something else to harass. Not before long a huge pinnacle arose from the blue and an endless stream of koheru appeared. Soon all we could see were fish and a lone kingie cruised around.

It was back to Starfish Bay for the night and the gin bottle was cracked open, unfortunately for Mike Coghlan. Balls-ache and Mike raced to the bottom of the bottle and

the hardened skipper came out looking better (which isn't saying a whole lot) than Mike who had some suffering to endure the following day. The next morning brought some truly beautiful sights with Mike entered in a beauty contest with Debras' swollen lip from kissing underwater creatures (I keep telling her a sponge will never turn into a handsome prince, but they will do a great dance at 200ft). A dive in the morning brought some crays and then it was decided that we would do our next dive at the tip of Whangerei Heads. Naturally the wind had picked up nicely and Mike spent the next couple hours running to the back of the boat to recycle his seasick pills. Guano Rock (fancy name for bird-shit rock) was fairly sheltered and a great dive was had chasing more crays and attending a John Dory seminar; The Diver Avoidance Reflex and Ecklonia camouflage skills - more seminars will be needed. Debra decided that she was going to give up looking for her handsome prince and skipped the dive, just as well, if she kissed anything else she'd be unrecognisable. Well, the weekend trip was over which was fortunate, as Mark and Ross were almost out of beer and would have been up for dolphin molestation had they stayed any longer. Just another abnormal trip on the Sou'East.