

Spearfishing Around

FEBRUARY last year I was fortunate to have a visit from Cameron, a fellow freediver / spearfisherman from Australia. We had originally made contact through the NZ fishing website as Cameron had put up a post looking for spearo's to go out diving with whilst visiting NZ.

It was all arranged that we would go out in the kayak to some local spots around the Mercury Bay area when he turned up in the Coromandel. I had put two days aside from work to take Cameron out so was hoping that the weather and sea gods would be kind to us. Cameron had explained to me via emails that he would especially like to spear a john dory, snapper, giant boarfish and tarakihi whilst diving as he had never done this before.

The first week in February the phone call came from Cameron one afternoon to let me know that he was on his way down with his parents and would be staying at Whitianga for four days and five nights.

Cameron exclaimed that he was hanging out for a decent dive and that he had only managed one other outing with another kiwi spearo so we arranged that I would make the thirty to forty minutes drive from Coromandel Town with kayak and dive gear and we would meet up at the Kaoutunu Store. So it was that the next day we finally met, and after a quick yarn with his folks we loaded his gear into my car and headed off for Opito Bay.

The day was nice and sunny with little or no wind, the water was a nice blue colour. As we travelled over the Blackjack Rd. I proceeded to fill Cameron in on the diving and using the kayak. Cameron had never dived from a kayak before so it was all new to him; I had never taken an adult spearo out on the kayak before. The only other person being a 10 year old boy who goes spearfishing with me from time to time. We arrived at our destination got suited up, loaded the gear onto the kayak and were ready to launch.

Cameron and I headed out towards some pinnacles at one end of the bay. Cruising over some reef I looked down into the water and noticed that you could see the bottom quite clearly which was promising as normally you would never be able to see the bottom in that particular spot. A short paddle of twenty minutes had got us to our first dive spot and I anchored the kayak at the edge of the pinnacle facing towards the shore. After getting our fins, mask etc on we proceeded to get in to the water. It was decided that Cameron would swim around the right hand side of the pinnacle with me taking the left



ABOVE: Cameron with his first NZ snapper

and meet up at the side facing out to sea. I knew full well that the right hand side held the most fish and this would give Cameron the best chance.

The visibility was amazing at around twenty meters which is good for this area and I had never seen it as clear as that ever. There were fish everywhere, huge schools of koheru (mackerel) came in to greet me as I swam along the surface. Diving down amongst them was amazing, there were so many that the only thing we could see were hundreds of eyes gazing as they circled around us. Then, as I surfaced, in came a school of around eight kingfish to check me out, the largest was only about 8 kilos, too small to spear.

Further on I noticed a likely looking cray area.



ABOVE: A friendly visitor comes in for a cuddle.

I dived down for a look but only found a couple of smaller crayfish hiding under a rock. It was fantastic having such great visibility and I was enjoying the scenery more than anything. When I reached the front face of the pinnacle lots of blue maomao and sweep were dancing around in the sun rays filtering down through the water. The current was quite strong around the face of the pinnacle and this made it hard to fin against. As I came around the front right hand face I decided to dive down in around ten meters of water and was greeted by a school of juvenile trevally that was about seven meters high by ten meters wide. I still hadn't seen anything worth taking when I met up with Cameron who had been a lot more successful.

Cameron told me of his catch 2 john dory and a good sized blue moki. He seemed pretty happy with himself and also said that he had left quite a few dory alone, but had managed to take some good footage and photo's with his camera. As we headed back towards the kayak I spotted a dory in close against the edge of the pinnacle, finally my first fish.

Once back at the kayak and after placing the fish on board, I dived down drifting along the bottom with the current. Again the kingfish came in to check me out but this time there were a couple around twelve kilos. I aimed, fired my gun hitting one with a good holding shot right through the center of the body just behind the head. After a short fight I had the fish secured on my float line. Back on board the kayak I spotted Cameron who had drifted quite a long way away from where I was, so pulled the anchor and paddled over to pick him up.

Cameron hadn't speared anything else so we headed back towards the way we had been to check out a reef which I knew sometimes had the odd giant boarfish and snapper resting up in some of the gutters running through it.

The water had got a bit of a choppy and the wind was getting up. After anchoring we dived a weedline in about fifteen meters of water, but there weren't any fish about. Cameron reckoned that he had seen a boarfish but it was right back on the edge of visibility. Boarfish can be quite shy sometimes. I dived down to lie in the weed hoping that something might come and check me out but still nothing showed up. On return to the surface I noticed that a seahorse had come with me, the seahorse had attached itself on the floatline close to the rear of my speargun. I called Cameron over and we spent five minutes taking some photo's as well as handling the seahorse before returning it to

Mercury Bay



by Rob Fort



ABOVE: Cameron with his John Dory

a large blue mackerel and moved off to swim around the outside face of the rocks. There wasn't a lot happening on the outside so we continued our way around to the west face and Cameron who was a bit ahead of me waved me over to him. When I got there he yelled excitedly, "there's some nice kingfish here mate". I looked around and was greeted by a school of around a dozen kingies to 10 kilos.

"Wait" Cameron said as I raised my head out of the water, "the big one's are behind those". Looking back in the water at the kingfish coming towards us I noticed the silhouette of much larger kingfish in the distance. As they got closer the kingies looked to be around twenty kilos plus. Cameron nailed one which when weighed later went fifteen kilos.

I lined up on a much bigger kingy and the shot was good. The fish stormed straight for the reef which was only 5 meters below. I fought hard trying to keep the fish from the rocks and was dragged under a few times but could not stop it when the line went slack. I watched as the kingfish swam off with the spear still in it. I discovered that by a fluke, the fish had managed to rub the end of the spear shaft on an oyster and the 180kg mono was cut clean through.

I was upset to say the least. My spearfishing was over for the day as I didn't have another replacement shaft.

Cameron and I decided we would swim across from the rocks to the point on the shore line which was a couple of hundred meters. On the way over to the shore we each took turns with his gun and dived fifteen meters to the bottom in search of terakihi but found nothing. When we reached the other side I explained to Cameron that he should give me all the fish on his float line and have a snapper snoop on the way back to where we had launched from in the bay. I had often spooked and got some good fish in that area so we began to deal with the fish when out of the corner of my vision I spotted a nine foot bronze whaler which made three passes then swam off into the deep. The bronzy probably wasn't keen to take us both on for an easy feed of fish. The fish were quickly loaded into the kayak and Cameron departed for the last part of his dive as I quietly went off in the kayak.

When Cameron finally came in he had a good john dory on his float line, we loaded up the car for the last time, it had been another excellent day.

Two days later Cameron and his folks came to see me on their way to Auckland to catch their flight home. I had arranged for the local butcher in Coromandel town to smoke and vacuum pack the blue moki and kingfish we had speared, so they could take it home to Australia with them. After saying our goodbyes they departed with a box full of fish and some good memories. Cameron will be returning next year for more Coromandel spearfishing adventures.

Enjoy your kayak fishing and diving.

Boaties remember to keep a look out for kayakers on the water.

LEFT: Cameron with his 16lbs blue moki and a nice john dory

the weedline, it was truly magical.

Moving over to the reef I came across a crayfish located with others in a crack running along a huge boulder 7 meters deep, I would give this to Cameron and his folks to have for dinner but the water was getting pretty choppy so it was time to head back to the shore.

Back at the beach and after a few more photos of Cameron with some of his fish we weighed his blue moki which tipped the scales at sixteen pounds. It had been an awesome day.

Day two proved to be just as good as the first. After meeting up once again with Cameron at Kaoutunu store we travelled over the Blackjack Rd to Opito Bay. The sea was a lot rougher than the first day so we headed to Matapaua Bay which would be much more sheltered. After getting geared up, we launched and headed out to some rocks situated about four hundred meters off shore from the bay.

When we were getting into the water we were greeted by sweep, koheru, herring, blue maomao, piper, blue mackerel, kahawai, butterfish and more. A bit of an easterly swell was building with the wave action making some nice wash on the eastern face of the rocks where the fish seemed to be hanging around. Cameron made a dive where the steep face ran down to about 6 meters opening out to a wide ledge which dropped off to fifteen meters. He came back with a nice snapper of around 8 pounds. He was really happy as it was his first NZ snapper. He told me how the fish had come straight towards him as he finned over the ledge. We took lots of photos of him and the fish. I proceeded to dive in the same spot and speared a good sized blue moki which would go nice in the smoker. We both managed to spear

