

[<=Back](#)



Autumn 2000



Fishing ___ by a Nuttfisha

REEFBALLS...

instant reef, just add water and fish

Ever wanted to have your very own Private reef? Ever get tired of driving over broad stretches of fishless sandy bottom wishing there was the odd clump of reef there to hold fish? Well Have We Got A Deal For You!

One day while browsing through the internet, I came across an excellent site, www.reefball.com home of the Reefball reef enhancement system, developed in the USA to repair, replace and install reef as habitat enhancement, breakwater and mooring bases.

Originally intended as a way of repairing hurricane damage to reefs, the reefballs are now being used around the world (100,000 units installed so far) from Abu Dhabi to Florida, Tasmania to Canada and now they are soon to be here in good old NZ!

Reefballs have been developed over the last decade to be one of the cheapest, most efficient, environmentally friendly and stable of all artificial reef constructions. The concrete used to make them is specially treated to be pH neutral, as is natural coral, and free of toxic elements, such as iron.

The original idea was to have something that a bunch of keen divers could make easily ashore, then float out into place. The need for barges, cranes and so on was beyond the means of these folks, so they hit on the idea of coating a large beach-ball with concrete. The ball inside providing floatation until you had the concrete where you wanted it, then deflate the beach ball, and your new reefette was in place! Front this excellent idea, reefballs evolved. Now the reefballs still have the large internal bladder for floatation, but all around the sides of the mould used to make them are placed a number of smaller balls. These create an interconnected series of large holes in the outside of the reefball, allowing for free circulation of water around, into and through the reefball.

These holes mean that in even the lightest of currents, the water eddies and swirls through the reefballs once in place on the bottom, preventing silt build up, while providing for the most natural and favourable growing conditions for sponges, corals right up through the food chain to large fish.

All this was featured in the January 2000 Boating NZ, and immediately grabbed the attention of come highly motivated folks. Led by Dave Allison and Dave Head of Napier, a group of keen fishermen, divers and environmentalists have banded together to form the New Zealand Reefball Development

Network.

Now, as the writer of that initial Boating NZ article, I have been kind of keen to keep abreast of developments with Reefballs in NZ (hey, I wouldn't mind popping a few in some secret possies of my own!), so when I found out that the originator of Reefballs, the CEO of the parent company and driving force behind the concept, Todd Barber, was headed this way to help set we innocent Kiwis up with our first reefballs, I was keen to meet the man and get a closer idea of what it all entailed.

So it was that I volunteered to leave the sanctuary of civilisation (Matamata), and head up to Auckland Airport to personally chauffeur Todd around the land. After saying "Hi" and letting the poor jetlagged soul have a few minutes rest (while I drove around Auckland's suburbs semi-lost), we finally got to our first stop for the day.

We had arranged for Todd to do an interview with Bill Hohepa, that well known fishing guru and television show host (Triangle TV in Auckland). The plan was to stop by Bill's house, and then head around to Kelly Tarpons to do the interview after a bit of breakfast. Kelly Tarpons is a great place, and really interesting, and the ideal place for an interview on undersea environments and fish life etc. An inspired brainwave of mine, I was so proud. The interview and the courtesy tour the Tarpons folks gave us, took a little longer than I thought though, so it was not until well after lunch that we finally managed to get under way for Napier, a nice little 5 hour trip in some of the heaviest rain I have driven in for agesoooh, what a trip! Yuk!

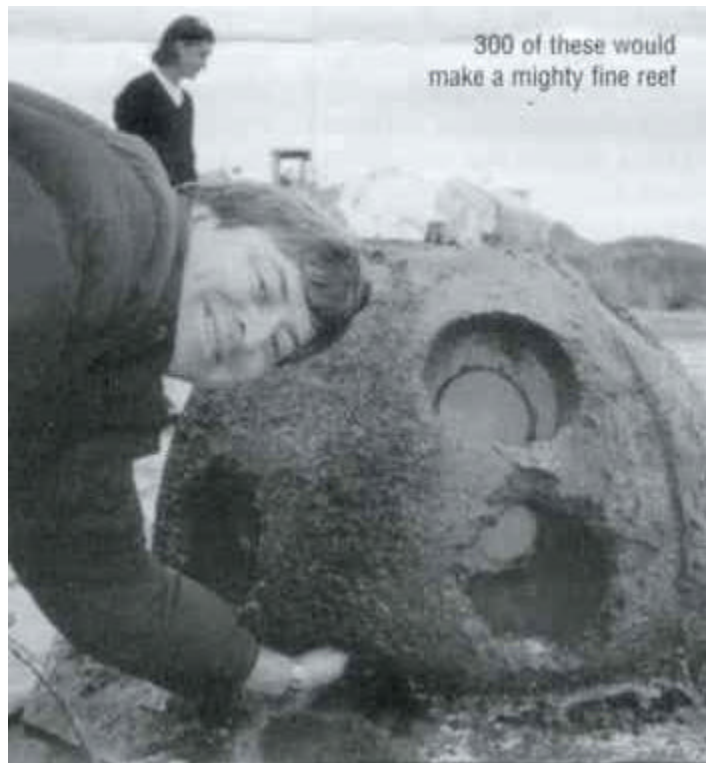
Still once there, we had a great welcome in Napier, with the folks all gathering to greet Todd, and of course, the mighty Captain Asparagus! (Dat's me folks! That's my other alter-ego, when I am not a Nuttafisha).

After a very very good nights sleep, we assembled next morning at the local Firth's concrete plant in Napier, to practise making some reefballs, the first in captivity in NZ. We were all keen and eager, arranging all sorts of plans to let the country know what we were up to, so when our first attempts ended in dismal failure (them Balls, they fell apart! Eek!) we didn't really mind too much.

Next day, we had another shot at pouring concrete, mold assembly etc, and finally got one or two right, which was very, very good, so we were now starting to be under some pressure to have balls ready for a Dutch film crew, who had come all this way to do a short segment on a popular Dutch TV show "Jules Unlimited"... kinda like their version of "Beyond 2000". Now you see why I was so keen on getting in on the act... I fancied me as an international TV star... well, dreams are free, huh.

Mission accomplished, with a pair of perfect balls now setting, we hauled off to a local day-care centre (5 to 10 year olds) where Todd gave a great talk to the kids, who were fairly keen on the idea, but mostly keen on the fact that Todd was from America (Ooooooh!) and even better, lives just a little way from DISNEY WORLD! (Aaaaaah!).. so they were most attentive.. it really was pretty cool.

Next day the film crew arrived, and the fun really started. You know, for a seven minute segment of TV it is amazing that it took them 2 whole days to get almost enough footage... not helped by the fact that we had just had five inches of rain before they arrived, so the water was like chocolate.



Mostly the filming went fairly well, only one person had a 150kg concrete reefball dropped on him (Owwwwww! Why me, that's what I want to know!! Owowowowowowow!!) and no-one killed the director, even when he asked for 57 takes of the balls being lifted into the trailer puffpuffpuffpuff), although I think he may have got the hint after a while, Kiwi's being the subtle people we are. I think the swearing may have become slightly more than mutters you see.

Getting the reefballs from the concrete plant to the beach was a mission in itself; as he had to have the "talent" (TV talk for the presenter) ride along the road in the trailer for the cameras to film something one of the local cops was none to impressed by. I hope Dutch TV will pay the fine!.. Bugger! Well, just kidding really, but if we hadn't pulled over when we did, I suspect his interest may have become somewhat more official, luckily I think he saw the cameras on the roadside filming it all, and was satisfied with merely glaring at us...

Well, from there we inevitably ended up at the beach...sigh. You see, to a film crew, a soft gravel beach looks just fine to drive onto, and I had a 4X4 didn't I?? Well, I am here to tell you folks, even in 4 wheel drive, having a trailer loaded with 400 kgs of reefballs and presenter is enough to firmly anchor even the best 4 wheel drive vehicle. Getting the truck onto the beach was not too bad, but as soon as those narrow trailer tyres hit the soft gravel... whoomph! It sank like a stone, right up to the axles. So... the director made the decision to let us stop there. Wise man. Hummph!

Not, I hasten to add, before asking us to back out so he could get another shot...what was this guy drinking? The man was a director...need I say more? Shhheeze!

Well, rolling the balls off the trailer wasn't too bad... seeing as how it was several inches closer to the ground anyhow, being sunk up to the axles and all, but still, with 4 and a half of us (the 'talent' was the half...mustn't make the talent sweat now, must we?) lifting it on and off the trailer for 8 different takes was a bit of an ask. Still, being the brave, stoic, strong type we is, we done it all in the best of humour. Ahem.

We then rolled the reefballs down the rather steep beach to the waterline. Even the director got the hint that re-takes were NOT an option here, but we could see it on his face ...he wanted us to. Some words of obviously rebellious intent from the "Talent" I think convinced him of the well nigh suicidal stupidity of such a move.

What I want to know is why do I always get the down-hill spot? I mean, I'd already had one reefball on my foot (as I have previously mentioned, Owwowowowowowowow, I mention that again at this point by way of emphasis), did they want me steamrolled by one now? Humph again..

Oh! Oh. yes, AND, I may add, being the guy with his back to the waves at the waterside too was a real pleasure, I don't think! Here I am, legs spread (not a pretty sight I must admit), holding the reefball from rolling too far, when suddenly I notice a flurry of retreating co-workers. Before one and one could add up to their ultimate conclusion of two, the wave swept through my legs, into the reefball, up and over it, and on the way, co-incidentally, drenching me. Oh my, what a HAPPY Stuart I was, oh my word yes indeed. And so refreshed! I was p... leased.

Well, from then on, as I was already well wet, I got the job of being the un-wet-suited member of the crew to hold the reefballs in the water while the "Talent", Todd, the cameramen etc. got into their wet-suits, ready to film their deployment at sea. It is lucky for me that I am so well cold-adapted (like penguins and walruses, both of which I bear a passing resemblance) or hypothermia may well have been an issue. Weeell, maybe, if the sun had not been so very very warm, and the water being pretty nice too. But the possibility was there!! I just think that this fact should be noted, that's all. I think I was pretty darn decent about it all really.

Once the crew all loaded onto the waiting boats and readied for their tow out to the deployment site, my part was over, all I had to do was squelch over to the truck and try to dig it out of the shingle. Oh, fun fun fun. With the help of a shovel and another 4 X 4 still on the hard drive above the beach, we managed to extract the truck, about which both I and my insurers are very pleased.

Well, you'd think that dropping a lump of concrete into 17m of water would be easy enough, wouldn't you? Well, no. Apparently things were even worse out there, and re-takes only ended when a mutiny was on the verge of erupting. After all that effort, it turned out the water was too soupy to actually film

anything anyhow. What a pain in the... well, I'll let you decide which anatomical feature would be most grievously pained!

That evening though, with everything "in the can" (see: I am getting the hang of this show-biz chatter!), we were all ready to relax, all was forgiven, and at times forgotten, and a good time was well and truly had by all.

We all were keen to the TV One news the next night, in which I even appeared (I was the big lump holding on behind the big concrete lump), and now we are all agog to see just what sort of show the TV crowd can make out of all those retakes.

The next morning was the big fare-well, as I hauled Todd off on the five hour trip back to Auckland, and all the other non-Napierites headed their separate ways.. the TV crew for Christchurch, and other reefballers heading back to Opotiki. It was one of the funnest times I have had for years without being at sea, and I thank you all, even you Lloyd, he who drops heavy reefballs!

Well, the ball is now rolling, so who wants to help us start to install some of our own reefs to help out our fishing??

To help, or get more information check out the reefballs site on the internet, at www.reefball.com or contact Dave Head at [dghead @ hotmail.com](mailto:dghead@hotmail.com).

[<=Back](#)