

Dive 69



Belgium, Ukkel, NEMO33

10-02-2013

On our way

Today I am going to dive in the deepest pool in the world, the Nemo 33 which is located in Ukkel, south of Brussels, Belgium. Having picked up the people designated to travel with me at the dive school in the Hague, we head off to Brussels at about eight o'clock. This will take about two hours.

Nemo 33 is not far away from the freeway located on a roundabout, and is easy to spot from a distance; the name is visible on the face of the building in large letters. Having parked the car on a fairly large parking directly around the facility, we enter the building. Directly left when you enter, there is a large bar and sales area with glass showcases, containing all sorts of diving equipment.

Arrived

It is here that you are supposed to wait until the bell sounds and the new group is allowed to enter the pool area. Having filled in the required documents, indicating the level of expertise of the divers, we wait for the bell to ring. By now the bar is filled with like a hundred people! At the ring of the bell (11:30) all of these begin to move to the dressing rooms. Our one hour window of opportunity has opened! The dressing rooms are quite congested, and in my humble opinion way too small for the large number of people using them all at the same time. We are virtually standing on each other's toes, that busy it is in here.

Arrived at the pool area, we first receive a briefing from a staff member. Since I am standing way in the back, I can't hear a thing of what the man is saying due to the poor acoustics of the pool area. So far so good. Then the

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staff member indicates that every person should now fit on a pair of fins first, after which the whole herd moves over to the equipment boxes and starts trying on fins.

Frustration!

These boxes are all marked with shoe sizes, but after having searched the box with size forty four, I conclude that the ones that I need are scattered all over the other boxes. Virtually nothing is in the correct boxes. Finally having found a pair of fins that fit, I move over to the vest department. The boxes that contain the vests are just as chaotically ordered as the fins. A big thank you to the previous group, whom most likely dropped their kit in whatever box was near! Then we move over to the air department.

The filled bottles are kept at the left side of the pool; the used ones are marked with a rope that is wrapped around the whole group of bottles. I fetch a bottle from the left group and start to assemble my kit. Having assembled my kit, I check the air supply; one hundred bar (f..k). I grab another bottle from the "fresh department" and start all over again. Again I check the air supply; thirty five bar (f..k, f..k, triple f..k). Another big thank you to the previous f...ing group! The third one finally reads a hundred and ninety bars. This pissing about with kit has cost me quite a bit of time!

Water, finally

As I enter the water with my buddy we head off to the ten meter tank at the right and literally get DOWN to business. As congested as the dressing rooms were, so is the pool. You must be careful with moving around or you can and will hurt someone near to you. It's a busy bee hive. When we reach the drop off to thirty five meters area we are welcomed by a huge stream of air bubbles on their way to the surface.

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These generate quite a bit current, and are generated by the divers that have already descended to thirty five meters. At first it seems somewhat intimidating since the bubbles obscure all vision downwards. As we decent into the thirty five meter area, vision becomes less and less obscured by the bubbles until we finally reach the deepest point of the pool. My computer indicates thirty four point four meters, we have officially hit rock bottom!

We make two or three rounds at the bottom off the pit after which we begin with ascending to the shallow area. Having made the required safety stop we reach the opening giving access to the ten meter pool. Here we swim around a bit after which we are summoned to leave the water.

The end

Then the entire ceremony in the dressing room starts all over again, this time in reversed order. We all meet again in the bar for a talk about the whole Nemo 33 experience. After a while it is time to head for home, another two hour drive.