

# Halton scuba club emphasizes fun and safety

By LORI TAYLOR  
Herald staff writer

Most people know what Fairy Lake looks like from the surface, but only the members of the Halton Scuba Trek know what it looks like from underneath.

The Halton Scuba Trek is a club for people interested in scuba diving. It was formed about five years ago, and averages between four and ten members. Club president Walter Noble told The Herald this week new divers are welcome, but the club will take each diver out on a practice dive before they join the club.

"With a club, you always have somebody to go diving with," Mr. Noble said. The buddy system prevails in scuba diving, as it does with swimming in unfamiliar waters.

Courses in scuba diving are available from the Halton Hills recreation department, Mr. Noble said, with the next course beginning in September. To take the course, a beginning diver must supply his own snorkel, mask, fins and weight belt. The rest of the equipment is supplied by the recreation department.

The cost for a basic scuba outfit ranges between \$500 and \$700, Mr. Noble said. The necessary pieces of equipment are a wet suit, weights to keep the diver submerged, a dive knife, a mask, a snorkel, a buoyancy compensator to assist in getting back to the surface, a regulator which regulates the flow of air from the tanks, diving tanks and a depth gauge. Another piece of equipment a diver should have is a diver flag, which is a red flag with a diagonal white stripe. This is put over the area where a diver is submerged and means boats should stay clear for about 100 feet.

**WETSUITS**  
Wet suits range in price from \$175 to \$300, depending on whether you buy the suit off the rack, or get it custom-fitted," Mr. Noble said. The suits will have to be replaced every five or six years, depending on how much wear and tear they have been put through, he said.

"I say the more zippers in a wet suit, the better," Mr. Noble said. "It gets colder, but it's easier to get in and get out."

A dive knife is a necessary tool underwater, in case the diver gets caught in the weeds, Mr. Noble said. It can also be used as a hammer, or to pry something open.

A diver should take a recommended diving course before even attempting to go scuba diving. Courses are available

through the recreation department, the YMCA, and a number of diving organizations. Once a diver has completed a course, he can request an examination in order to be certified as a diver.

Certification tests are conducted by different diving groups, such as the National Association of Underwater Instructors. Part of the test is written, and part practical. Mr. Noble said that in his test, they went out for an open water check-out on November 30, in Bala, where qualified diving instructors studied their practical skills and knowledge.

Mr. Noble said he and his wife, who took the test at the same time, were required to go in for a set period of time skin-diving, which is diving with a snorkel only. Then they came out of the water for a while to warm up. Then it was back into the water with the scuba gear for about 20 minutes.

**DIVING SKILLS**  
Other diving skills include removing all the diving equipment underwater, then putting it back on again. This may involve swimming away from the gear, or laying it out on the bottom, surfacing and going back down again to put it on. Another valuable skill is learning black-water diving which is necessary in dark water, where divers may get lost because there is no visible difference between up and down.

In a diving test, the people doing the testing may even turn off the air in a diver's tank to see how he or she will react to an emergency situation, Mr. Noble said.

So far, the government has not been involved in scuba diving, and Mr. Noble said most divers hope to keep the government from getting involved because they fear it would place too many restrictions on enthusiasts.

"The Ontario Underwater Council keeps a check on the stations which fill air tanks, to make sure the quality of air going into the tanks is good," Mr. Noble said. "That's all that's necessary. The government tends to put too much red tape around it."

Accidents in diving arise from "people not knowing what they're doing, from carelessness and abuse of alcohol and drugs," Mr. Noble said. "I've never heard of an accident with people who were careful and checked everything, and who were confident underwater."

In a recent scuba-diving accident two women diving in Georgian Bay died. One of the women was trying to qualify



Walter Noble shows some of the basic equipment a scuba diver needs to take part in the sport. The diving knife is a multi-purpose tool which can come in handy in any number of situations. The tank contains air under tremendous pressure, and care has to be taken that the tank does not explode, as it might if it was knocked about.

for her instructor's certificate. Mr. Noble said that there were several factors involved in that accident, from what he read in the newspapers, which led to the tragedy. One was the fact that the women were diving too deep in unfamiliar waters.

**WATER COLD**  
"They didn't realize that the water is as cold in Georgian Bay at 100 feet in the summer as it is just under the ice in the winter," he said. "Also one of the divers was a novice, and she shouldn't have been diving that deep with so few previous dives."

Mr. Noble said the women probably died from hypothermia (lowering of the body temperature) and panic. "The limit is a wet suit is 20 to 25 minutes in the winter," Mr. Noble said. "When you start feeling warm, you come up, because that's the first sign of frost bite."

"All scuba accidents I compare to a drunk driver," he said. "He doesn't know what he's doing."

"Diving is just as dangerous

as crossing the street," Mr. Noble said. "There are rules you have to take into account."

The policy of the Halton Scuba Trek is to take a diver down for a dive before he joins the club, so they can be assured of the diver's level of skill, and the amount of caution the diver takes in readying himself or herself for the dive. No matter how impressive the diver's credentials are, he or she must undergo this test.

"A lot of people don't go in over one summer, and then they try to go back in the

following year as if they hadn't stopped," Mr. Noble said. "It's not possible to miss a year without it having some effect. It's like getting up on skates for the first time each winter. After the first time, your legs are pretty tired. By the end of the winter you're back in shape again."

Mr. Noble said the club generally starts out the summer season easily, with a dive or two in Fairy Lake, before going further afield. "We've been in Fairy Lake five times this year already," he said. "We've pulled out some interesting stuff, like an old tricycle and a fishing rod."

**LOVE OF STRESS**  
There's a lot of stress involved in diving, and it's important for a diver to stay in good shape, Mr. Noble said. "Most diving courses recommend that you be able to swim one mile free style," Mr. Noble said. "Even diving in calm water takes a lot of energy, and the colder the water, the more energy it takes. After you've been in real rough water, or if you've been under a long time, you'll come up feeling very hungry, thirsty and tired."

Being in good condition and being ready to dive will also mean a diver can stay down longer with the same amount of air in his or her diving tanks, Mr. Noble said. "A tank of air will last me an average of one and a half times as long as a novice diver, because I'm more relaxed," he said.

"Some people are certified divers, but they aren't at all confident once they're under the water," Mr. Noble said. "You have to learn to relax."

The Halton Scuba Trek will frequently get together a group of people to organize a charter for a day of diving. A charter costs about \$125 on the average, Mr. Noble said, and with 10 or 12 people the cost is reasonable.

There are a number of sports stores, particularly in the area around Tobermory, which will arrange charters, once the group lets them know

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