

The HangLine

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Happy Anniversary S.D.O.

Serious Divers Only - 20 Years and Going Strong

The year was 1988. It was a very cool Ontario spring day, two university students decided to breakaway for the weekend and get some diving in after a long couple of months of intense studies. Tired of driving to the local quarry and diving sandy bottoms and chasing tiny minnows around, the two decided to head north to the great white of Georgian Bay. Cold frigid but clear waters was only 6 hours from campus.

On arrival the two were amazed at the beauty of the geographical setting. Bright blue water set against green pines and snow covered limestone formations. Excited to get started exploring the area, the first job was to check in at the local dive shop and find out what was where and how to get there.

Fathom Five (the national marine park in Georgian Bay) offers some of the best freshwater diving opportunities in the world. Clear, clean water, submerged geological formations (cliffs, caves, overhangs) and more than 20 historical shipwrecks all offer a variety of underwater experiences. But what was most intriguing to these two

young divers was the Grotto dive site located along the Georgian Bay shoreline about 19 km (12 miles) east of Tobermory. Hidden passages lead from inside the Grotto to the open waters of Georgian Bay, but not before winding in and around a maze of limestone pinnacles, only interrupted by the occasional dome rooms that intersect with each tunnel. Charter operators advertise this as a boat access only site and were asking way more money than the cashless college students could afford. After the attendant at the tourism





booth told the two youngsters that it was only a 3 or 4 kilometer hike from the road at Cyprus Lake Head, the two struck out to haul gear into this remote site.

At first, hauling dive gear for two dives each did not seem like such a big challenge. Silly men. Three and half hours later the two emerged from the muddy trail out to a ledge at the fringe of the Grotto. A beautiful site to say the least. Just as they arrived, the local dive charter pulled up and anchored. The manifest of divers looked up onto the ridge and after realizing that the two hikers were actually divers who just hauled their gear a marathon through snow covered trails, they began to ridicule the two. One charter passenger however appreciated the effort and was overheard saying "Wow, for serious divers only I guess!"



From that moment on the term stuck for each and every adventure the two made.

Adam Harrington, a grad student in Marine Biology and Bill Nadeau, an undergrad in the 'extended program' and both at the University of Guelph, spent a great deal of their time diving whatever body of water they could get into {pictured above - 1988, at a local quarry near Guelph, Ontario}. Not a lot of choices in the western Ontario region, especially during winter. However


the late week night and weekend get-aways are what kept the two sane during their academic tenure.

Their adventures soon drew the attention of other divers with similar interests and passions. Eventually, 'Serious Divers Only aka **S.D.O.**' became more than a secret diving cult of people who wanted to take the sport to the extreme. It evolved into a club and later a business providing training, travel, programs, dive charters and offered a variety of environmental marine expeditions. The unique services this company had to offer was quickly recognized and soon it was sought after

by commercial operations to conduct sub-sea assessments, specimen collection and even the design and construction of marine superstructures such as marine railways and boat lifts, large aquariums, cisterns, and underwater photographic surveillance systems. In doing so the **S.D.O.** team was forced to think outside of the box, integrating a combination of traditional commercial diving practices with scientific and what is now known today as technical diving applications.

In 1989, after realizing the quasi-official status of the club, it was decided among it's members that a charter should be drawn. The original statement was drafted over a keg of beer at 3 o'clock in the morning and sounded like a pirates law book but with overtones of cowboys





1989 S.D.O. Statement of Principals and Objects

Since the advent of the aqua-lung in 1943, SCUBA divers have been in the unique situation of entering a world foreign to most people. Technological advancements have enabled divers to further probe the aquatic environment and to examine the abundance of life and history that exists therein. Divers are in the position to witness firsthand the destruction caused by human pollution and wanton exploitation. Our perspective generates appreciation of the world's vulnerable and fragile underwater realm. This privilege to explore the world's waters carries with it a collateral responsibility to help support the environment from which we derive pleasure, knowledge and sustenance.

As serious divers we must accept this responsibility and begin to care for the only real physical phenomenon that has been taking care of us for the last five million years; the planet earth.

Serious Divers Only (S.D.O.) is a society dedicated to responding to the environmental issues affecting not only our aquatic systems, but our entire biosphere. Our **CHALLENGE**; to **CONQUER** the problems generated by environmental abuse and **PRESERVE** the natural state of the aquatic environment.

breathing voodoo gas. The following morning, with cold clothes and spicy ceasers, it was amended to reflect the more 'academic' nature of the group {see below}.

The diving arena expanded into some very specialized and often sensitive environments including mineshafts, aquarium tanks and remote frozen lakes and rivers. Various contracts with Canada Parks, Universities and other environmental agencies tasked **S.D.O.** with the job of entering into, measuring and recording the

various resources within their industry. As a result Bill, Adam and other club members refined their technique to enhance the effectiveness of their exploration and reduce the risk of their job. To do this, unique equipment modifications and diving techniques were developed. Both Bill and Adam were heavily involved in scientific diving activities since the early eighties so this was a natural progression. In effect, they were developing what would be considered technical diving practices almost 30 years ago, long before the establishment of any technical diver training agency.

S.D.O. undertook projects that included wreck preservation and archeological studies, site clean-ups, film projects and underwater





documentaries. It's membership base grew to include specialists all across Canada



and eventually the birth of it's newsletter 'The Diver's EcoWatch' which later became syndicated in diver magazines and TV shows as 'Technically Speaking' and 'The HangLine'.

S.D.O. later went on to promote ecological studies, tradeshows and eventually became one of the first companies to pioneer technical diving into Canada.

S.D.O. was a sponsor in the first Canadian technical diver tradeshow called Mix '96, and later hosted the Island Tech Retreat and the Sea the Future symposium which drew diving pioneers from all over the world including Dr. Phil Nuytten, Tom Mount, Jarrod Jablonski, Jill and Paul Heinerth and Dr David Sawatzky. Sea the Future offered ground breaking programs including the first ever 'Rebreather Forum and Gear Modification Workshop' which pitted contrasting opinions from some very outspoken authorities.

Today **S.D.O.** represents a huge alumni of pioneers who originally banded together because they had a common cause and passion. Some of **S.D.O.**'s forefathers continue to remain heavily involved with **S.D.O.**, others have moved on, and some have passed away doing what they love to do most - diving. Adam Harrington, one of **S.D.O.**'s original founders enjoys a successful acting career and maintains contact with us. Bill Nadeau, continues to promote S.D.O. activities and is a regular contributor to Deep Fathoms Productions.

To it's founders, we congratulate you on **S.D.O.**'s 20th anniversary. To those members lost at sea, we honour your memories. To the rest of you - thanks for helping us make history.

~ The Gang at DFP

Cleanup of Bala Bay held

SUMMER 1990

The Serious Divers Only club hosted a cleanup of the Bala Bay and the Moon River on Saturday. Even though poor weather hurt attendance the 20 divers who showed up cleaned up a large area, concentrating on swimming areas, and areas where there were loss of fish.

The dive yielded some interesting artifacts, including old Coke bottles, old fountain glasses from the Kee, several boat parts, and even a couple of snowmobiles.

The group collected about 12 boxes full of old bottles, and over 100 pounds of metal from the bottom of the lake.

Organizers are planning to make this cleanup an annual event.

Serious Divers Only is an environmental group working to preserve the environment, and to promote responsible diving.

They work to preserve the natural dive sites such as the wreck of the steamship Waome near Keewaydin Island, which members of the group recently visited.

The group is trying to teach divers to respect the natural dive sites.

Wrecks are protected, but many divers tear off pieces to take home for trophies.

In one instance when the group was diving at the Waome they caught another diver coming up with a spring from the ship.

The SDO organization are now going to dive back down to the wreck on Thursday to attach this piece back to the ship, and to clean off the ship to make it better for weekend dives.

Anyone who would like more information about the Serious Divers Only organization should call 416-247-8627.

DIVING IN BALA: The Serious Divers Only Club hosted a clean-up of Bala Bay and the Moon River on Saturday. Bill Nadeau, special projects director for the group, poses with an artifact from the steamship Waome after they confiscated it from a diver. SDO will be diving down to the Waome to attach this piece back to the ship. (Bottom right) This is a photograph of the boiler room of the Waome. (Left) Dave Cooper points out some of the deterioration of the wreck.



Diving and Marine Sciences