

SPORTS: SWIMMING, SCUBA AND SKIN

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August 12, 1963, students of Jim Willoughby's diving class met for the first time to form a club. Election held with Bill Hind president, Fred Whiteman divemaster, Len Gooderich, secretary-treasurer.

Difference from other clubs is the election of a divemaster. Divemaster is responsible for safety and organization of dives. Constitution was drawn up September 2, 1963 and the name adopted was Richmond Wetbacks.

Meetings were held at The Richmond Rod and Gun Club, River Road and Cambie, as a section of the Richmond Rod and Gun Club. Dues of the club then were \$7.50.

The small club was a small knit group of friends with limited money. Met Sunday mornings at 7:aa a.m. at Super Valu parking lot, Westminster Highway and #3 Road to drive by car to selected area, usually Howe Sound.

Diving areas were Porteau, Lions Bay, Brunswick Beach, Whytecliff, also Horseshoe Bay, (east wall of which used by B.C. Ferries in 1973.)

Diving was extremely good with large sized ling cod taken by spear fishing. Club also rented boats to take them to the Gulf Island, Aerewac boats. They went to Porlier Pass, Gabriola Pass, up to Sechelt to Pender Harbor region, Canary Islands, and down as far as Active Pass. The main interest was spear fishing.

Safety was of prime importance in the club constitution. First requirement was that every member be a certified diver, have taken a certified diving course and could produce a letter from an instructor to this effect. Regular course given was by B.C. Safety Council with Jim Willoughby and Phil Newton involved.

Average course taken was 6-8 weeks and consisted of two ocean check-out dives at Whytecliffe or Porteau. Pool tests first years were carried out in private pools in Richmond with instruction in Rod and Gun Club classrooms.

Skin Diving: is mainly using a mask, fins and snorkle.

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Scuba Diving or self-contained underwater breathing apparatus is use of tanks or generator. Use of tanks prolongs length of underwater dive.

First part of diving course consisted mainly of skin diving section, explaining equipment and why pressure must be equalized within the mask, dangers in diving and dangers in marine life. Then came an ocean check-out with members suited in wet suits to get used to equipment in water, then go onto important areas of scuba diving and reasons why two tanks or three tanks must be used or not used, and dangers of bends and other diving diseases if down time is prolonged. Biggest danger in diving is poor instruction, not knowing what one is doing.

After final examination scuba diving students took ocean test in 1963 at Lions Bay. Feeling of freedom was one of best feelings in diving. Holt recalls swimming along a ledge, hanging on water with cliff below having fallen away leaving blackness below.

Club Activities in last 10 years:

Spear fishing was the first interest, with plentiful fish every where the group went. Held two or three meets yearly just for spear fishing.

Specimen collecting started next. Members picked up various types of crabs, injected them with formaldehyde solution and when dry, sprayed them with lacquer or varithane, resulting in beautiful model to be wall mounted or just kept. Cloud and silica sponges were kept.

Photography entered into the activities with underwater cameras used. While waters appear grey or dull to naked eye, photography now beauty of underwater life color and colors of fish more beautiful than tropical fish.

Wreck diving was done on Mary Island, Horseshoe Bay, but wrecks were already picked over. Holt's first wreck was a burned out fish boat hull in Horseshoe Bay were visibility was not clear, but after shock of seeing man made object 80 feet away in the water, marine growths heavy.

It was fun just to dive for the sheer enjoyment.

Night Dives: were done at 8:00 or 9:00 p.m. suiting up in sleet or rain or snow. Entirely different world appears with prawns, shrimp are over the bottom, difficult to catch. All impressed by the phosphorescence in the water. While swimming the members turned out their lights and the glow of phosphorescence surrounded the swimmer and buddy. As near a projection to a ghost or spirit. Body outlined in eerie florescent light but it streaked off behind the swimmer moved in the water. An extremely exciting sight the first time.

Underwater Archeology:

1966: incident diving at north end of Gambier Island and story about finding anchor which came from a sailing ship which burned in the harbor during the Vancouver Fire.

Diving in the same area, the members found an old crock which the Carling Brewery said was the only existing crock of its kind.

1969-1973:

Club started Diving Classes in Skin only to kids 12-15 years of age. Classes were given in cooperation with Richmond Recreation department with pool facilities at Centennial Pool and classrooms at Minoru Pavillion and Richmond Arts Center. Classes ran twice weekly, for one hour in classroom, one hour in the pool, for six weeks. Mainly classes dealt with skin diving, and the course cost \$7.50 with club members supplying free instruction.

Course started naming safety features of diving and the buddy system by which two people always entered the water together for back up and safety reasons. Skill was then developed in use of mask, fins and snorkle. Next came sports activities such as underwater hockey. This was pushing a three pound stainless steel puck around the bottom of the pool, with goals set up either end. Many exciting evenings were spent playing this game. It was not a good spectator sport because on the surface it looked like churning water, with people continually diving, but the kids enjoyed it.

Later the checkout dive was given by a licensed instructor from Vancouver, in a written test and physical pool test. In

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the four years of instructions there hasn't been on failure, the kids are extremely enthusiastic and learn extremely well.

Then came the ocean check out dive to areas the instructors knew, to rent wet suits and get the kids used to diving in salt water. The kids became very enthusiastic about marine life, pull up starfish.

Normal attendance for classes was 15-20. They were restricted so four students could have one instructor for safety, but two students to one instructor was the preferred ratio. In 1973 classes were 16 students in the water.

Pre-requisite to Diving Class:

The person must be physically fit especially not have sinus problems as diving deals with pressure in sinus areas, or respiratory problems. A medical certificate of physical fitness is required. Also a pre-entrance exam of swimming, Centennial Pool (approximately 100 feet) six times; crossing Centennial Pool (30-35 feet) underwater without a mask, fins or snorkel; the retrieving of a five pound weight from the 12 foot end of the pool; treading water five minutes deep end with hands in the water, and two minutes with hands and wrists out of the water.

Age limit is not so important as physical ability of person taking part. In ocean, the individual adds 10-20 pounds of lead weight plus a great amount of swimming or diving so physical stamina vital. Retention of information learned also considered utmost importance.

Dellis Cleland