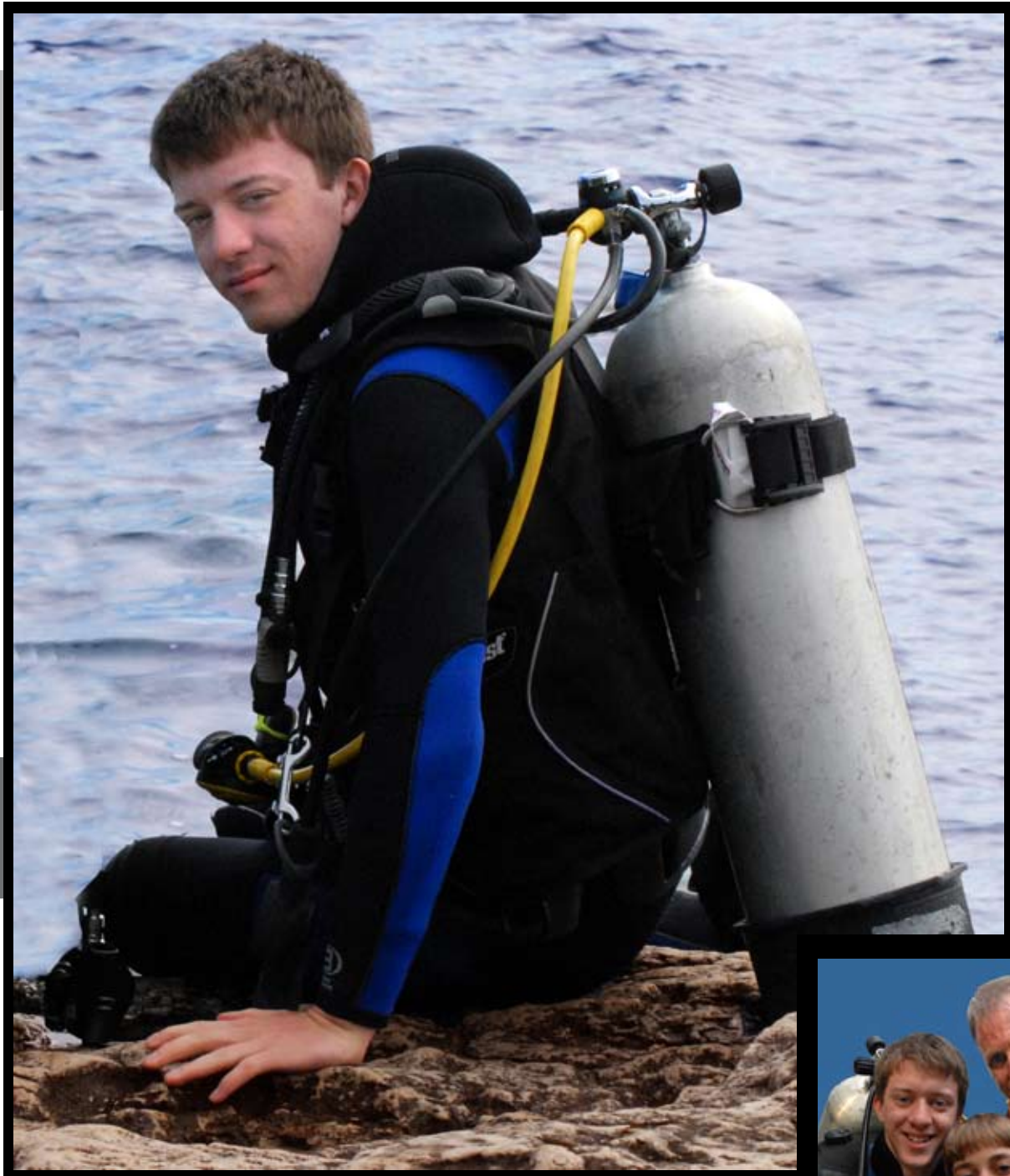
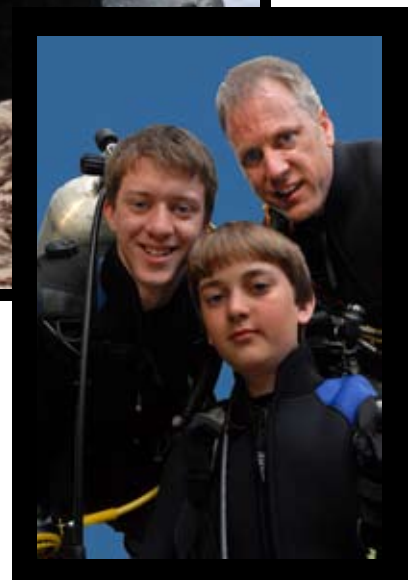


THE GREAT CANADIAN
Family SCUBA Series
AQUA LUNG



The Ellison Boys Scuba Dive Across Canada

Story and Images by Chris Ellison



There are several myths associated with Scuba diving in Canada that need to be dispelled. One is the notion that scuba diving is only limited to fit adult athletes and another is that the only reasonable place to dive is in the Caribbean.

The fact is that more and more families are becoming involved with scuba diving. There is an increasing number of young divers involved in the sport and, although they may move at a slower pace or dive shallower than their parents, they are safely enjoying the sport. In fact, many reputable dive clubs offer 'young divers' programs geared to youths as young as 8yrs old.

Canada has countless world renowned dive spots so there is no need to travel to the tropics. Some of the country's excellent diving experiences include Ontario's Fathom Five in the Bruce Peninsula's city of Tobermory, Sarnia's swift currents and Kingston's sunken wrecks. Outside of Ontario divers can enjoy Newfoundland's historic ship wrecks, Nova Scotia's Birchy Head, Saskatchewan's White Swan Lake and British Columbia's coral reefs off Victoria Island to name a few.

The Plan

In order to dispell many of the myths about scuba diving, Canadian Destinations was challenged to provide a case example of a Canadian family friendly scuba diving experience starting with the Open Water Certification of some young divers and ending with actual diving trips to various Canadian dive sites. I was happy to volunteer my family for this opportunity and I posed the opportunity to my kids. Although they did not know exactly the challenges that were ahead, they shared my adventurous spirit and were excited to try it out.

It was decided that the series, therefore, would focus on myself (43yrs), an intermediate diver but needing to upgrade skills, and my son's Josh and Jonah, both experiencing diving for the first time. We agreed to travel to various parts of the country to demonstrate first-hand that scuba diving is a safe family-friendly sport.

The Series

This multi-week series would begin with the process of Josh and Jonah becoming certified with their Open Water Certificates and then travelling to some of the prime diving hotspots around Ontario and eventually to other great locations around the country. While in each region, we also planned to feature many of the premiere scuba diving outfitters whose services, products, training and tours fit well within our mandate, which was to demonstrate scuba diving as a safe and family-friendly sport.

One of the country's prime scuba diving destinations is the Fathom Five Scuba Park in Tobermory. Right: Josh and Jonah prepare for the 1st Open Water Certification course lake dive.



The Training

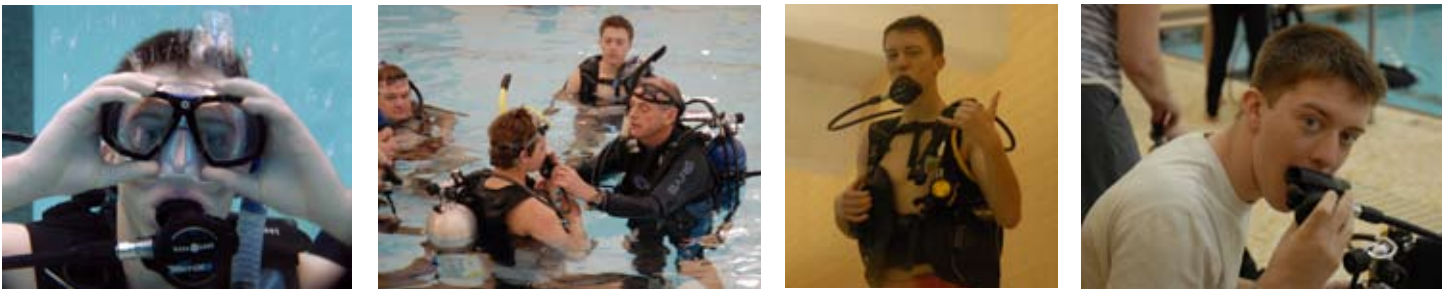
The first step was to find a scuba diving training company to start the training. In my search I found that in my city, as with many cities, there were several scuba training clubs available. I was surprised that even cities or towns that have no water nearby, have scuba diving outfitters offering equipment and training, as well as planned scuba diving tours.

I also learned there are different certifying scuba diving associations and each company usually trains in at least one of them. The most common are PADI (Professional Association of Scuba Instructors) and NAUI (National Association of Underwater Instructors).



PADI





The company we chose for training Josh and Jonah was Cross Current Divers because they were family-friendly, had a solid record of excellence and had high safety standards. Cross Current Divers teaches new and experienced divers, sells quality scuba diving products, organizes trips and provides divers a place to hang out when they are not diving. The staff love to dive and want to share their enthusiasm to explore Canada's and the world's underwater locations. Visit them www.crosscurrentdivers.com.

The first phase of the Open Water Certification process was to sign up for the course and to pick up the training material. Provided was a DVD which offered a user friendly interactive video orientation to scuba diving and covered the theoretical aspects of the course. This is great for new divers because when I was first certified about 10 years ago, we had to read all

the content in a textbook and sit in class for hours. This current program made it fun and interesting and very teen friendly.

The boys worked through the material, sometimes together and sometimes on their own. Once completed they were ready and psyched up for the practical part of the course. Josh and Jonah, along with the other students of differing ages and demographics spent the first part of the first day reviewing the content learned from the DVD training and discussing the finer details. The second part of the day occurred in the pool with equipment putting the theory learned into practice. Both did a great job and could not wait to return the next day for combined class discussion and pool skills development. It went well and they both mastered this section.



THE GREAT CANADIAN **Family SCUBA Series**

AQUA LUNG

Featured Dive Location: TOBERMORY, Ontario

Featured Scuba Company: CROSS CURRENT DIVERS

TOBERMORY Ontario

The next and final part of the Open Water Certification process involved completing some dives in a lake. Stoked, and wanting to commence the dive series as early in the summer as possible the boys opted to complete the course as soon as they could. This meant that we would need to dive in the cold early summer waters of Tobermory Ontario, situated in the renowned Bruce Peninsula.

It is said that if you dive in Tobermory in early June then you can dive anywhere. Though excited by the prospects of a weekend of diving in the beautiful

Bruce Peninsula we were not prepared for the cold waters we faced. Regardless, we went full steam ahead into the adventure.

Among the numerous skills the boys needed to learn and be tested on underwater was one with which Jonah had significant challenges. He had to remove his mask several feet beneath the surface, replace it and blow out the water. After several attempts, Jonah found it just too challenging and he became afraid. I am told that this skill is often more challenging for young divers and often ends in having to wait longer for final certifi-





ABOUT TOBERMORY

With hundreds of kilometres of majestic shoreline, The Bruce Peninsula offers visitors an abundance of magical experiences. I can now understand how one can become lost in the essence of the fresh, clean air and crystal clear waters, which in some areas, more closely resembles a Caribbean seascape. Tobermory can be quiet and tranquil, or busy with visitors from the Chi-Cheemaun ferry delivering people back and forth to Manitoulin Island. It is

known as the Fathom Five National Marine Park, Canada's first National Marine Conservation Area, boasting 22 shipwrecks, several historic light stations and some of the most pristine waters of the Great Lakes. Tobermory is the winner of numerous awards and is billed as the Scuba Diving Capital of Canada. The surrounding area has many great dive sites and charters available from spring "break-up" to winter "freeze-up."



cation when the essential skill can be mastered.

I have to admit that as a protective parent, my natural response was to get in the water and hold his hand through the ordeal, or to have him postpone his certification until a later date. I talked with Kelly, owner of Cross Current Divers, about my concerns. She very gently acknowledged my distress and suggested I allow Jonah to learn the skills independently with the support from the instructors who were always at his side. She indicated that for his own safety, it was essential he master this skill to avoid risks in the future.

The challenges related to learning this skill

caused anxiety for Jonah and I hated watching him in such distress over the task. However, although afraid, Jonah refused to quit. So I agreed to take a back seat and I was amazed what happened next. The group of instructors recognized Jonah's challenges and they all rallied behind him. Kelly arranged for Roman, one of the most senior instructors, to work with Jonah one-on-one to master this last skill. The two of them started at the surface, and slowly over time, Jonah managed to work his way to repeat the skill at deeper levels. As they descended for the last time I sat at the surface for several nail-biting minutes. When they finally surfaced there



ABOUT COACH HOUSE INN

While in Tobermory we stayed at the wonderful Coach House Inn (www.coachhouseinnresort.com), not only because of its cleanliness, on-site activities, restaurant, or because it is perfectly situated just 3 minutes from the Chi-Cheemaun ferry and less than 5 minutes from the Bruce Peninsula National Park

and Fathom Five Marine Park, but because Ruth, the Owner always makes guests feel so welcome! If you are planning a trip to the Bruce Peninsula I would definitely start with a visit to the Bruce Tourism website which can be found at:

www.explorethebruce.com

was a shout from the other divers that Jonah had been successful and met the standards necessary to achieve his Open Water Certification. I was profoundly proud of Jonah for pursuing his goal in spite of his fears and challenges.

Needless to say, there was great jubilation and celebration that he, and Josh, had officially achieved their Open Water Diving Certifications! It was suggested to the group that, as all newly certified PADI scuba divers, they could end the weekend with a fun celebratory dive. Josh and I jumped at the chance to go for one last dive in the gorgeous Caribbean-like waters of Tobermory. Jonah, who was wet and cold, not to mention physically and emotionally exhausted, decided to stay in the van to warm up.

It ended up being an excellent weekend and, although challenging, it was an excellent opportunity to reinforce newly learned diving skills. Both Josh and Jonah worked through the weekend diligently and met each of the tasks presented with boldness and perseverance. We departed from Tobermory elated and enjoyed a brief rest at home. It was clear, however, the diving bug had bitten the boys, and all they wanted to do was take off for another diving expedition where they could flash their new scuba certification identification cards and put their newly learned skills to into action.

Choose an experienced, qualified and reputable instructor to ensure thorough training and safe diving. Right: Kelly Wright, Owner of London's Cross Current Divers offers a variety of training geared to all levels.



THE GREAT CANADIAN Family SCUBA Series

AQUA LUNG

Featured Dive Location: KINGSTON, Ontario

Featured Scuba Company: Northern Tech Diver
Ontario's Premier Source For Scuba Training & Gear!

KINGSTON Ontario

I planned a trip to Kingston Ontario because it was so well known among Canadian Divers as a wonderful diving mecca. We started with contacting Northern Tech Diver, the area's foremost diving tour and equipment provider. Northern Tech Diver is at the heart of some of the world's best diving and they offer a full range of dive services, including training, tours, and exploration in the 1000 Islands area of Lake Ontario. Northern Tech has been serving Lake Ontario divers since 1998 with an experienced and knowledgeable

staff. As a certified PADI/ DAN Training Facility they offer a variety of programs for all levels with some of the most experienced instructors in Ontario, whose qualifications range from Dive Masters to Technical Instructors. Visit them at www.northerntechdiver.com

The Northern Tech Diver crew loaded us onto their boat and provided interesting information about the area and the many wrecks to explore. They told us that for over 200 hundred years, the 1000 Islands region and St Lawrence Seaway have claimed many a hapless

Unsurpassed beauty in the 1000 Islands region of Ontario...

GLEN HOUSE Resort

One of the highlights for the boys and I was staying at The Glen House Resort near Gananoque. It offers a full service 75 room resort which boasts a variety of accommodation styles and options. It's comfortable rooms, beautiful gardens and island view scenery, along with superb gourmet food and a memorable dining experience made our stay incredible. The Glen House offers all the technological necessities and services and amenities you would expect at a luxury modern city hotel but located in their scenic 1000 islands riverfront setting. For generations, The Glen House Resort has enjoyed a long history along the quiet banks of the St. Lawrence River, stretching back well into the early days of the twentieth century. Over the years, the Resort has expanded and new facilities have been added. The golf facility with adjacent accommodations at Glen House Resort would create a highly sought after vacation package by couples, groups of golfers, and corporate



meeting planners. Smuggler's Glen Golf Course opened on July 20, 2005. The 2009 addition of spa services at the resort offers yet another reason to visit The Thousand Islands and stay at The Glen House Resort. www.smugglersglen.com.

ABOUT KINGSTON

Visitors to the area will learn that because a diver cannot dive all day, the city of Kingston has a lot to do. I started our journey at the Tourism Kingston website at www.kingstoncanada.com and identified numerous things to do during our stay. We stayed at Leggett Hall located at Queen's University Campus which offered a clean and economical place to stay. It is open to visitors during the summer months for a reasonable cost. In the evening we enjoyed a dinner cruise through Kingston 1000 Island Cruises (www.1000islandscruises.on.ca) in Confederation Park.

The Sunset Dinner Cruise offered an evening which involved viewing the many Kingston and area sites, a great meal, music, laughter, and twilight dancing, all under the glass canopy of the Island Star. The next day we were greatly entertained on a walking tour of downtown Kingston with Chris Whyman, World Champion 2010 Town Crier Competition. We followed this up with a Confederation Tour Trolley where we explored the city and relived its grand history. One thing not to be missed is one of the incredible tours of Fort Henry National Historical Site where we observed the Garrison Parade and joined the Officer of the Day to watch the Fort Henry Guard perform their daily spectacular show, which included a cannon firing.

Visit them online at
www.kingstoncanada.com



There are numerous opportunities in cities like Kingston to have fun before or after the dive. Make sure you maximize your time.



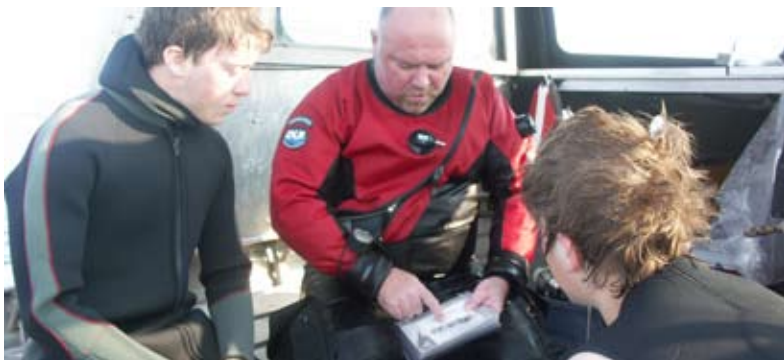
vessel through rocky shoal and severe weather. The fresh water and slow currents in Lake Ontario have done an excellent job of preserving many of these wrecks, making this region one of the best places in the world to explore sunken wrecks. I was amazed at how many were available at varied depths and skill levels.

One of the wrecks the boys and I dived was the Effie Mae since it was relatively shallow and perfect for new divers. Around the year of Canada's 100th birthday, the construction of The Effie Mae, a 40 ft wooden trawler, was started in Shelborne Nova Scotia, by Ken and Lois Jenkins of Port Credit, Ontario. They brought the partially-built hull to Port Credit and completed it in their back yard and finally launched it in 1968. Over the years the boat worked and was owned by a num-

ber of people. In 1993, twenty-five years from the date of her christening, the Effie Mae was put to rest beside one of the historic shipwrecks she had visited so many times before. Today, sitting upright beside the wreck of the schooner barge Aloha, she remains an often-visited dive site.

We also dived the Aloha, which was built by William Dulac at Mt. Clemens, Michigan. While in tow by the C.W. Chamberlain, en route to Kingston, the Aloha floundered in a gale with the loss of one life. The Aloha was discovered by local divers Barbara Carson, Nathaniel Sudds and Lloyd Shales in August 1963, the hull is mostly intact, and this site is used as a second dive or training dive.

Northern Tech Divers offers a variety of excellent training experiences in the Kingston area geared to all skill levels. Right: The boys enjoy several dive opportunities in Kingston.



THE GREAT CANADIAN Family SCUBA Series

AQUA LUNG

Featured Dive Location: SARNIA, Ontario

Featured Scuba Company: Play It Again Scuba

SARNIA Ontario

Our next diving destination was Sarnia Ontario because it is home to some of the most interesting current dives in the country. From experience, however, I knew that such dives could be dangerous and because my boys were with me, I wanted to ensure that safety was paramount. In my research I learned that the foremost expert in the areas was veteran diver and Owner of Play It Again Scuba, Kevin Voseen. Play It Again Scuba is a registered PADI Dive and Travel Centre and with 3 fully certified PADI Instructors, offers courses from your Open Water Diver Certification all the way up to the first professional level that PADI has to offer, PADI Dive Master.

According to Kevin, the primary dives in this location take place at the CSL docks, just south of the bridge and I have to say it was one of the most unique dives I have experienced because it is a drift or current dive. Kevin mentioned that the area features a back-eddy, which refers to a place within a river, usually along a shoreline, where the current doubles back on itself and actually flows in the opposite direction, so the dive actually runs north along the dock. This dive is more geared to advanced divers and because of the potential for danger to young or inexperienced divers, one should dive with a professional.

The first part of the day was spent around the bridge in a thorough safety and planning briefing before we entered the water. My sons had not yet received their certification cards, and I was pleasantly surprised that Kevin was not flexible to proceed until this was resolved. It turned out that Jonah was too young to dive here so he had to stay on the boat. Safety is first.

Advanced dives can be exciting, but challenging. Be sure to dive with the experts. For Sarnia current dives, there is no one better than Kevin Vossens, Owner of Play it again Scuba.



It certainly is a strange experience to navigate currents as you hear, and even feel, ships overhead. I was glad Jonah was planted safely on the boat. At first it felt like the ship would skim overhead, but I eventually realized the ships traveled a safe distance away. After Kevin led me along the shoreline so I could get my bearings, we proceeded to navigate our way along the bottom.

At one point I felt a little nervous and wondered if I would get sucked out into the middle of the river. I later realized that if I allowed the current to take me, I would have just glided back a little further along the shore and the worst I would experience is a little swim back to the starting point. At one moment I experienced a slight dizziness, and I was not sure why. Kevin told me it was likely the shifting current and that others occasionally experience this feeling. Within a few moments it passed and I enjoyed the rest of the dive.

On the next dive we made our way to the bottom and glided along very comfortably to the Monarch. The history behind the Monarch is that on July 7, 1934, this 60 foot wooden tug was towing another vessel upstream. The strong currents in the area caused the vessel in tow to pull the Monarch over onto her side. She took on too much water and sank stern first after righting herself. Located on the Canadian side just South of the Blue Water Bridge, and lying on her starboard side with the bow facing upstream, the hull is mainly intact with some access to interior at a depth of 50ft. A steel staircase and cable can help guide you to the wreck. We used caution at the wreck because currents coming over the top can be strong. Other wreck dives near that location include International Scout, Ben Hur, Tremble, Fontana and the Martin.

One should be an advanced diver when diving most of the wrecks in the area. There can be a moderate to extreme swift current and there can also be heavy boat traffic, which forces you to treat it as an overhead



SARNIA, ONTARIO

If you have never been to Sarnia, or it's been a long time since you visited last, you will be surprised at the number of excellent offerings to visitors. Start at the Bluewater Angler's Fish Hatchery located under the bridges on the north side of the parking area and learn about this interesting hatchery. You can visit Canatara Park where visitors can enjoy the beautiful lifeguarded public beach on Lake Huron, the free Animal Farm and the BMX Track in the park maintained by the City of Sarnia. Visitors will love the Hiawatha Horse Park & Slots and the a new golf driving range simply called The Range.

Visitors with younger children will enjoy a day at Bluewater Fun Park with an array of wet and dry activities such as indoor wall climbing, paint ball and swimming pools, mini golf, laser tag and a variety of water slides. Another highlight in the downtown core for children and adults is the Stones 'N Bones Museum, which is filled with amazing natural history artifacts, a dinosaur room and a gift shop which has items for small children's interests up to adults. If visiting Sarnia in the near future, visit the Tourism Sarnia website found at

www.TourismSarniaLambton.com



Sarnia Rogers Bayfest

One of the most incredible draws to Sarnia in the summer months is Sarnia Rogers Bayfest, known far beyond the Sarnia borders for years. Sarnia Rogers Bayfest is an annual music festival in Centennial Park in downtown that takes place in July each year. Since 1999, Rogers Bayfest has grown from attracting a few thousand visitors to approximately 100,000. The festival involves and benefits a number of charities and capitalizes on the hometown feeling and the festival environment.

As of 2009, Bayfest is split into two weekends: The first being Rock acts which play Thursday, Friday and Saturday, and the second being Country, which play the following Friday and Saturday. The festival also was the winner of Ontario Tourism's Best Business/Event of the year 2009. It is already to know that the people who put on Bayfest also offer concerts throughout the year, such as Yellow Hat Open and Hiawatha Bash. Visit them right not online at

www.sarniabayfest.com

environment. Divers sometimes use river sticks or ropes to pull themselves back up into the shallows. If you are planning on going deeper than 40 ft be ready because that is where the back eddy current meets with the downstream current and the current going downstream can be intense. Near the bottom of the river where the sand meets rock it is magnificent to look into the current and see the underwater sand storm. In such circumstances your bubbles don't go up they go sideways. Always keep your focus and avoid turning your head too abruptly because there are times that the current may take your mask off.

For an easier dive the old CSL docks just north of the casino is a fairly protected area with no boat traffic and little current. It is calm enough and protected enough that open water certifications are done there.

Another incredible dive Kevin led was the Charles S. Price, which reportedly capsized and sank in the big storm of 1913. It is said that it probably en-

countered the lost Regina in the maelstrom since some crewmen of the two vessels were found wearing the lifejackets of the other. The Price floated upside-down near the shipping lane for several days and created a sensation as a mystery ship until divers went down and read her name off the side. At 75 ft deep this wreck's dimensions are 504ft x 54ft x 30ft, which means it is absolutely huge. I must admit that it was probably one of the most beautiful wrecks I have dived. The water was very clear and blue and around the several openings where schools of fish, some about a foot long each.

On a beautiful 11km journey back from the wreck we enjoyed a feast of hot dogs cooked by Kevin right on the boat. Comfortably fatigued and hungry from the day's diving, but enjoying the setting sun and the gorgeous distant Bluewater bridge in the distant, the boys and I later admitted we never enjoyed hot dogs as much those. I would absolutely recommend Kevin at PIAS for an out-of-the-ordinary dive day in Sarnia!

Josh and Jonah have had a busy but exciting summer of scuba diving. Getting through the Open Water Certification process was very rewarding for them and diving at different sites also offered some interesting and diverse diving experiences where they could develop their newly learned skills. The whole experience was incredibly rewarding for me. We are eager now to jump in with both feet and tackle more of Canada's great diving opportunities in months to come.



Chris



Josh



Jonah

Remember to stay tuned for further developments at
www.TopCanadianDestinations.com



The gear we trusted during the series:

It is very important to me that when we dive, safety is put first. My boys are too important to me to allow them to use second rate or out dated gear and risk injury. We also wanted to maximize the quality of our experience and memories in any way we could, including using non-scuba gear. We used the following gear during our recen dives:



Aqua Lung Pro LT Boyancy Compensator - This weight-integrated, jacket style BC is the latest addition to the highly successful family of "Pro" BCs. Those that dive with Pro LT will benefit from the quality and knowledge that Aqua Lung and Sea Quest have developed in BC design and construction over the last four decades. It packs features, style and durability into an affordable package. See www.aqualung.ca.

Aqua Lung Titan LX regulator - The challenge to the design team was clear, "Improve upon the current Titan LX." While no one wants to "mess with success", the designers rose to the occasion and did not disappoint. Aqua Lung is excited to offer an all-new Titan LX for 2009. This beautifully redesigned Titan LX, while picking up exciting new features like Aqua Lung's auto-closure device (ACD), is actually lighter weight, making it travel friendly. The ease of breathing is rated superior on the ANSTI breathing machine.



Aqua Lung Slingshot fins - Swim with the Aqua Lung Slingshot - a revolutionary fin that will take the dive world by storm. The Slingshot will make diving more comfortable, efficient and fun. Its innovations include Power Bands, Gear Shift and Mid-foot Flex Joint that all add up to provide a wonderful diving experience. Junior divers use the Caravelle ADJ, an incredibly comfortable and lightweight fin with the power and efficiency of many larger and heavier fins. See www.aqualung.ca.

Bonica Underwater Diving Video Camera - This combo package comes with a Bonica 1080P High Definition Video Camera, a Bonica Video Light G8V15 - 1500 Lumen LED Light and a soft travel bag ideal for traveling as airline carry-on luggage. See www.bonicadive.com.



Nikon D300s Camera - We rely on the quality, durability and dependability of the D300s BODY, with Nikkor lenses (AF-S DX 16-85mm f/3.5-5.6ED VR II and the AF-S 70-300mm f/4.5-5.6G IF-ED VR). See www.Nikon.ca.

Lowepro DryZone Rover - The DryZone Rover is the world's first backpack designed to safely carry both a hydration system and camera gear all inside the same bag. The unique design of the DryZone Rover allows you to comfortably store camera equipment or other water sensitive items in the waterproof lower compartment while providing quick access to personal storage space above. Remove the padded camera insert from the lower drypod and you instantly have a multi-purpose waterproof pack. Perfect for the adventure photographer in remote and extreme conditions, the DryZone Rover keeps you hiking, hydrated and shooting longer. See www.lowepro.com.

