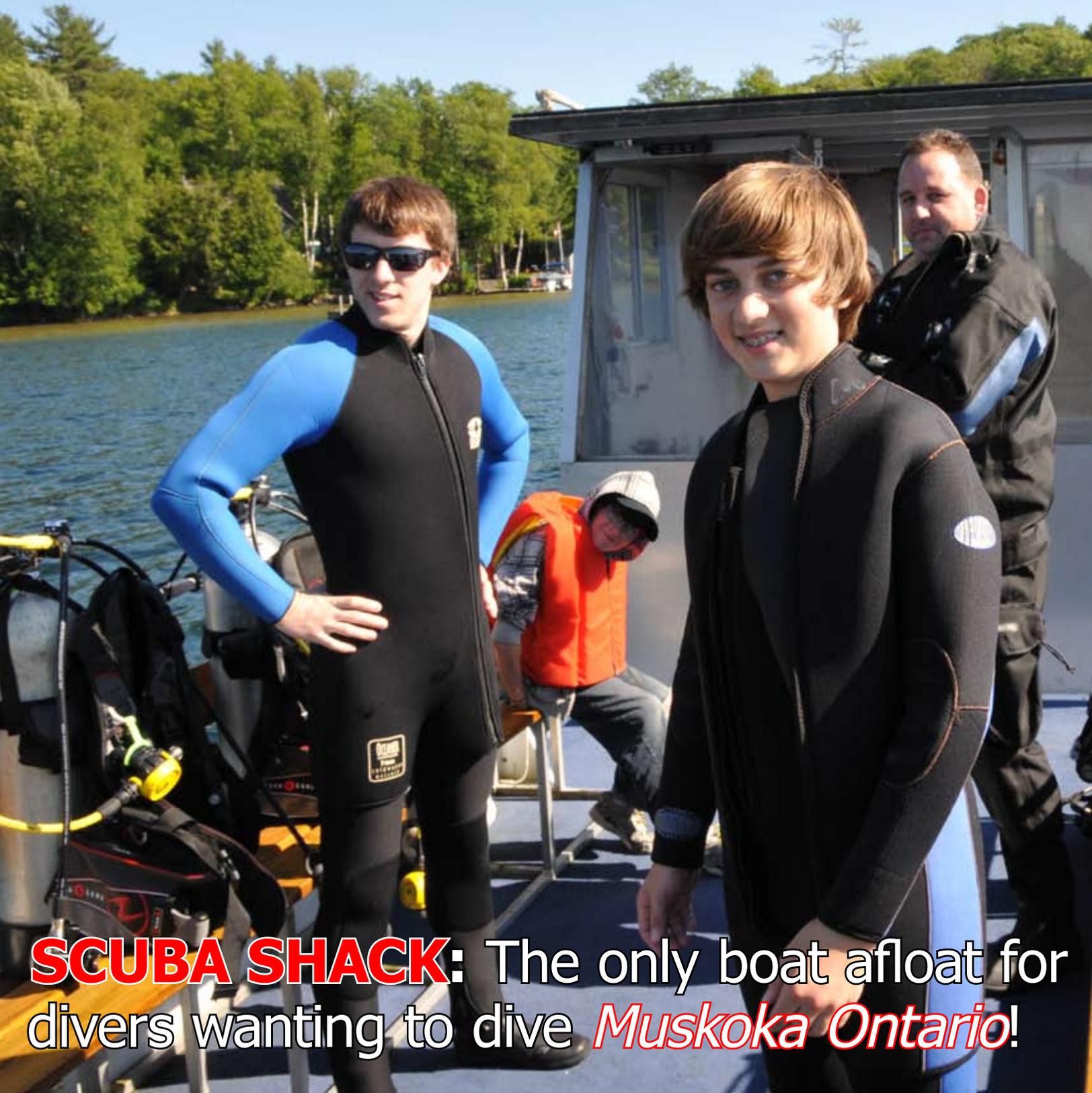


MUSKOKA DIVING

STORY BY CHRIS ELLISON



SCUBA SHACK: The only boat afloat for divers wanting to dive *Muskoka Ontario!*

As part of our **Great Canadian Family Scuba Series** over the last year we have dived in many incredible locations across Canada. Using my own eager sons as case examples, Josh (17yrs) and Jonah (15yrs), we highlighted the successes and challenges associated with the Open Water Certification process. Our goal was to dispel some of the myths associated with scuba diving in Canada, including that scuba diving is only limited to fit athletes, that only adults can do it successfully and that Canadian waters are just too cold to enjoy. So far we have loved being a part of this series because of the exceptional diving opportunities in great locations, some of which have surprised us.

One area we loved this summer was Muskoka Ontario. After all, with all it's 1600 lakes, we assumed that the Muskoka region would be festooned with diving tour operators. However there is only one: Scuba Shack! Based in Gravenhurst Ontario, Scuba Shack is Muskoka's only recreational and technical diving facility and is backed by over 32 Years in the diving Industry servicing all of central Ontario.

The region is actually very large and, for those who have been there, it is arguably among the most beautiful summer vacation areas in Canada. The District of Muskoka is located approximately two hours north of Toronto in Central Ontario. It extends from Georgian Bay in the west, to the northern tip of Lake Couchiching in the south and to the western border of Algonquin Provincial Park in the east. This region is referred to as "cottage country" and sees over 2.1 million visitors annually. Muskoka is a scenic area sprinkled with picturesque villages and towns, farming communities, lakeside vacation hotels and resorts, golf courses, country clubs and marinas.

To hook up with Scuba Shack this summer was an incredible experience. Scuba Shack offers a full service dive shop with numerous dives and wonderful diving tours geared to varied levels. They offer air, nitrox Trimix fills, full recreational & technical gear, is an authorized service & repair of all scuba equipment and they offer retail sales & equipment rentals.

Scuba Shack Owner Dean Mark learned to dive in Manitoba's dark, cold water and then decided to make his hobby a business. So, after moving to Muskoka and finding the Scuba Shack, Dean joined the team as a dive master. When the owners of Scuba Shack decided to sell the business Dean and Jane took the leap. They are now in their 28th year of business, 25 of which are at the same location.

Mark and Jane are avid dive enthusiasts plus certified sport and technical dive instructors. Their expertise ensures that Scuba Shack customers will be offered the largest selection of quality equipment, first class instruction and service which is second to none. The entire staff is dedicated to making the diving experience the most rewarding possible.

With 4 SDI Instructors and

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8 dive masters as well as a technical instructor on the roster, Scuba Shack's staff are fully trained and qualified to assist with any dive related requirement.

International Scuba Certification

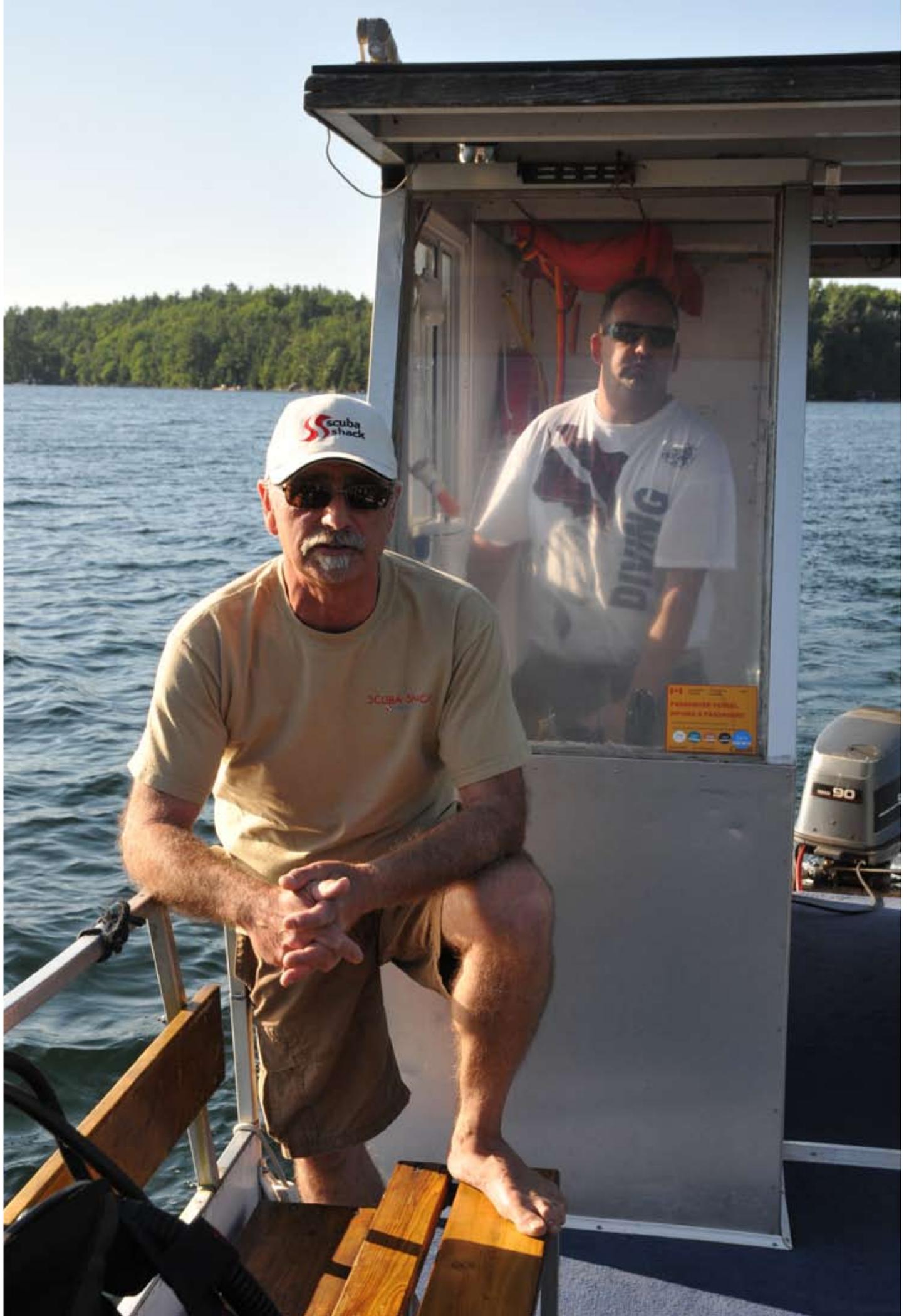
Scuba shack employs some of the most professional and knowledgeable instructors available in central Ontario. Being an SDI Training Facility, TDI Training Facility and PADI Training Facility. Scuba Shack can offer you a large variety of courses from novice to technical, to career oriented. All courses offered at the Scuba Shack are international certifications.

I found the staff to be incredibly helpful and supportive, especially to my boys who where relatively new to the sport and having achieved their open water certificate at the end of last year. This was our first dive of the season and even I was feeling a little out of sorts re-orienting myself to the equipment. However Dean and his crew were patient and understanding from beginning

Scuba Shack is a certified C.T.C. hydro-static test centre and has a complete and comprehensive regulator, tank, valve & suit repair department.

to the end! While we were feeling awkward with the equipment, they encouraged us to relax, acknowledged the challenges for new or infrequent divers and helped us to enjoy the whole experience. Dean took us on some great dives in the area on his custom built 32' pontoon charter boat which is specially designed to accommodate scuba divers, and hold 10 people comfortably.





Featured Muskoka Ontario Dives:

The Wreck of the Waome – The Waome is among the best dives in the area, and according to Dean, she is one of the most pristine, diveable wrecks in Ontario. Historically, on the morning of October 6, 1934 and en route from Port Carling to Beaumaris, a freak storm caught her broadside and left her on the bottom of the lake just west of Keewaydin Island. Today, this 78 foot steel-hulled wooden steamer sits upright in about 70 feet of tea-colored water. Lights and experienced divers are required for the dive. Penetration of this wreck is possible; from the upper deck past the wheelhouse, the diver can descend down the stairway to the lower deck or head towards the fantail. The cargo doors on the second deck are open on both sides allowing divers to swim through from one side to the other. They recommend a minimum Advanced Certification for this dive.

Gravenhurst Cliffs – This site was formerly a German POW camp. When it closed all the intact buildings were pushed into the bay. Max depth 30 feet.

Clear Lake – A great shore dive for any level diver as well as a perfect dive to practice your navigational skills.

Eleanor Island Wall – A boat dive on a neat wall you will find lots of large eggs and bird skeletons. Max depth 100 feet.

Skeleton Lake Wall – A boat dive on a fantastic clear (but chilly) wall where you will find lots of fish and couple of sunken barges. Max depth 120 feet.

Lake Joseph Wall - Excellent boat dive in crystal clear water. Pick your depth and swim along the wall. Max depth >120 feet.

Morrison Wreck - Shallow wreck dive off the docks in Barrie's Waterfront. Max depth approximately 30 feet

Lake Of Bays - Cool wreck dive with 2 boats sitting on top of each other. Max depth 60 feet Bottom of Bala Falls – A Fun easy entry dive with lots of craw fish and good visibility. Max depth 45 feet.

Bird Island Wall & The Platform - The wall goes down in levels with a ledge at approximately every 15 feet. This island itself is a bird sanctuary and is particularly interesting during the month of June when the Blue Herons return from the south to hatch their young. The Platform is a dive area originally set up as a training site for part of the advanced diver programs. With a maximum depth of about 50 feet, it is the numerous boats, toilets, tire reef filled with fish, and town water intake line that make this such an interesting dive. Recommended Advanced Diver or Open Water diver.

Lake Joseph Wall and Grotto - Their Lake Joseph charter includes two dives aboard the Bottom Times II, First is our wall dive, a fantastic experience with depths up to 285' for those advanced technical divers, so good buoyancy and lights are definitely required. The second is a more relaxing dive amidst the Grotto. Swim-throughs abound in this semi cavern dive site and at a relaxing max depth of 55', it is the perfect way to end the day's diving. Boat leaves from Gordon Bay Marine. recommended Advanced Diver certification or greater.

Bottom Times II - Scuba Shack will get you to either of these dive site aboard their 32 foot pontoon boat. The Bottom Times II is very stable in the water making it very easy to suit up and was set up by divers mainly for running dive charters. Maximum 10 Divers.

I would strongly recommend visiting the Muskoka region. It is beautifully diverse and offers memories that will last a lifetime. There are so many other things to do in the region for the whole family and any time of year! Be sure to contact Scuba Shack for all your questions about diving in the area, and especially about booking your own diving tour. They are family-friendly and a company that meets Canadian Destination's high standards for family-friendly diving!

Visit Scuba Shack online at www.scubashack.on.ca.

