

## Great Lakes Summer Program Gives Sea Cadets Scuba Training

By PETER ATKINSON, Deputy Editor

The U.S. Naval Sea Cadet Corps' (NSCC's) summer training program offers cadets the opportunity to gain practical experience on land and at sea in a wide variety of professional pursuits, skills and disciplines, from airman and air traffic control training to culinary arts, mine warfare operations, photojournalism and even music school. And in a program offered through the NSCC's Great Lakes, Mich., Division and the White Lake, Mich.-based Noble Odyssey Foundation, cadets have the opportunity to do their training underwater.

The Great Lakes program provides advanced scuba diving courses to cadets from around the country as part of summer training that also combines maritime skills, engineering and scientific research. In recent years, summer training projects have included collecting plants and reptiles from Great Lakes islands, underwater studies of zebra mussels, investigation of an ancient drowned forest and diving explorations of archaeological sites.

The summer scuba program is based at the Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary, a 448-square-mile area of Lake Huron near Alpena, Mich.

All of these projects have involved field work with scientists, educators and cinematographers, according to Lt. Cmdr. Luke Clyburn, NSCC, Great Lakes Divi-

sion commanding officer, captain of its 80-foot research/training vessel *Pride of Michigan* and president of the Noble Odyssey Foundation, which supports the division by organizing the trips and helping coordinate volunteers, as well as raising funds. It has partnered with the division since 1977.

In 2005, one summer scuba training trip teamed the Sea Cadets with the Ocean Futures Society, headed by Jean-Michel Cousteau, son of explorer and documentarian Jacques Cousteau, for an exploration of shipwrecks in Lake Huron. The trip was filmed as part of the Public Broadcasting System's "Jean-Michel Cousteau's Ocean Adventures" series that aired in spring 2006.

The Great Lakes program also has been producing its own a documentary science films that chronicle the research done during the trips. The most recent of its eight films, "Great Lakes, Ancient Shores – River Channels," was issued in February. The films typically are shown at schools, libraries and to maritime organizations, and are available on DVD.

According to Clyburn, the program is expecting an additional grant from Michigan Coastal Management to continue filming and producing underwater documentaries.

This summer's scuba training trips included studies of ancient submerged shorelines in the Great Lakes, Clyburn said. The first 10-day session, based out of Alpena July 3-13, featured a three-day Nautical Archaeological Society Underwater Archaeology course taught by National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration personnel.

The course focused on the principles and practices of maritime archaeology and incorporated a hands-on mapping exercise of the shipwreck *Scanlon's Barge*. The cadets produced a detailed site plan after two days of diving on the shipwreck.

A second trip, July 31-Aug. 9, was a research project in the Straits of Mackinac between Michigan's upper and lower peninsulas that connect Lake Huron and Lake Michigan, where the cadets worked on a bathymetric survey of an ancient drowned river, Clyburn said. Heading the research was marine biologist Elliott Smith, who accompanied the Cousteau exploration. The trip, scheduled to visit Alpena, St. Ignace and Mackinac Island, also gave the cadets an opportunity to see shipwrecks from the 1800s.

"We get kids from all across the county who take part in this, and they get to see things that not a lot of people have seen," Clyburn said. "They learn about



KATHY TRAX

A pair of U.S. Naval Sea Cadets Corps (NSCC) cadets measure a stump and takes notes during a dive in an ancient drowned forest in northern Lake Huron. The cadets were taking part in a 10-day advanced training program in early July offered through the NSCC's Great Lakes Division in Michigan.



KATHY TRAX

Two Sea Cadet divers explore an underwater shipwreck during the advanced training program that focused on the principles and practices of maritime archaeology and incorporated a hands-on mapping exercise of the shipwreck.

ancient shorelines, invasive freshwater species and are able to contribute to the research that is being done in these areas. They leave with a better understanding of the Great Lakes.”

While other Sea Cadet units offer scuba certification classes and diving programs — notably the Suncoast Division in Clearwater, Fla., which recently provided scuba certification to 39 members and performed a scuba clean-up at nearby Weeki Wachee Springs State Park — the Great Lakes Division is the only Sea Cadet program that combines underwater research science with dive training, ship operation training and documentary filmmaking.

“The cadets do just about everything. They don’t just dive on these trips,” Clyburn said. “They essentially run the ship, doing engineering, navigation, cooking and clean-up work, as well as a lot of other activities. The focus is on the diving, but it’s pretty complete training.”

During the two trips this summer, additional training aboard *Pride of Michigan* was being conducted for man-overboard situations, damage control, firefighting and ship handling, as well as underwater communication equipment operation.

Both trips were available to 20 cadets, 16 male and four female, which is a fairly typical allotment, according to Clyburn. The cadets are accompanied by an adult crew of about eight, including Clyburn, other members of the division staff, volunteers and representatives of the organizations with which the units are doing research.

The program is not for beginners, Clyburn noted. Among the qualifications cadets must have to partici-

pate — along with being at least 14 years old and in good physical shape — is a Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI) certification.

Although cadets must provide some of their own basic equipment, berthing, food, air tank fills, complete scuba equipment, ship training and local transportation are covered by the program. Cadets do have to pay a fee for PADI and Divers Alert Network training and certification.

Among the diving certifications available to qualifying cadets during the 2009 summer scuba program were PADI Advanced Open Water Diver, Great Lakes Research Diver and other specialties.

During their underwater training, cadets are accompanied by certified instructors from the division staff. Clyburn and Lt. Kathy Trax, NSCC, Great Lakes Division’s executive officer, are certified PADI open water instructors and master scuba diver trainers.

For the Great Lakes Division, dive training is available beyond the summer program, with weekend sessions, classroom and pool work offered year-round to bring cadets up to speed on the basics and get them ready for the Great Lakes.

“There’s lots to do and learn before you get into open-water situations,” Clyburn said.

The Great Lakes Division and *Pride of Michigan* are sponsored by the Navy League’s Inland Seas Council in Pontiac, Mich. ■

Information about the scuba training program can be found on the Web at: [www.greatlakesdivision.org/](http://www.greatlakesdivision.org/) or <http://nof.homestead.com/>