

The Surface Times

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Diving for Science
 David Crocker



It's August in Texas and the temperature outside is 102 and rising. The commute to work is a frustrating mix of stop and go traffic and inconsiderate drivers. Sitting in the middle of yet another freeway slowdown you wish you were somewhere else. Someplace relaxing. Someplace quiet, peaceful, and cool. Someplace underwater. A getaway to blue water would be awesome. Unfortunately time and money are two factors keeping that wish from becoming a reality.

But what if there was a place, reasonably close, with crystal clear visibility, and beautiful as well as interesting underwater scenery and aquatic life? What if this place allowed unlimited diving opportunities throughout the year after only one required weekend of training for only \$230.00. All this is possible by enrolling in the Diving for Science program at the Aquarena Springs Nature Center in San Marcos, Texas.

Offered by Texas State University San Marcos, the two day Diving for Science course focuses on The Edwards Aquifer, the Habitat, Endangered Species, Archaeology, State & Federal Regulations governing Spring Lake and advanced diving techniques to ensure protection of this critical habitat. Spring Lake is registered as an Archaeological site governed by the rules of the state of Texas Antiquities Law. Consequently there is no recreational diving in Spring Lake. With the exception of the training area, where open water certification can be done by instructors who have taken the Diving for Science course, access to the open areas of the lake is restricted to authorized Diving for Science Volunteers.

Spring Lake is a unique site with an interesting history. At Spring Lake, more than 200 springs bubble up from the Edwards Aquifer discharging an average of 225 million gallons of water daily. It is also one of the oldest continuously inhabited places in North America. An archaeological dig conducted from 1979 to 1982 discovered artifacts dating back 12,000 years. The springs were also an important stop on the Old San Antonio Road and the Chisholm Trail. Early settlers described the larger springs as fountains, gushing water several feet above the surface of the stream they created. Today, the springs lie at the bottom of Spring Lake and can be viewed through the floor of glass-bottomed boats.

The lake itself didn't exist until former Republic of Texas Vice President, Edward Burleson, purchased the land surrounding the headwaters of the river in 1847. Two years later he built a dam just below the springs to power a mill; the dam, which created Spring Lake, still exists today. In 1926 new owners built a hotel and introduced the glass bottom boats. But the heyday of Spring Lake occurred from 1951 to 1966 with the addition of an amusement park that included a submarine theater, where tourists could view 'mermaids', an Alpine Swiss Sky Ride, and 'Ralph, the Famous Swimming Pig.' Ralph swam in the underwater show performing tricks and his famous "swine dive" until the

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Training Specials

WBD Season Pass

Take any or all of the 38 PADI/DAN specialties offered at We B Divin' in a 12 month period. Crewpacks not included.

Get your **PADI Master Scuba Diver** and your **DAN Diving Emergency Specialist**.

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Learn to Dive Package

A whale of a deal, tell your friends.

Group Class Tuition, Student Materials, Personal Gear (Mask, Snorkel, Fins, Boots, Bag) chosen from a wide variety of options, and a shorty wet suit. Upgrades are available should you desire.

\$725

eLearning

Don't have time to spend in classroom but want to get certified?

Sign up for on-line learning. Do all of the classroom on your time at your location on your PC.

Then spend 8-12 hours with us in the pool and 4 dives in open water.

Same gear package included. \$660 Plus \$120 eLearning enrollment.

Diving for Science

park closed in 1966 and was converted by the university to an environmental learning center. Aquarena Nature Center still offers glass bottom boat tours, as well as environmental education tours, an endangered species exhibit, a natural aquarium and scientific diving training.

So, what do volunteer divers do? In exchange for the opportunity to dive in this pristine environment they work. The majority of the 'work' at Spring Lake involves underwater 'gardening' to keep the springs that bubble up from the bottom of the lake free of detritus, algae and invasive plants. Procedures for this gardening include finning, plucking and transplanting.

There are seven work areas in the lake: the Training Area, Cream of Wheat, Riverbottom, Ossified Forest, Catfish Hotel, Deep Hole, and the underwater Archaeology site, Cream of Wheat is the most dramatic area of the lake. Here the springs bubble up from underground through the sandy bottom making the golden-white sand look like pots of boiling cream of wheat, hence the name. One job at Cream of Wheat involves finning detritus. Detritus is a black accumulation on top of the springs and simply involves gently waving your hand over the sand and fanning the black detritus up and away from the springs. The white sand, being heavier, sinks back to the bottom and the black detritus moves away in the current.

Most of the gardening, however, involves controlling the invasive non-native plant species from the lake, mostly, hydrilla. Hydrilla is a submersed plant that can grow upwards of 25 feet to the surface and it has formed an underwater jungle in much of the lake. Hydrilla has become the most serious aquatic weed problem in most of the U.S and even though the plant is on the U.S. Federal Noxious Weed list, it continues to be sold through aquarium supply dealers. Although hydrilla can be controlled by the application of aquatic herbicides, that option is not viable at Spring Lake due to the 8 endangered species found there. For some reason, hydrilla as well as algae likes to claim the bubbling spring areas and the diver has to reach into the bubbling froth to pluck out the plant, gently shaking it so no salamanders or darters living in it get sent into the open water to be eaten by the numerous fish that gather round to 'observe' the workers. No doubt hanging around in hopes of a tasty tidbit.

Transplanting simply involves transplanting native plants to replace the invasive plant species.

Visitors to the Nature Center who ride the Glass Bottom boats enjoy watching the divers and hearing the explanations of the boat operators of the jobs the divers are doing. Divers are encouraged to wave to the visitors whenever a boat stops

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Confessions of a Snorkel Lover

Caryn Landers

I love to dive, don't you? Hanging weightless way down under the water, cruising along an underwater wall and turning to look off into the endless blue to see a manta fly by is so great! Why on earth would I want to be stuck at the top with only a snorkel when there is so much waiting below? Because there can be so much to do up at the top!

One of the aspects of snorkeling that I love most is that I don't need to have a lot of heavy gear. I feel so much freer with just my skin and mask, fins, and snorkel. No bulky wetsuit. No heavy tank and weighted BC and hoses sticking out all over me. Now don't get me wrong, I love to dive and yes, the gear is not so heavy in the water but it is certainly not streamlined! I love the freedom of movement I have when snorkeling. But all the good stuff is way down there, you



say? It's not. Life abounds in the first fifteen feet of water, especially if you choose your snorkeling spot well. And the colors are much more vibrant in the first few feet of water than they are down below.



Snorkeling can easily be done on your own schedule. You and your buddy can set the pace, enter and exit the water when you want and go back in as many times as you wish. There is no boat schedule to rely on. Just grab your beach stuff and a picnic and you're set for a day of fun! Yes, you can shore dive and have the same no-boat-schedule advantage but you still have to carry all that gear and are limited by how many tanks you have with you.

Snorkeling can be enjoyed by anyone. If you have kids who are too young for diving, snorkeling is a great way to introduce them to the underwater world. They will enjoy doing what you enjoy. It helps them become comfortable in the water and shows them first hand what a great variety of life is under those waves. The same holds true for older children or adults who aren't divers but are curious about the underwater world.

Snorkeling can take you places that scuba can't go. What? Yes, that is correct! While scuba can take you places that your snorkel can't, your snorkel can also take you places that scuba can't. One of the most exotic underwater views in the world is Jellyfish Lake in Palau. You can't dive there—snorkeling only. Imagine how awesome it would be to slip smoothly through the water—no big tank and hoses on your back—sliding through soft jellyfish. Whale and dolphin watching tours are snorkel only. Snorkeling is the best way to visit with manatees in Florida's Crystal River. Many marine mammals do not enjoy the exhaust bubbles produced by scuba; underwater nature photographers and videographers use snorkel gear only to approach and film their subjects.



Give your snorkel a little respect and you will find that it can provide you with a very enjoyable activity on its own. If you don't enjoy it because you find it difficult to clear the snorkel or to dive down quickly, come in to the pool and practice. A snorkel may be a simple piece of equipment, but like anything else, works best when you know how to use it properly. An instructor or divemaster will be happy to practice with you in the pool and teach you the proper techniques and a few little tricks to make your snorkeling just as great as your diving.



Travel 2011

Cozumel

May 27-30 \$972_{DVR} \$768_{NDVR}

July 01-04 \$907_{DVR} \$832_{NDVR}

Ladies Only! **Aug 05-08** \$896_{DVR} \$692_{NDVR}

All taxes / fees included, Hotel Cozumel, 3 days 2 Tank boat dives, transportation to / from hotel / airport, round trip airfare

Truk

November 27 — December 04

\$3280 plus airfare, double occ
Est airfare DFW to Tkk is \$1800
(unless you have miles (-;)

1 night in a hotel in Chuk, est \$75

Curacao

July 23-30 \$1199_{DVR}

Lions Dive, Breakfast,

Free entrance to the Curacao Sea Aquarium,

6 Days 2-Tank boat dives,

Unlimited beach diving 24 hrs per day

2 Spots Left

1 Spot Left

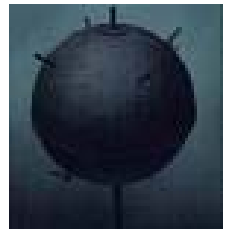


Trying to Decide Where to go Diving?

Angela Garrett, MSDT

Each have their own advantages and disadvantages. If you find yourself debating where to go, think about what you want to accomplish. With a few open water students trying to get certified before their trip to Cayman in the early spring, our decision was simple. It was a matter of which location had the warmest water? There is not much difference in travel distance between the two locations, but when we started comparing water temperature, there was a significant difference. Clear Springs was reporting mid 50s for water temp and Athens was reporting low 70s. Since our purpose was the first three open water dives, things like what was submerged to look at or trying to get deep were not on the priority list. The difference of 20 degrees of water temperature, is the difference in one wetsuit versus two or considering using a dry suit. Comfort is something you should pay attention to when selecting your dive site and your dive equipment.

My first year diving at Clear Springs, I was headed from the shrimp boat to the shark, and somewhere in the middle of that route, I found a naval mine. It was not marked at the surface, no one had ever told me that it was there. I had heard there was a coffin somewhere between the center platforms and the plane, but not a naval mine. It is suspended mid water around 12 to 15 feet, of course, that changes slightly as the water levels change. To give you an idea on the size, it is too big for me to put my arms around. In my many times finding it, I have not gone to the deepest point there to find how exactly it is attached to the bottom of Clear Springs, but somehow it is. Perhaps the next time, I will answer that question.



In September, another diver and I were heading exactly on that path and stumbled upon it again. So if you are leaving the shrimp boat and heading to the shark, try a heading of 210 degrees targeting the front of the shark, and you might just find something new.

From the Dallas Fort Worth area, there are several local diving options that are anywhere from about one hour to five hours away, they each have something unique that a different location may or may not have. So when you start thinking about doing a refresher dive, practicing your navigation skills, getting more exposure to deep dives, or even getting a dive from a boat completed, do your research, there is a place for it near by.



Diving for Science

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over their work site.

The 'work' as a Diving for Science volunteer is not difficult nor is it boring. Volunteers are amazed at how quickly the time flies. Since the lake is fairly shallow, only reaching depths between 20' and 30' air lasts a long time, often resulting in dives that last well over an hour. The constant temperature of 72 degrees Fahrenheit makes Spring Lake an ideal dive year round.

The Diving for Science is offered monthly at Aquarena. The course itself consists of three sections: First being an introduction so Spring Lake itself.

An introduction and explanation of the history and working of the Texas river systems and the Edwards Aquifer.

An introduction to the endangered species of Spring Lake.

Introduction to the basic archaeology of spring Lake.

Understanding the rules and regulations of Spring Lake.

A written test

The second section involves dive skills:

Advanced buoyancy control.

Advanced fin placement.

Buoyancy fin control obstacle course.

The third section involves diving in the Springs .

Identification of spring sites.

Identification of flora and fauna.

Application of buoyancy/fin control.

Evaluation by the Dive Team.

Once a diver has successfully completed the course and received authorization to dive in the lake that diver is eligible to participate in assigned dives and are able to assist in the conservation and preservation efforts of the San Marcos Springs and ecosystem. Best yet, all it takes to keep the Diving for Science certification active is 4 hours of volunteer diving a year.

So, if you find yourself sitting in the middle of a traffic jam wishing you were someplace else, consider taking the Diving for Science course at Aquarena Springs. It's reasonably priced. It's fun. It's definitely the best lake diving you'll ever do and give you a sense of accomplishment when the day is over. Aquarena's Diving for Science program is a great way for divers to get to dive in the cleanest and clearest water in Texas and at the same time get to become involved in one of the largest habitat restoration projects in the country.

To register for the Diving for Science authorization course contact Eric Peterson at seaspete@msn.com and put Diving for Science Authorization Course in the subject header.

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The Surface Times

We B Divin' is your personal resource for scuba training (PADI), equipment sales, service, and travel.


We pride ourselves on individualized training, especially for people with water related anxieties. Our rental gear includes SeaQuest weight integrated BCD's (women's and men's), computers, and regulators for state of the art training and the ultimate in safety.

Remember, enjoyment and safety are enhanced by comfort and proper fit. We will personally fit you, whether your primary interest is diving or snorkeling.

We offer both group and individual travel opportunities. Both singles and couples are welcome. Singles may ask to room share or can choose the single supplement option. Everyone is welcome - divers, snorkelers, non-divers, shoppers, etc.

Think Outside the Bowl!

There is much to learn, many places to go and much to see.



Come learn with us, go places with us and see with us.



Divers Alert Network

DAN Travel Insurance

This is Dan's newest product. I am sure that I have not reviewed every Trip Cancellation and Interruption policy available out there on the market, but this one is very competitive in benefits as well as cost. Also, of course, when we use this

product we are supporting DAN which is always a plus.

Travel insurance is good for those who want to plan a trip but have pending concerns like the health of a loved one. It is very valuable when planning a BIG trip like Truk Lagoon. Many times trips like this must be planned far in the future

and we simply cannot know what life will put on our plate in the interim. So this type of insurance protects us from a total loss.

Check the details from our web site by clicking here

[DAN Dive Insurance](#)

Divers Alert Network

Membership

DAN is the only organization I am aware of that is actively pursuing medical dive research. They provide assistance to all divers (regardless of membership status) through 800 phone numbers and will accept collect calls from anywhere in the world. This alone is

worth our support with membership fees of \$35 per year. The included subscription to Alert Diver is just a bonus.

Dive Insurance

This is the best option for Medical Dive Accident Coverage that I have reviewed. There are three plans from \$25 to \$70 per year covering not only

medical coverage for a dive accident but extra transportation, extra accommodation, lost diving equipment and much more.

I cannot stress enough how valuable it is to have this coverage. Check the details from our web site by clicking here

[DAN Dive Insurance](#)