

A BRIEF HISTORY OF D.U.C.

In the beginning.....

W.W.W. II, brought much suffering to the world, it also pushed the frontiers of invention years ahead.

One of these frontiers was underwater exploration.

Many of the young South African soldiers and sailors who came back from war front had been exposed to underwater warfare and marine salvage. It wasn't too long before small groups of "Frogmen" were seen around the SA coastline all the way from the Cape to Zululand, investigating the rich marine life whilst wearing the strangest and most primitive equipment imaginable!

The abundance of fish life was truly amazing, and as no deep sea fishing had taken place over the years 1939 – 1946, the pickings were easy! So this hardy band of underwater adventurer's took to spearfishing, and developed some mean looking guns, which did the job so well, that local authorities were soon to insist on controls, to regulate this group of unconventional fish harvesters, that appeared to be a threat to the rod and reel brigade.

Thus the SAUU was born under the guidance of Tim Condon, to correlate diving activities in SA.

This then brought about the formation of the Durban Undersea Club by it's founder, Gordon Lumley and his fellow spearo's, the year was
October 1951:-

Bon Levitt	Bob de Lacy Smith
Geoff Aiken-Smith	Peter Wilson
Harold Hephlethwaite	Harold Peskin
Gene Franken	Bob Johnston
Ron Wright	Eric Davis
Julian Snyman	Ted Henley
Johnny Wormser	Talbot Goodlad

The building that we occupy today is still part of the original building, built in 1974, and was the first permanent home to it's members.

It has however over the ensuing years seen many structural changes (1978 and 1984), and had a number of "face-lifts", to become what it is today at the turn of Century, the foremost, oldest surviving dive club building in SA.

DUC has a proud history in the development of and research of the local underwater environment. The Club has always been in close touch with the Natal Parks Board (now ZN Conservation) ORI , Smith's Institute, Natal Sharks Board , Port Captains Office, SAP Dive Unit, and the SAUU.

A look at the Chairman's Board indicates a long history of members dedicated to the task of directing the club to its present position of esteem and strength in the Underwater Community of SA.

The past 40 odd years have seen some remarkable people pass through the Durban Undersea Club, each in their way leaving their own indelible mark on the history of the Club.

The club's members have always excelled in the various disciplines of the sport and from the earliest days brought home the honours in :-
Underwater Hockey – Scuba Orientation – Spearfishing – Underwater Photography – Ichthyology and Conchology

The biggest breakthrough the Club ever achieved was the granting of off-shore boating by the Port Captain's office, in 1978. Our club was then allowed three boat numbers to operate out of Veches Pier, under the jurisdiction of The Durban Ski-Boat Club.

By 1988 DUC had 40 active ski-boats operating out of Vetches Basin and had control of our own Boat Inspections and Radio Control, answering directly to the Port Captain.

By 1998 DUC had over 300 active Ski-boats registered! (from 3 to 300 in 20 yrs) what an achievement.....

Another major contribution to conservation that DUC made was the Survey and Photographic recording of the Leadsman Shoal Sanctuary (Zululand) in a joint venture with the Natal Parks Board.

.This project had its humble beginnings on the 31st May 1983 when our late Chairman Peter van Niekerk, in conjunction with Mike Brokenshaw, (Conservator Coast) of the NPB, took a group from DUC to dive this remote sanctuary, surf launching from the shore at the wreck of the Timavo (1940), to photograph and plot this untouched reef section north of Leven Point.

This is still an on-going joint venture that has provided the NPB with valuable visual and charted records of the Leadsman Shoal fish population and reef structure for future generations to study and evaluate.

Another memorable event in the history of DUC, was the granting of an official Bar Licence.....February 1988
Prior this we had operated as a "Shebeen" and been "bust" on a number of occasions by the Liquor Board. These busts cost DUC a bundle as they then confiscated all stocks of booze and we also had to pay a hefty fine!

On the social side DUC has always been active. Before the advent of TV, Sunday night was 16mm movie night and a main feature movie would be

screened, with supper being provided by the ladies, in our make-shift kitchen, between film spool changes!

As far back as can be recounted, "Theme Party's" have been a feature of the social scene. Rock 'n Roll, Mauritian, Ship-wreck, Come as you are, Hag's and Hobo, were just some of the fun filled parties that have spilled out of the Club in the wee small hours.....

Easter and long-weekends saw DUC at Sodwana Bay camp-outs, before concessions took over the dive scene and electricity was online to run compressors and freezers.

DUC members would consider it a tremendous privilege to have had a 2-mile dive. DUC boat owners would ferry members in their small 4 man craft all day to ensure as many as possible got to see 2-mile reef.

Other brave souls would swim out to 9-mile reef from the beach grab a tank off a waiting boat then snorkel back to shore after their dive. Then drive back to Sordies along the beach! And they'd say "Diving is Fun" Compressor operators would spent long noisy hours into the night, filling tanks on the club's portable petrol driven compressor.

While skippers nursed their over worked outboards into shape getting ready for the next day's diving.

A far cry from today's dive packages which include 5 dives and a sunset sundowner on Lake Sibaya, with luxury accommodation at Sodwana Bay Lodge!

To experience a deep dive (30m+) in the 1950 / 70's, DUC divers would travel to Uvongo on the South Coast. At the base of the Uvongo river water fall (before it silted up in 1987) divers would swim across the lagoon to the cliff face and down into the murky cold water to achieve this depth.

Aliwal Shoal diving only became a reality to DUC members and others in the late 1980's, when the Ski-boat fishing fraternity finally agreed to "allow" divers to ride in Ski-boats out of their controlled ski-boat launch sites. To this end DUC and divers in general have to thank the late 'Bryan Sutton' for his unrelenting efforts in getting this archaic regulation banished from rule books

Sadly many of the people responsible for the steady growth of DUC have emmigrated to various parts of the world (in Perth there is a dive club called "DUC Down Under" founded by ex DUC divers) others to have passed away before their "Three Score Years plus Ten"

So we look to our new members to add their bubbles to those of their predecessors and continue to take DUC into the New Millennium and add their names to this history of the Durban Undersea Club.

With all the new advances in dive tec, the next 40 yrs will make even more interesting reading, and who knows where DUC will be, for sure it will still be a great club – wish I could be around to see it happen.....

Some noteworthy members were (in no particular order of achievements);-

Gorden Lumley	Founder of the Club
Duncan Bannerman.....	Underwater Photography /Magazine Editor
Barry Busby.....	Underwater Photography/Scuba Orientation
Ben Hitchcock.....	Underwater Photography/Custom Housings
Lyn Doveton.....	Marine Study
Boet Martins.....	Spearfishing/16mm Cinematic U/W
Colin du Plessis.....	Underwater Hockey
Hugh Field.....	Equipment Diving/Scuba
Darrrol Smith.....	Equipment Diving/SAP Divers Liaison
Graham Charter.....	Natal Sharks Board/Ski Boating
Neil Brent.....	Chairman/Building Alterations
Roger Johnston.....	Chairman/Point Development Committee
Brian Sutton.....	Chairman/Ski-Boating
Yvonne Sutton.....	Committee/Chairperson
Carl de Villiers.....	Compressors/Scuba/Ski-boating
George Askew.....	Spearfishing
Peter Wilson.....	Leadsman Shoal Project/Photography
Peter van Niekerk.....	Chairman/Clubhouse Development
Kathy Mc Keown.....	Marine Study
Alistair Bennett.....	Sponsors/Ski-Boating
Penny Moxham.....	Club Magazine
Len Jones.....	Spearfishing
Ricky Schick.....	Underwater Photography
Peter Dexter.....	Spearfishing/Committee
Shawn Atlas.....	Spearfishing
Antony Benjamin.....	Spearfishing
Des Dandridge.....	Underwater Hockey
Malcolm Osmond.....	Spearfishing/Committee
Ken de Villiers.....	Committee/Spearfishing
Ron Davies.....	Committee/Skiboating
Joe Jackson.....	Chairman/Skiboating
Alex Brown.....	Compressor Room
Steve Larter.....	Scuba Officer/Committee
Eddie Molier.....	Clubhouse Manager/Committee
Kevin Holley.....	Scuba Training/Committee
Serge & Carmen Galio.....	Marine Fish Tanks/Memorabilia
Peter Cartwright.....	Clubhouse Manager/Scuba Officer
Roger Knowles.....	Committee/Legal Eagle
Neil Brown.....	Chairman
Anne Sykes.....	PRO/Committee
Dennis King.....	Ichthyology
Terry Spetsiotis.....	XL Roadhouse/Committee

There are so many other noteworthy names that spring to mind, that I could fill another page, so apologies to those who feel “left-out”