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Wednesday, March 9, 2016

A Steward's In-Depth Look Beneath the Surface

This past weekend, spring break 2K16, 30 UD students traveled to Williston, Florida. For the 25 open water SCUBA divers, this was a chance to get SCUBA certified in the sun and the sand. Students in the advanced class got to log many more dives using Nitrox air on their way to their advanced certifications. This is an annual trip for UD SCUBA students and instructors, and this was the largest group in almost fifteen years. They started this tradition 22 years ago, under the leadership of Donn Shade.

Learning to SCUBA dive was a very unique experience. Telling your brain to breathe while underwater takes some coaxing, and learning how to safety dive and manage the equipment is overwhelming for a beginner's mind. The class spent four weeks learning in the classroom, covering topics from the underwater environment to health conditions that can arise from diving. We had three pool lessons before the trip, in which we covered things such as regulator retrieval, mask clear, out of air situations, and emergency ascents, skills that we demonstrated in Florida for our certifications.



The first diving location was Devil's Den, a sinkhole/underground cave. It is so called named after the pioneers first saw steam rising from the Earth, and mistook the moisture for the breath of the Devil, rather than the warmer water temperatures below. This was a very comfortable

place to dive, with a big dock to get into the water, and platforms in which to demonstrate our skills.



The next day we dove at Blue Grotto. This diving site is much deeper than Devil's Den, the lower caverns actually stretching down 100 feet. The advanced divers were able to make this dark journey through the use of nitrox air. I went to a max depth of 57 feet, actually sitting on Peace Rock and absorbing my surroundings. It is amazing how quickly colors fade, and I was surrounded by a blues. The water was very clear, until a clumsy diver touched the silty bottom and stirred up the dirt. The mascot of the place is Virgil the Turtle; he is loved by all. It was really cool to see the air bubbles travel up the rock walls and overhang; their quick movements resembling an animal scurrying around.





Saturday, the open water students got a chance to swim with Manatees, at the only place in the world to allow these types of encounters.



This trip was a lot of fun, and valuable as I am now an open water SCUBA certified diver. I got a lot more comfortable with diving and learning to handle problems underwater. Experiencing the underwater environment at a deeper depth is really neat, but eerie and unnerving at times. I'm glad I was a part of this diving class and Florida was a great way to spend spring break.

