

# Skin Diving One Of Fastest-Growing Sports

By EDWARD W. MILLER  
Old King Neptune is getting crowded right out of house, home and underwater kingdom. The skin divers have taken over.

In steadily-increasing numbers, they have invaded the watery world of shellfish, groupers, turtles, pike, bass, perch and old automobile tires, bed-springs and beer cans.

A skin diver is anybody who's invested from \$50 to \$200 or more in equipment

good either for haunting houses, or allowing the owner to swim underwater comfortably in rivers, lakes and oceans and goggle right back at flabbergasted fish.

SKIN DIVING is one of America's newest and fastest-growing sports. Devotees say it has just the right flavor of danger and adventure.

For safety's sake, anybody interested in giving it a try should be a good swimmer. He also

should have a good heart and lungs.

This is what a skin diver wears, in full regalia, and what it cost him: Face mask, \$4.95; leg fins, \$5.95 to \$12; aqua lung with compressed air tank, \$100 to \$200; rubber suit, \$60; depth gauge, \$8.

That equipment, with the strap-on tank containing 70 cubic feet of compressed air, will permit diving for about an hour in water 10 to 20 feet deep, and about 20 minutes at 100-feet depths.

The variable in length of descent time depends on exertion and the diver's physical strength.

Skin divers, wearing only masks and fins, have attained depths of more than 100 feet. A new depth record with this meager equipment was set last fall. A couple of Italians reached a depth of 134.51 feet.

Without the aid of compressed air tanks, skin divers can remain under water only as long as they can comfortably hold their breaths.

Divers equipped with double compressed air tanks can manage depths of 200 or more feet and remain under 30 minutes.

SAGINAW HAS A GROWING band of skin divers organized last fall as the Saginaw Valley

Aqua Fins. Four members started it. Now there are 24.

Organizers were Don C. McLellan, 2519 Court, now Aqua Fins president; Kenneth Wren, 617 1/2 South Ninth; John Fredericks, 1412 Marquette; and Pat McCarty, 933 South Woodbridge.

The average Aqua Fin has been skin diving two years. They meet monthly at each other's homes. Occasionally, they rent the Arthur Hill High School swimming pool for practice.

The real purpose of organization," explains McLellan, "was and is safety. Many members had been diving alone—a dangerous practice. The club provides an opportunity to exchange information on equipment, diving locations, experiences and safety measures."

THE AQUA FINS plan group dives this spring and summer at Higgins Lake, Torch Lake; off the Charity Islands in Lake Huron, and at several known shipwreck locations in the Great Lakes.

McLellan says his club may have a go this summer at locating the wreck of the Kitty Reeves, which sank in 1870 off Tawas Point, Lake Huron, in a November gale.

If they do, it would be a victory which has eluded half a dozen expeditions, some utilizing expensive equipment, to locate the wrecked freighter laden with an estimated 500 tons of copper bars which would be valued today at about \$300,000.

The Aqua Fins also plan to dive this summer in Lake Solitude, near East Tawas—either to disprove one of the area's favorite legends or make what would be one of the greatest finds in maritime salvage history.

McLellan and several club members are intrigued with the fable that the first sailing vessel on the Great Lakes, French Explorer LaSalle's ship, "The Griff-

on," lies somewhere on the bottom of Lake Solitude, once accessible by a small river which ran into it from Lake Huron.

The Griffon last was seen in 1679 when gales drove the little two-master through the Straits of Mackinac and into oblivion. It never was seen again. Historians have speculated about its disappearance, some believing The Griffon even may be resting somewhere on the bottom of Saginaw River or Saginaw Bay.

If there's time this year, the Aqua Fins may journey farther north for an attempt at "big league" skin diving in Lake Huron off Alpena.

This venture will be in 180 feet of water to probe another of the Great Lakes' most famous shipwrecks. It is that of the ill-fated Pewabic, once a lordly lake passenger vessel which sank in 1865 after a collision with another liner, The Meteor.

The Pewabic, whose wreck was reached in 1917 by armored divers but never fully salvaged, carried an estimated 300 tons of copper ingots or bars and \$40,000 in currency.

"Wearing double air tanks," says McLellan, confidently, "I'm sure we can reach the Pewabic comfortably and without danger. I intend to have a go at that one, too."

Skin divers also have limitless opportunities in the streams and rivers of the Saginaw Valley watershed to find valuable pine logs which, for one reason or another, sank and are buried in river or lake bottoms.

"Saginaw River," says McLellan, "is so murky even on the clearest day you can't see your hand in front of your face."

Diving last summer in Otter Lake, near Millington, McLellan says he saw many buried logs. Some of the Saginaw lumber era's finest cork pine came from the Otter Lake region, incidentally.

"One log I saw," relates McLellan, "looked almost as big as an automobile. I scraped away moss on one end and there was the log mark stamped in it maybe almost 100 years ago."

The Aqua Fins also stand ready to perform grimmer mis-

sions. Saginaw Police and Sheriff's Departments have called them to locate bodies of drowned persons.

THE AQUA FINS and other Michigan skin divers rankle at present state conservation laws prohibiting underwater nimrods from spearing any but so-called "trash fish"—carp, dogfish, gar pike and others.

Further, skin divers stalking Michigan lakes and streams may use only hand-held spears, none with mechanical propulsion. The Conservation Department also designates certain lakes skin divers may hunt and during what periods.

Any skin diver who gets around much has seen pike and bass line fishermen only dream about.

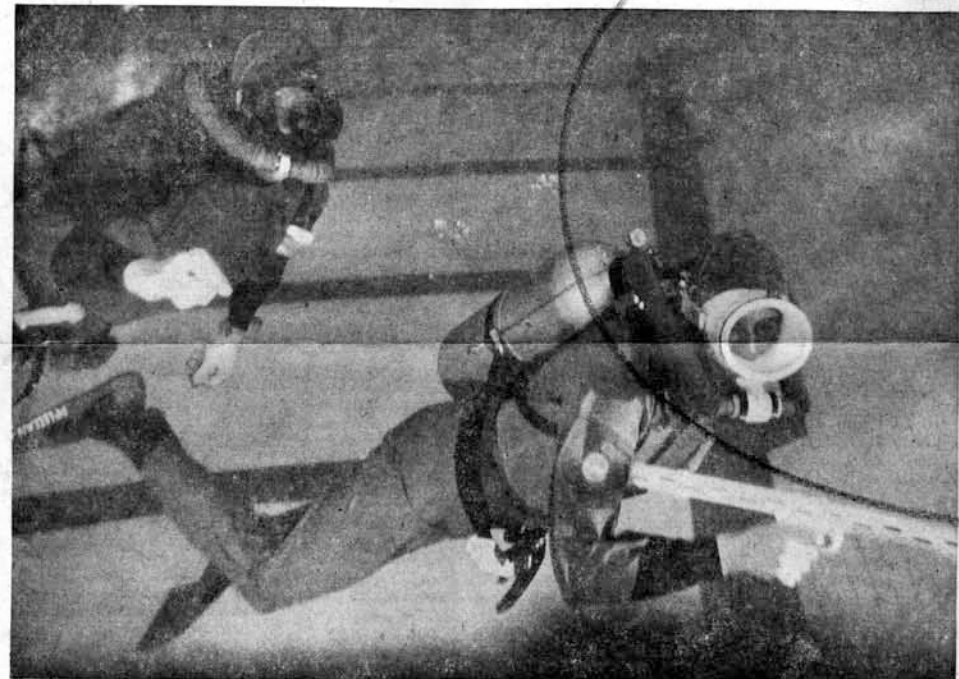
"I've seen bass and pike big enough to make any fisherman drool," says McLellan, "and once one of our club members ran into a sturgeon in Burt Lake so big it just plain scared him out of the water."

What's the sensation of skin diving — walking about the bottom of a lake or stream on a fine, sunny day?

"It's almost like flying in a liquid sky," answers McLellan. "You feel absolutely weightless. Sometimes the weeds are 18 to 20 feet high, but they don't look like weeds. They look like beautiful, wavering forests in most delicate tones of green, red and brown."

Maybe there's a little poetry, too, about this skin diving business.

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UNDERWATER 'NIMROD'—Don McLellan, wielding a spear, is accompanied by Ken Wren as they swim in about 12 feet of water in the Arthur Hill pool. Michigan skin divers hope the

Legislature will relax laws prohibiting underwater spearing of any but so-called "trash" fish, including carp and other coarser varieties. (Saginaw News photos by Bill Gustafson).



'NEAT YET NOT GAUDY'—These two Saginaw skin divers, Don McLellan (left), and Ken Wren, members of the Saginaw Valley Aqua Fins, as they appeared in full regalia for practice at the Arthur Hill High School swimming pool. McLellan is president of the newly-organized club of skin diving enthusiasts.