

It's All About the 'P's!

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UNESCO's influence reaches far beyond Newfoundland's Conception Bay – my home, my office and definitely my favourite place to be – and it's safe to say that 'little old me' will never have the same impact upon the World. However, I'd like to think that in this beautiful part of the planet which most people have never heard of, we at Ocean Quest contribute as best we can to some of the UNESCO ideals by increasing awareness of the importance of safeguarding our natural and cultural heritage. How do our activities help address the threat to underwater cultural sites? Well, it's all about the 'P's!

Passion

Many good things are borne from necessity, but I firmly believe it's passion which truly influences opinion and is behind most successes. Growing up near the Ocean, like all Newfoundlanders, I've always admired and respected it. Watching icebergs float by in spring, whales feeding in summer or ships and fishing boats going about their business, the sea held a fascination for me which was destined to develop into much more. Taking the "plunge" and learning to SCUBA dive made that fascination into a dream – a passion to turn the amazing underwater world I'd just discovered into a career opportunity, even a lifestyle. Whether beautiful marine life or awe inspiring shipwrecks, what I saw under the Atlantic waves was special, but so much of it was threatened – mostly by lack of awareness of its fragility but, sadly, much of the time by blatant disregard for its existence. That's where my passion came from – the urge to encourage others to respect and care for the natural and historical wonders I'd found beneath the sea on my own doorstep. The company which emerged from the dream, Ocean Quest, is driven by that passion – one which is shared by all its employees and which I hope will sustain it for a long time yet.

Product

Without a product, there would be no business! The solution was obvious – a dive charter business. I'd do what I loved best, with a bunch of like-minded people and get paid for it. No problem! Well, it wasn't quite as easy as that but the product – with a little hard work and a lot of support from family, friends and a dedicated workforce – is now



Figure 1: The unofficial Marine Park of Conception Bay designated by Rick Stanley (Drawing Rick Stanley)

sold internationally. Diving on shipwrecks, with whales, icebergs and in historic sites is, it appears, quite popular with divers around the World. Ideally, I could show off the Bell Island Wrecks and the magnificent local marine life and pay the bills! In addition to benefiting tourism in the Province, it's helped increase awareness that we need to look after our marine environment and, equally as important, the snapshots of history and culture which find themselves on the seabed in the form of shipwrecks and artefacts. In order to keep selling the product, it needs to remain attractive to the consumer. However, the marine environment is not manufactured, it's a living thing which also provides a unique insight into our past and if its wonders are to be sold as a commodity, it needs to be cared for.

Protect & Preserve

Along with a successful marine based business comes the responsibility of protecting and preserving its resources. This responsibility has to be shared; it's way too much for one person. Education and encouraging respect is the means by which it is shared. SCUBA Diving is one of the fastest growing sports and there are two distinct types of diver who have an impact on protection: those who truly respect what they see underwater and want to preserve it for future generations to enjoy and those who care little or nothing about what they see and attack shipwrecks with crowbars, taking what they can as trophies to prove they've been there. A picture isn't proof enough for our latter diver, and too often an important part of our heritage is consigned to rust away in

a corner of a garage or be discarded as junk once the bragging rights have been exhausted.

Prime examples of the need for protection are the Bell Island Wrecks in Conception Bay. They are the focus of diving in the Province and will hopefully soon be declared an Underwater National Historic Site, protected by Federal Law. These four Allied ore carriers, sunk by German U-Boats in 1942 with the loss of 69 lives, are amongst the best preserved shipwrecks in the World. There are still many artefacts on the wrecks, including portholes, lifeboats, guns, kitchen utensils and personal items, offering divers a glimpse into the past and perhaps an understanding of what life was like aboard before the fateful days in September and November of 1942. The story of the sinkings is very much part of local folklore, especially due to the historical link with the Bell Island Mines, the source of the ships' iron ore cargoes. The attacks resulted in the only damage caused to "land" by the enemy in North America during WWII when a torpedo struck the Scotia Pier on the island. Education is working and the majority of divers visiting the wrecks these days have the utmost respect for them. Things haven't always been that way, though. They were plundered for years and there are still many divers who don't care about preservation efforts and show no regard for the history surrounding the wrecks or, apparently, those who died on them. Even deck planking and doors fall victim to their pursuit for supremacy in a bizarre competition amongst inconsiderate divers to see who can collect the "coolest" prize. It's this diver who we strive to educate with our "take only pictures and leave only bubbles" policy – one which is welcomed by many and is, slowly but surely, having a positive effect.

Divers visiting the wrecks with Ocean Quest are briefed before departure that theft of artefacts is not tolerated and our policy is generally accepted in good spirit. An internationally renowned diver and author, famous for his 'recovery' of artefacts, visited the wrecks in the company's early days and summed up in a few words what we hope divers will be saying for many years to come. "WOW....Unbelievable! A Wreck diver's dream!" He took nothing except memories and photographs away with him, but his experience was no less rewarding than if he'd had a chunk of rusty old metal (or should that be piece of history?) tucked away in his luggage.

It's not just private divers who need educating. Government organisations and commercial companies employ divers who operate in often harsh conditions for reasons such as repairs, ordnance disposal or rescue situations. They have a job to do – a difficult one – and it's often not feasible for them to take care of their surroundings. But they could do more! For example, extensive damage was done to one of the Bell Island Wrecks in 2005 when a Coast Guard ship moored to it, rather than next to it, during a Police Diving Unit exercise. A call was made to the diving unit to inquire about the circumstances, but no assurance that efforts would be made to avoid similar occurrences in the future was received. In fact, a flippant comment about more damage being done by icebergs highlighted the lack of awareness I believe is prevalent among such organisations. There has been iceberg damage to the wrecks, but it is not significant and has not



Figure 2: Deb Stanley at one of the companion ways on the *ss Saganaga* (Rick Stanley)



Figure 3: Diver from USA, Arch McNamara, taking pictures of Telegraph in Engine Room of *ss Rosecastle* June, 2005 (Deb Stanley)

Figure 4: Captain's Head on *ss Lord Strathcona* with porthole intact (Rick Stanley)



happened at all since 1997. Once again, an important part of local heritage and, indeed, culture was damaged due to ignorance.

There are many wreck sites in the Province, all of which deserve protection from humans! Some say restricting diving on them completely would give them that protection, but I disagree. The 'crowbar divers' would still visit the sites as effective policing of such a rule would be an enormous drain on resources and anyway, why deny the majority the opportunity to get up close and personal with history because of the actions of an ignorant minority? Perhaps, one day, some kind of 'Pay & Play' or registration process will help control needless destruction of our heritage and culture, and people will understand better the laws and repercussions of their actions. Until then all we can do is keep up the education.

Obviously, nature affects all underwater cultural sites, whether it be marine life, weather, icebergs or decay. We have no control over this, and eventually they'll disappear completely. For the meantime though, we need to do our utmost to ensure that process is not accelerated.

Promote

Like all businesses, promotion is essential. Trade shows, magazines, websites, flyers – whatever it takes to bring divers here is worth it. Feature articles written by visiting journalists also play a big part in increasing awareness of our underwater cultural sites. Photo presentations and seminars by staff and local divers are popular, and even visitors from afar give their time to show divers in their home towns what they're missing!

The best promotion of all, though, is word of mouth and that word is definitely spreading. Relatives of the victims of the sinkings have heard of the good things happening in Conception Bay. Annual Remembrance Day visits to the wrecks with wreaths have prompted private visits by the now elderly children of some crew members who were unaware until late in life of how easy it was to visit the site and pay their

last respects to fathers they were too small to remember. From there, they can visit a memorial in nearby Lance Cove, the Bell Island Mines Museum, which has a section dedicated to the wrecks, and chat with Islanders who still recall the attacks.

There are many other examples of what I consider to be part of the promotion process. Every year, an expedition is mounted by the Royal Air Force from the United Kingdom to dive in the area. Wreck surveys carried out by them at sites such as Dildo and Trinity Bay have contributed towards archaeological studies, and a photographic survey at Bell Island produced amazing images which are now in demand all over the world.

In-depth research by the Ocean Quest boat captain, formerly enlisted in the US Navy, led to the discovery of a torpedo close to one of the Bell Island wrecks. Ironically, it was a German diver – a renowned underwater photographer who considers the wrecks an inspiration – who, with Ocean Quest, subsequently recovered part of the weapon on behalf of the Provincial Archaeologists. At times, there is a need to take items from such sites as long as it is for the right reason, and this was such an instance. It's all part of the education.

Profit

A dirty word? Should there be financial gain from encouraging respect of the ocean and the history it shrouds? Of course! Even non-profit organisations survive on donations from other people's earnings and revenues, which are generated by profit. The other 'P's depend on the support of the Profit, as it depends on them. Without it, Passion dwindles, the Product loses value, Protection & Preservation suffer, and Promotion becomes pointless. No Profit, end of Dream!

So there you have the "P's!" Our efforts, which we hope are worthy, have gained us the unofficial title of "Stewards of the Bell Island Shipwrecks" – a title we are proud of, and one which we hope is an indication that the message is getting "out there." We need to protect what we have, so that in the future, we can "Dive into History."