

SCUBA Diving in Florida

With Venturing Crew 502, Virginia Beach, Virginia
by Rachel Eddowes

A week down in southern Florida in early April seems like a great way to spend spring break. With the menu of scuba diving in Key Largo, visiting the Everglades and NASA's Kennedy Space Center, a day trip in Key West, learning about Leave No Trace and Project Aware, as well as camping out is a great way for eight teenagers to just have fun.

For Venturing Crew 502 from Virginia Beach, Virginia, the long awaited scuba-diving trip has finally arrived.

The decision for the trip started half a year before hand, with choosing what to do and when to do it. Various ideas were thrown out, but the idea of scuba diving during everyone's spring break seemed to agree with everyone. With only two teen crew members who were already scuba certified, it gave six others an opportunity to try something exciting and new.

In January, the already scuba-certified crew members decided to join the six newbies as they took a weekend scuba course. There they learned about the usages of air tanks, regulators, wet suits, and weight belts; getting used to breathing and swimming underwater; and the safety precautions needed to dive in open water.

To fully get their certification, the six newbies decided to perform their open water dives out in the coral reefs in Key Largo, during spring break. The two already scuba-certified decided that they would train to become deep water certified during the trip.



Left to right: Katrina McGinnis, Bobby Sharp, Scott Jones, Rachel Eddowes



Left to Right: Mr. Shannon, Magnus Roeberg, Secylia Gray, Scott Jones, Kate Shannon, Rachel Eddowes, Brian Sharp, Mrs. Jones, Katrina McGinnis, Bobby Sharp, Mrs. Shannon

The next few months were used to make plans for the trip. Since the scuba diving part would only be for only a small portion of the spring break week, the crew explored different activities to perform once down in sunny Florida.

With half of their certification completed, and a general outline on what they would do, the crew then devoted their time into designing the finer points of their trip: Mileage, cost of gas, lodging, meal plan, and daily schedule.

Not realized how fast time would fly, spring break had crept up on the crew fast.

The crew made two stops along the way to Key Largo; first to the famous 'Robert is Here' fruit stand and farm, where everyone enjoyed the well known tropical fruit milkshakes, along with the small petting zoo behind the stand. The second stop was at the Everglades National Park visitor center, where one of

the rangers explained about the various creatures and activities the park hosted, as well as Everglades' the delicate landscape.

Tents were set up in a local camp site in Key Largo, and the eight teens spent their free time swimming in the pool, playing volleyball and shuffleboard. However, the first few days were mostly dedicated to what the trip was mainly about: scuba diving.

The eight teens made a total of ten dives in the course of three days. The first day's dives were at Christ of the Abyss (very fitting, for the crew visited the statue on Easter Sunday), and Grecian Reef. On the second day, they visited Mike's Wreck, South South Ledges, and dived twice at Horseshoe Reef (the second being a night dive). After the first two dives, the newbies were finally scuba-certified. After which, on the next day, the six went off to visit the City of Washington and Train Wheels, while the other two went off to perform their deep water dives at the USS Spiegel Grove at a depth of 100 ft, and at Wreck of the Benwood. The eight all met up latter, and went off to City of Washington and North North Dry Docks. During these last two dives, the eight took crew pictures underwater with the Crew 502 flag, American flag, as well as with the Norwegian flag (one of the crew members was a foreign exchange student from Norway).

Once the dives were completed, the crew spent their time preparing their presentations for each of the LNT principles. Each crew member was responsible for developing a 5-10 minute talk on a given principle, finding "teachable moments" and connecting an ethical controversy with a given principle focusing either on the undersea or front country camping aspect. Each crew member learned through teaching the values of leaving no trace when diving or camping, as well as learning how to give a presentation to an audience.

Next was the trip to Key West. Along the drive, they crew stopped at a Sea Base, where the Crew Advisor showed where in a previous year, Crew 502 conducted an environmental project for the Brinton Center.



Left to Right: Kate Shannon, Bobby Sharp, Secylia Gray, Katrina McGinnis, Magnus Roeberg, Mrs. Shannon, Brian Sharp, Rachel Eddowes, Scott Jones



Left to Right: Bobby Sharp, Secylia Gray, Brian Sharp, Scott Jones, Kate Shannon, Magnus Roeberg, Rachel Eddowes, Katrina McGinnis, Mrs. Jones, Mrs. Shannon, Mr. Jones

Back on the road and 25 minutes later, the crew was driving through Key West's streets. First stop: 'The Southernmost Point of the Continental USA.' The crew took quick pictures then it was off to the Key Lime Pie Outlet where we enjoyed key lime pie-on-a-stick soaked in Belgium chocolate. They then moved across the street to be introduced to KINO sandals.

Once leaving the Kino shop, the crew split up into two groups: One to the Aquarium, the other to Ripley's Believe-It-Or-Not Museum. The crew met up for a quick pizza dinner, then went off to the waterside. There, the crew enjoyed the local street performers, where one crew member was invited to help in a performance. They then watched the sun set below the water before getting back into the car and heading back to Key Largo.



Left to right: Mr. Jones, Magnus Roeberg, Kate Shannon, Secylia Gray, Katrina McGinnis, Scott Jones, Mrs. Jones, Mrs. Shannon, Bobby Sharp, Brian Sharp, Rachel Eddowes, Mr. Shannon

For the final program day, they crew made their way to NASA's Kennedy Space Center. There everyone toured around, learning about the launching of the Orbiter, the time line of space travel, and about the International Space Station. The crew also watched the Hubble 3D movie; as well as enjoyed a space simulator, where they crew got a hands-on feel for what it's like to be launched up into space.

After spending time at the center, they visited Cocoa Beach's Ron Jon's Surf Shop, where the crew was joined by one of its former Presidents, and Mrs. Dowdy, a friend of Mr. Shannon's. From the shop, the crew drove over to La Fiesta, a famous Mexican restaurant where astronauts generally visit before being launched off into space. There the crew enjoyed large platters of Mexican food, a speech from Mrs. Dowdy about working with NASA, and group photos taken.

As they made their way home, they reflected on their experiences, their accomplishments, how their planning sequence could have been better, and their high hopes for the next big adventure.

We have many folks, organizations, and the undersea life to thank for making this trip what it was: Jennifer Stahre, Col and Mrs. Joe Dowdy at Kennedy Space Center; Dr Joe Klos and the boat crews of Silent World Dive Center; our dive instructors at Dive Quarters in Virginia Beach; Leave No Trace, Project Aware, and the National Outdoor Leadership School for providing educational material; and of course, the entertainers of Key West. We owe thanks to our crew advisers, Jim and Donna Shannon, also to Mr. and Mrs. Jones who accompanied us on the trip. This article was written in part to "pay it forward." Our hope is that Crews just like us can use our trip as an example of what's possible. Let your imagination be your guide, then realize your dream! As our Advisor always tells us: Keep movin'!



**Left to Right: Scott Jones, Bobby Sharp, Magnus Roeberg, Katrina McGinnis,
Brian Sharp, Secylia Gray, Kate Shannon, Rachel Eddowes**