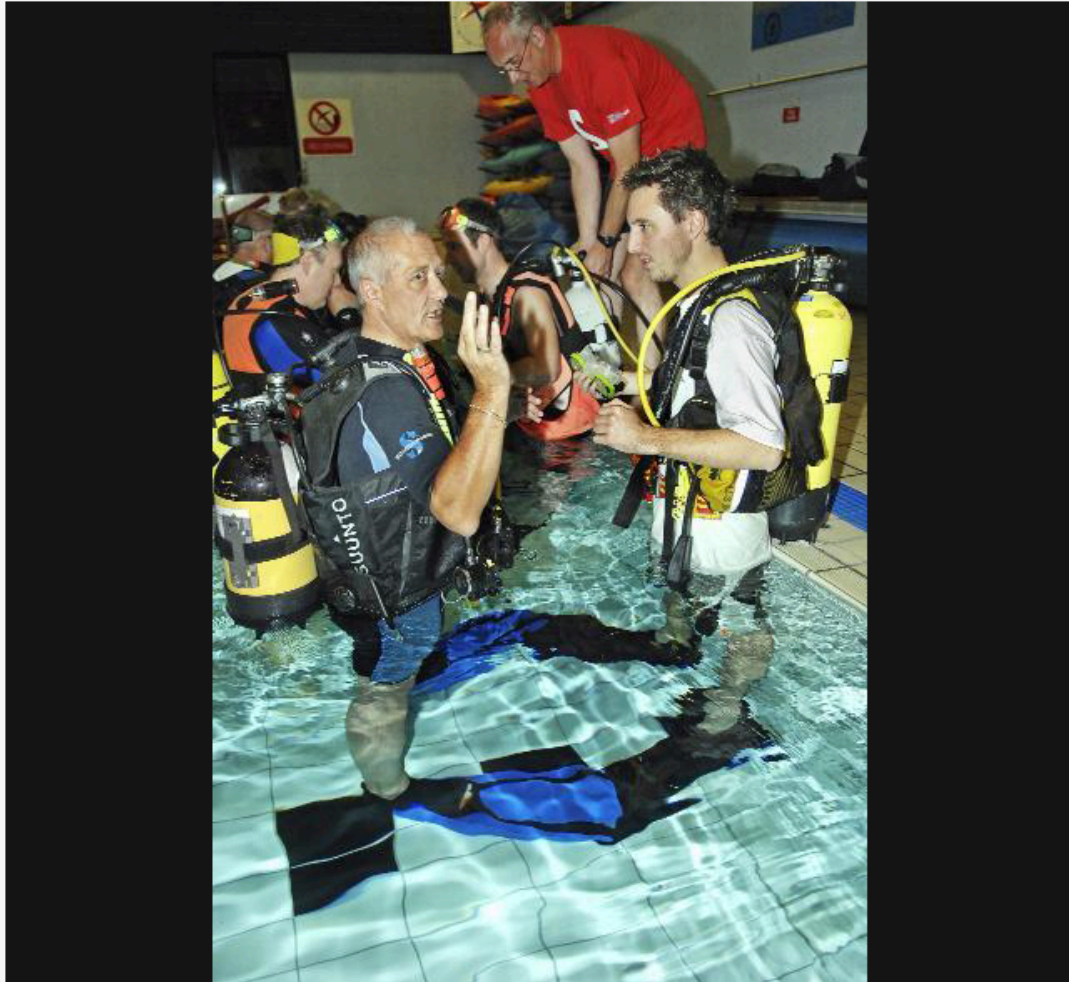


12th January 2010

Take a dive and see a new world - underwater



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THE club members are a friendly bunch.

At first, joining them is a little daunting as they talk in diving jargon and share aquatic in-jokes, but they're all eager to help and answer any questions.

Soon I find myself chatting about buoyancy compensators, dry suits and 300 bar compressors as if it is the most natural thing in the world.

Luckily for me, you don't need to understand any of this to get involved, as once you're geared up it's relatively simple.

Air goes into the mouth through a regulator, and two buttons control depth (one for up and one for down) by **letting** air in and out of the buoyancy compensator, or BC.

Other than that, the only equipment needed is a cylinder, a pair of fins and a mask (not a tank, flippers and goggles if you want to talk like a proper diver).

Plunging into a pool with a heavy lump of metal strapped to my back fills me with dread, but the hardest bit, warns dive master Ian Ellison, is overcoming the powerful natural instinct which says humans can't breathe underwater.

That instinct is wrong, of course. We can if we have SCUBA gear.

Once I've mastered the incredible feat of swimming one length of the 25m pool, I'm introduced to a basic lesson in depth control.

"If you're diving at a coral reef, you need to be able to do this, or they won't let you near it", says Mr Ellison.

The lesson involves letting enough air out of the BC to sink to the bottom of the pool, then adjusting it to come to a dead stop just above the floor.

It's fair to say that, had I been diving the Great Barrier Reef, I would have caused immeasurable ecological damage and would probably never be allowed to set foot in the sea again.

As it is, the most harm I can do is flail about like an idiot as I hit the bottom of the pool.

This short introduction to diving is excellent fun, and it opens up the possibility of exploring a mysterious new underwater world, which I am assured is a lot more interesting than **Westhoughton** Leisure Centre pool.

As one of the club members says, being able to dive immediately trebles the amount of the planet available as a holiday destination.

The Westhoughton Sub Aqua Club, which has about 40 members, is a local branch of the British Sub Aqua Club. They meet every Thursday evening at Westhoughton Leisure Centre, in Bolton Road, Westhoughton. Contact Ian Ellison on 01942 201835 for more details.

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