

SIDNEY Beachcomber

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Reefball project more in-depth than visible on s

By BRUCE MEYHVEN
Beachcomber Reporter

Once every month, the bubbles that rise up to the surface beside the Pier on Bevan project provide the only clue that a unique scientific study is under way below the waves.

The Sidney Pier Artificial Reef Science (S.P.A.R.S.) project is a joint effort between the Institute of Ocean Sciences, the Professional Association of Sport Divers (PADI), the Royal British Columbia Museum and the local community.

The project, which is the brainchild of the town's economic development committee, is one of the only Canadian studies ever to be carried out on a recreational artificial reef.

Five museum divers are teaching 14 volunteer scuba

divers how to collect data on the slow colonization of marine life on the 300 concrete reefballs that have lined each side of the partially-completed pier since last November.

The one-metre reefballs, which were fabricated at Sidney's public works yard, were made using a two-piece fiberglass mould loaned by the Artificial Reefball Society in Atlanta, Georgia. Project coordinator Nick Panter says the American moulds were donated on the basis that a local marine study would be conducted twice each year.

Coinciding with that agreement was a change in the federal Ocean Act that encouraged public/private partnerships, especially in environmental matters.

Panter is working on the project with University of

Victoria biology graduate Kevin Conley under the auspices of the pre-Protective/Environmental Youth 1

Together, Panter and Conley have completed the project before their contracts expire when PADI, the museum and S.P.A.R.S. using volunteers.

The monthly dives are intended to monitor the establishment of marine life, including algae and fish, comparing them to those on the natural reef located about 20

Using a list of species expected to be found at the museum, divers will enumerate