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Although cave diving can be a very safe activity with proper training, all too often the untrained diver thinks that he will be fine, that cave diving is easy, or that he's just going to run in and take a "quick peek". I started this page on July 7th, 1995 in the hope that maybe someone who was thinking about entering a submerged cave without the proper training will think twice.

This page contains newspaper and other articles concerning cave diving fatalities.

The purpose of this page is the hope that it will keep someone alive by showing them that

**ANY PERSON CAN DIE ON ANY DIVE
IN A CAVE.**

BODIES OF 2 DIVERS REMOVED FROM CAVE AT BOTTOM OF LAKE

July 7, 1995

By Mary Murphy

MONTVERDE-The bodies of two Central Florida divers not trained in cave diving were recovered Wednesday after the men ran out of air in an underwater **cavern** in Lake Apopka. "It looks to me like a couple of open water divers who didn't have the certification to go into a cave", said diver Jim Calvin, owner of Underwater Adventures.

Calvin and two other divers recovered the bodies of Kevin James Gokey, 26, and Daniel Eugene Smith, 30, at 2:30 a.m. "The men were together, floating in 96 feet of water, just inside a tight spot between some rocks leading into the cave," said Calvin, 43.

Calvin, accompanied Mark Long, 36, an expert cave diver who is specially trained in cave rescue and recovery, on the dive. Lake county sheriff's divers did not have the training necessary to recover the bodies, said Lake sheriff's Lt. Chris Daniels.

"The place where these guys drowned is not some place most people would go---it's silty and restrictive," Long said.

Gokey, of Astatula, and Smith, who lived in the Orange County community of Gotha, took a boat with a group of friends to the cave at Gourd Neck Springs near Montverde on Tuesday. The pair only had 45 minutes of air in their tanks. When they failed to surface after an hour, friends called the Sheriff's Office.

Long, who has been cave-certified since 1981 and has made more than 800 cave dives, said open water diving courses emphasize that special training is needed before anyone attempts to cave dive. "There are courses that teach you how to dive safely in caves so you can survive in these kinds of things," Long said. "I understand one of these guys only had six dives period --- very inexperienced. They certainly did not need to be in a place like this."

The men did not have any rope with them to use as guide lines when the water, which "is clear and pretty when you're going in," became murky and opaque when divers' fins stirred up silt on the cave bottom. Visibility can be cut to zero in a matter of minutes. The men only had a couple of small lights with them, Calvin said. Cave divers should carry three lights each because bulbs routinely burn out or lights are dropped.

End of article

Analysis: pending

Diver Drowns in Williston Spring

Friday, July 14, 1995

WILLISTON - A Mobile Ala., firefighter drowned while diving in Levy County on Thursday afternoon with another Mobile firefighter.

The drowning victim, identified by the Levy County Sheriff's Department as Steven Christopher Dismukes, 28, was pronounced dead after his body was recovered from Devil's Den at 8:30 pm Thursday. Devil's Den is a privately owned spring outside Williston on Levy County Road 505, a mile north of Alt. U.S. 27.

The man diving with Dismukes, Samuel Howard Williams, 35, told investigators that he noticed Dismukes was missing at about 3:30 pm. Williams went back to the surface to pick up a fresh tank of air, but was unable to find Dismukes when he returned to the opening of the cavern where the two had been diving, according to sheriff's spokesman Lt. Chuck Bastak. Cave divers from the National Speleological Society -- Lamar Hires and Mark Leonard of Lake City and Woody Jasper of High Springs -- found Dismukes in about 35 feet of water Thursday evening.

A preliminary investigation showed that both Dismukes and Williams were certified as open-water divers, but it did not appear that either diver was certified for cave diving.

End of article

Additional Information: Apparently the divers decided to pull down the fence which blocks off the cave section at Devil's Den. They did not have the proper training or equipment to cave dive. On top of that, the cave system at Devil's Den is supposed to be very low flow and high silt, as well as a tight squeeze. The type of system that trained cave divers would probably say, "There's no way you're getting me into that hole".

This next article is not really a news account, but rather a message posted by one of Robby McGuire's friends.

Death of a friend

From: giii01@InterServ.Com
To: "Cave Divers List"
Subject: Death of a Friend
Date: Sun, 16 Jul 95 15:18:24 PDT

We woke up this morning to some really sad news. Our friend and team member, Robert McGuiarre (USMC Capt. McGuire) drowned at Thunder Hole yesterday. According to his dive partner, Dell Moats, they were conducting a personal trimix dive involving two nitrox mixes. Apparently the bottles were not marked for depth, as is our standard, but were marked as to the mix. Robbie mistakenly took the 50/50 to 140 instead of the lesser nitrox, which he left at 70 feet. On the way out of the dive Dell heard his Farrallon scooter kick on and looked over to see Robbie convulsing at 80 feet during deco. Dell got the scooter away from him but was unable to save him. With no safety or support divers on hand there was no chance to get Robbie up and resuscitate him, again, not the way we do things, but I guess the complacency of repeated dives lets us all believe it can't happen to us.

Robbie was in every way the perfect team member and as strong a diver as one could be. He was in top physical condition, but chose to take three sudafed before the dive, again something we don't do. He survived every dirty job the Marine Corps sent him on, and then got killed trying to have a little fun. He was our friend, especially to JJ and the younger guys, but what really upsets me the most is that

I like his dad so much and feel so badly for him.

There is nothing else to this. You all can see what can be learned. We keep hoping this kind of thing won't happen, and as a team we do everything we know to prevent it. Don't ask me any questions about this because everything I know is written here. Services Wednesday in Gainseville, Roger Werner did the recovery (he was on site), he or Dell would be the guys to refer all other questions to.

-George Irvine

End of article

It can happen to anyone.

DIVER DROWNS IN LAVATUBE

Sept. 6, 1995

A diver was killed a couple of days ago inside a lavatube on Oahu's North Shore. According to the very brief account in the paper, two divers entered the cave in search of lobsters and silted out. The surviving diver found his way out. The body of the other diver was recovered 180 feet back in the cave, reportedly with no air left in his tank.

Although the paper gave no details, I'd be willing to bet that neither diver was cave-certified, and both were probably wearing single tanks. I'll post a confirmation if I get it. Dennis? Any more details?

The lavatubes, adjacent to a very popular sport-diving site called "Shark's Cove", are shallow (depth does not exceed about 25 feet in most of them). Most of them wall-out within cavern range, but a couple of them continue way back under land until they hit the freshwater lense, where the bottoms of the caves can be very silty. Hundreds of OW recreational divers dive outside these caves on a daily basis (when the north swell isn't pounding), and I have no doubt that many wander inside. Unlike most lavatubes, which are non-branching passages with basalt bottoms, the caves on the north shore have many branches and side passages. Because this area can be good lobster hunting grounds, and because most caves don't go far back, many divers will cavalierly enter them. When they find one of the caves that goes, they keep going farther and farther back mistakenly thinking there will be the mother-load of lobsters at the back (lobsters don't like freshwater), until they can't figure out how to get out again.

The fact that so many of the holes do not go far in is what gives OW divers a false sense of security about poking around in them. When they stumble on one of the ones that goes back, they just meander in far enough that they can't find their way back out (especially when it silts out).

A bunch of years ago, three OW divers got lost and died in the same area (probably the same cave). A bunch of years before that, a friend and I made our very first and very last cave dive in the same area (probably the same cave). We each had Eveready "weatherproof" flashlights with a bunch of rubberbands as o-rings (literally). The flashlights lasted just long enough to get us way the hell back inside and silted out. It could very easily have been our last dive ever. I do not know how many others have died in that cave.

Aloha,

Rich

End of article

This letter was written by Steve Gerrard to Barry Miller, August 1995. The names have been changed to protect the victims.

A Senseless Tragedy

A week ago on Thursday, Aug. 17th..... Three Open Water Divers Drowned at the Cenote Temple of Dome. If there was ever a criminal act performed in diving, this was it. It began through a divestore in Cozumel called Mexican Divers, owned by a Mexican couple from Mexico City. For whatever reasons, they decided to organize a dive group to go to the mainland and dive a few cenotes. The Cenotes of the Akumal-Tulum area are becoming more and more popular. They hired an independent OW instructor- a Mexican named Juan. He told the owners that he knew the cenotes located near Tulum and would take them to two of his favorites. So, a trip was formed taking with them five diving customers. Three Dutch people, one american girl and an Italian. They took the ferry from Cozumel to Playa Del Carmen and hired "Taxi's" to take them first to the Grand Cenote. There they performed their first dive. The divestore owner - Harry and his wife were part of this eight person group. The second dive they moved down the road 2 1/2 kilometers to the Cenote Temple of Doom. Apparently, the instructor Juan led the group of eight from the cavern zone into the popular cave passage known as the Modonna Passage. Juan was first with Harry taking the eight position. To enter this tunnel you pass TWO WARNING SIGNS. The NACD STOP SIGN and the PADI GRIM REAPER SIGN which clearly states "PRE surface. Juan continued leading the group without knowing this. Apparently, he never looked behind to check on the fellow divers for many, many minutes. When he did turn around, he found half his team missing. Swimming back to the cavern zone, he found two people out of air and one very low. He found Harry at the surface and traded tanks because Juan was very low. Juan went back into the cave passage and found Harry's wife "out of air" but still alive. Was able to get her to the surface and begin CPR. The American girl was dead and one of the Dutch men was dead in the cave passage. Juan pulled their bodies to the surface. The got Harry's wife to the Red Cross station in Tulum but she finally died. THREE DEAD PEOPLE. I'm sure there is more to this and I will continue to gather FACTS. This was First Degree Manslaughter. German Mendoza tried very hard to have Juan thrown in jail. This tragedy caused a BIG uproar up & down the coast in Cozumel. Last night we had a hugh meeting in Playa Del Carmen at the Continental Hotel with representatives from all the divestores. An Association is being formed with the Policies and Safty of diving the Cenotes.

End of article

Even being with some who knows what they're doing will not make you safe.

Hopefully I won't need to update this page anytime soon.

Ken Sallot

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