

Underwater Speleology

Journal of the Cave Diving Section of the National Speleological Society



Volume 52, No. 4
Winter 2025

WW26

TULUM, MEXICO

WINTER WORKSHOP FEBRUARY 20-27, 2026

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Photo: Daniel Riordan



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Underwater Speleology

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Cover: Patrick Widmann, Jake Bulman, and Ryan Dart explore Madagascar's Malazamanga Cave. © Phillip Lehman.

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The magazine encourages members to submit news, stories, letters, trip and exploration reports, maps, and photos for consideration. Please contact the Editor for publication guidelines and to avoid duplication of work.

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A Note from the Chair



While many people bemoan the approach of winter, drysuit divers embrace these cooler temperatures. Snow birds are descending on Florida and Mexico from northern latitudes, reuniting friends for cave adventures and topside fun.

The Cave Diving Section has been incredibly busy on your behalf this past quarter. Here are some of the highlights:

The 2026 Winter Workshop in Tulum, Mexico, is a “do not miss it” event, and tickets are going fast. Hosted by Clare and Lanny Vogel of Underworld Tulum, seats are limited to 50 for this 20-27 February event. Get the details on the venue, speakers, prizes, and the spectacular cave diving in the article on page 18.

If you can't make the Winter Workshop and still want to dive in Mexico, buy some raffle tickets for our grand prize, a cave diving trip for two in Tulum! Schedule the trip anytime in the next year when it suits your schedule. You'll enjoy five days of diving, \$1,000 airfare allowance, six nights of lodging, a \$200 breathing gas allowance, and a \$400 rental car allowance. Buy your raffle tickets in [the CDS online store](#).

The 2026 International Cave Diving Conference (ICDC) is taking shape. The social event is Friday 05 June, and the conference is Saturday 06 June. Participants in the 2025 ICDC were unanimously positive in their feedback on the venue so we have reserved once again The Barn at Rembert Farms, Alachua, FL. An extensive after-action review generated numerous ideas for improvement, which we are putting into motion. These actions will improve comfort, enjoyment and interaction for attendees, members and sponsors alike. We've already recruited three phenomenal speakers.

Is there a topic or speaker you'd like to hear? Would you like to help organize the event? Let us know.

Training & Education: Our Training Committee has been hard at work refreshing our training programs. Certifications are up in 2025, indicating increased demand and confidence in the Section's education and training program. The Training Committee's next project is the Single-Tank Cavern course. Other courses will follow as our modernization efforts continue.

DEMA Update: We experienced tremendous interest and energy among visitors to our booth at the 11-14 November Diving Equipment and Marketing Association (DEMA) Show in Orlando. Read the details on page 22..

by Fred Stratton

Tara Forest Threat: We have reached a critical point in the campaign to raise awareness of the threats that the Tara Forest developments pose to Mill Creek Sink. Read Bryan Buescher's brilliant article on page 24 and join the effort to save this hydrological wonder from rapacious development.

Do you live in Florida or plan on visiting cave country in mid-January? Rally with us at the Alachua City Hall at 6:00 P.M. on Tuesday, 13 January 2026, for the next hearing on the Tara developments. There will be an opportunity for public comment. Let's show up en masse!

Online Store: We cleared out old merchandise to make room for new products emblazoned with our logo this past year including steel tumblers, cooling towels, and polo shirts. We have some new products in the works for 2026. Is there something you'd like us to stock in the store? Drop [Adam Hughes](#) a line. We apply the proceeds from every purchase to serve our members and continue our mission.

Clearcut Sink Infrastructure: Check out the photograph (right) of the infrastructure that a dedicated band of volunteers has built at this beautiful offset sinkhole, part of the Leon Sinks system. Hats off to Bryan Buescher, Kevin and CC Marks, Michelle and Matthew Bull, Marin Hawk, Jeff Peterson, Nate Davey, Chris Brown, Cindy Badnell-Myers, Joerg Hess, Steve Dalcher, and Sidney Ruetz. We will update members how to dive this beautiful site once access and diving guidelines are established. Look for a detailed article about the sink and its

history in the next issue.



L-R: Fred Stratton, Christopher Brown, Nate Davey, Joerg Hess, Steve Dalcher, Cindy Badnell-Myers. © Fred Stratton.



On the stairs L-R: Cindy Badness-Nyers, Tom Johnson, Steve Dalcher, Nate Davey, and Tyler Jackson. Front row: Fred Stratton, Joerg Hess, John Rutledge. © Fred Stratton.

Cow Springs Stairs Replacement: An energetic crew (left) of volunteers completely replaced the stair stringers and treads from the upper platform to the lower platform on 21 December. Thanks to Tyler Jackson, Tom "TJ" Johnson, Joerg Hess, Steve Dalcher, Cindy Badnell-Myers, Nate Davey, and property manager John Rutledge. The stairs are well built and will last for many years to come. We also installed diagonal rails between the treads at the request of some members wanting supports to lean their cylinders against.

Future Projects: We have one day of work to complete the boardwalk replacement project at Madison Blue Springs State Park that we began last summer. We will be training our sights on Meetinghouse Sink in 2026 along with Wall of Honor, a model of which was unveiled at the January 2025 Winter Workshop in High Springs, Florida. Fundraising for the latter will begin in earnest early next year. If you'd like to help, please donate to the Ongoing Projects Fund at <https://nsscds.org/product-category/donations/>.

Go dive. Have fun. Be safe!



Massive tunnels and formations the size of houses define Malazamanga. It is Africa's second-longest "going" underwater cave. Divers (L to R) are Patrick Widmann, Jake Bulman, and Ryan Dart. © Phillip Lehman.

FINDING MALAZAMANGA

THE FOSSILS, LEMURS, AND EPIC VIRGIN CAVES OF MADAGASCAR

by Phillip Lehman

In May 2013, Patrick Widmann and I set off on what would become a life-changing reconnaissance trip to Madagascar. Using Google Earth, I had spotted what looked like a sinkhole inside Tsimanampesotse National Park, just south of Anakao's legendary surf breaks, jelly babies, and flameballs. I had always wanted to surf Madagascar. Together with the possibility of finding caves, the trip could be epic. At best, I figured, we might stumble onto some interesting caves—and at worst it would be an epic surf trip in Anakao. What could possibly go wrong?

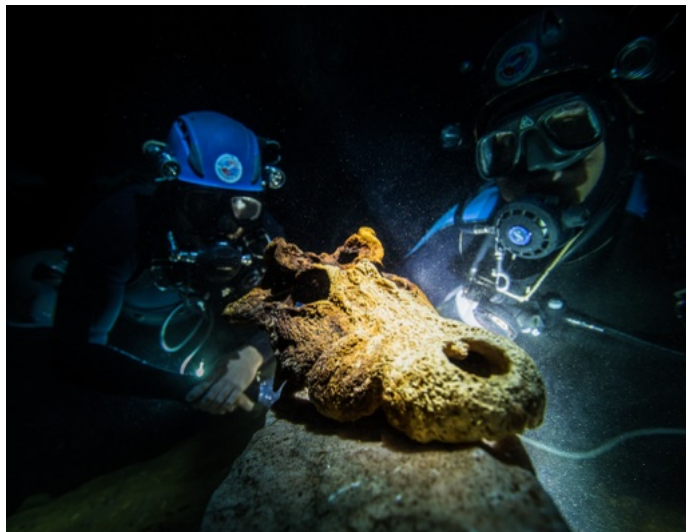
On Google Earth I found a link to a dive video of Aven, made by Ryan Dart. Aven is a large flooded sinkhole in the national park. I contacted Ryan, who said he knew of some other caves as well as some epic secret surf spots too.

So Patrick, Ryan, and I took off to look for caves around Anakao in southwestern Madagascar.

Madagascar looks unlike any landscape on Earth. The baobabs alone feel impossible—massive upside-down carrot trees coming out of the ground. No matter how many you see, your brain never fully accepts them as real. The colors are wild too: There's Martian-red dirt, bright mineral streaks, and pink limestone. And then there are the lemurs. Nothing beats coming out of a cave only to find a bunch of lemurs bouncing around like they are all insane. It's as exotic and surreal as it gets.



The Republic of Madagascar sits off the southeastern coast of Africa in the Indian Ocean. © WorldAtlas.com.



Ryan Dart (left) and Christian Pittaro with a giant lemur skull discovered in Aven. © Phillip Lehman.

After weeks of relentlessly checking caves and sinkholes up and down the coast with little to no luck, our focus shifted more to surfing. We went south to Anakao to surf. We also checked out Tsimanampesotse National Park (“tsee-mahn-ahm-pay-sue-tsuh”), where Ryan had previously explored the flooded Aven sinkhole.

Aven turned out to be a treasure trove of ancient fossils. Extinct horned crocodiles (*Voay robustus*); the giant flightless elephant bird (the mamutak or *Aepyornis maximus*); and the giant fossa (*Cryptoprocta spelea*)—an extinct predator resembling Madagascar’s modern-day fossa but having the size of a mountain lion—were among the fossils that we collected.

Aven would subsequently become Madagascar’s largest and most significant fossil graveyard. Our subsequent expeditions were under the direction of the boss lady of Madagascar paleontology, Professor Emerita Laurie Godfrey (University of Massachusetts/

Amherst) and of Madagascar's University of Antananarivo. Aven exceeded any expectations. The cave is layers deep with fossils, and it continues to be the mother lode to this day.

But back to 2013. Fossils are cool, yes—but we still had no really going cave.

Mitoho is a large sinkhole that offers an easy walk down a collapsed slope and an equally easy gearing up area. The team decided that I would make the initial exploratory dive.

I laid about a thousand feet or so of line in a huge, dark, and decorated tunnel similar in color to Mexico's Cenote Cristal, but much wider, before running into a large debris slope. The tunnel ended there and went straight up into a heavy cloud of hydrogen sulfide with zero visibility. Upon surfacing, I connected Mitoho to the Bat Cave, a large dry cave lake with a massive bat colony.

Although Mitoho has only a few thousand feet of tunnels, it is a very wide cave with really unique and weird eroded decoration. One large formation in particular looks exactly like a Klingon Bat'leth double-sided scimitar (*page 10*). It's very very cool but again not really long.

But after weeks of not finding any going cave, the team considered Mitoho a great success. We were super happy to have discovered Madagascar's first flooded cave system and so far the longest cave that we had found on this trip.



We headed upriver to check another spring, but it was a no go. Front to rear: Patrick, Phillip, and their guide on the Anduaran spring.



Ryan Dart and Christian Pittaro explore the main tunnel in Mitoho. © Phillip Lehman.

We had one more spot to check north of Aven. Ryan and I hiked out to have a look and found a massive sinkhole. We'd need ropes to get to the water's edge, if there was any water at all, so we did only a surface scout out at this time. Given that the surf was pumping, we were not particularly motivated to explore. We had checked many leads exactly like this one only to find nothing. Why would this one be any different? We were missing waves!

Surfing Interlude

With a big south swell on the way, our priorities shifted for the next few days. Ryan had an old RIB (Rigid Inflatable Boat) with a 40 HP engine that he had not used for over a year. Our plan was to drive out to the edge of the reef—about six or seven kilometers off shore— then proceed north for 20 kilometers to an open ocean secret spot, all the while not knowing if the engine would even make it there, let alone make it back. Again, what could possibly go wrong?

Sometimes you get really lucky, and we scored insanely epic waves at Ryan's Right. This is an open-ocean reef break around six kilometers offshore with surf similar to Jeffreys Bay in South Africa. Only here we were the only ones out. The water was warm with a way-overhead pumping classic Indian Ocean swell. Wave after wave of pure perfection, not a drop of water out of place with not a single person around for miles, wow!

Finding the "Famous Blue"

Patrick and I had little hope of finding any going cave at this point. We were satisfied that we had found Aven's fossil graveyard and a bit of going cave in



Ryan Dart and Cristian Pittaro search for fossils in Aven. © Phillip Lehman.



This formation in Mitoho cave reminded the author of a Klingon Bat'leth double-sided scimitar. © Phillip Lehman.

Mitoho. We had scored mega-epic waves and had seen lemurs. And because we had checked so many caves that did not go, we thought Malazamanga would be the same.

But in exploration, you only need one.

Three days before the end of the trip, Patrick went to check Malazamanga (it translates to “famous blue” in Malagasy). Aside from looking really big, nothing was known about it. Ryan and I also hiked out to check it out. It turned out to be a massive sinkhole that looked exactly the same as every other massive sinkhole.

The access requires rappelling down about ten meters or making a gnarly climb down a large tree. The locals descend the tree without even thinking about it. Patrick opted for the rappel.

After reaching the floor, an easy climb down a huge collapsed slope leads to a small tunnel with a tiny muddy stream and literally a small puddle about two meters in diameter. But in the next forty eight hours, this had become the entrance to the biggest cave any of us had ever seen!

Patrick geared up, submerged, and emptied a full reel in less than 30 minutes in small but going cave that looked very similar to springs in Florida. The cave does not really open up and even has multiple restrictions, he reported, but it goes.

That first day's end-of-line terminated in a room that looked bigger than the rest of the cave. Up to that point, Malazamanga was the longest cave we had found so far. (To date, it is Africa's second-longest underwater cave, surpassed in length only by Anjanamba).

On the very last day of the trip, we returned, loaded with fresh reels and a ghetto selection of stage tanks of all different sizes and brands, some of never-before-seen diameter. We swam impatiently to the end of the line. I tied in a new reel while Patrick prepared to survey. At this point, neither of us had the faintest idea of what awaited.

We still believed that we could “speak fluent geology” and hoped that we had prayed to the right cave god, Chaac. Our prayers were answered. It turns out that Chaac is the god of caves worldwide, not only in Mexico. What happened next would change us both forever—you cannot be the same after finding a cave like this.

Thank you, Chaac.



Locals and tanks near the entrance to Malazamanga. © Phillip Lehman.

“...a cave so big we wouldn't know what to do”

I swam down a small tunnel that looked like it was about to pinch off. I figured that even if it ended, we were already about 550 meters/1,800 feet in—still a cool find and, up to this point, the cave looked like a cool spring. At every tie off I would pray to Chaac that the cave would keep going before looking ahead.

I looked at what I thought might be the end of the tunnel, but I saw a hole in the floor. I swam up to it and tied off. When I popped through with absolutely no indication of the sheer magnitude of what lay ahead, I realized that I was in the ceiling of the biggest cave I had ever seen. Everything just went black. It was so huge that I couldn't see a single wall. When you find caves that are really big, they make a kind of rumbling sound, not the bubbles but a kind of deep rooted subtle sound.

I had heard of Bil Phillips' (RIP) making a 100-meter-long tie off, so I thought about making the world's longest tie-off. But as I swam off to do that, I realized that it was a terrible idea: The “world's longest tie off” might turn into the world's biggest flying T, mega uncool.

Up to that point, the cave had been trending south, so I headed due east to try and find a wall or any place to tie off. It took a long time before I even found a wall. In retrospect, scootering across this room takes around five minutes at full speed. Imagine swimming here!

We had always joked that we'd someday find a cave so big we wouldn't know what to do. Well, this was it. And it was even bigger than we could possibly imagine.”

The biggest and “beautifullest” cave. Exploring Malazamanga with 18W exploration lights is like exploring Mount Everest with dental floss. The exploration reels feel like safety spools, and the 18W lights felt like we were dueling tigers with toothpicks. In this colossal space, the rule of thirds feels like a tiny idea.

After weeks of searching and not finding much going cave, after almost losing faith, and literally on the last day of the trip, we had found the “biggest and beautifullest” cave in the world, Malazamanga.



Patrick, Ryan, and Jake dive in Malazamanga about 16400-19700 meters/5000-6000 ft from the entrance. © Phillip Lehman.



Patrick (left) and Ryan near a majestic baobab near Aven. © Phillip Lehman.



Madagascar's ring-tailed lemurs are declining significantly in numbers due to habitat loss, hunting, and illegal capture. © Frans Lanting/Getty Images.



The author prepares to ride Anakao's legendary swells.



We used whatever tanks we could find. © Phillip Lehman.

What would follow would be a series of full-blown expeditions and the subsequent discovery of Anjanamba, Africa's longest flooded cave, but that equally insane discovery is a story for another time. I'll recount that adventure in an upcoming issue of *Underwater Speleology*.

Part II will follow in Underwater Speleology's Spring 2026 issue.

Phillip lives and explores caves in the Dominican Republic. He is a founding member of the [Dominican Republic Speleologic Society](http://www.drspeleology.com).

THANK YOU, M2: MEMORIES OF MICHAEL MENDUNO

by Barbara Dwyer

Even if you didn't dive in the pre-nitrox era, you've heard about how technical diving was anathema to the mainstream industries. It was taboo, heresy, a black art to be practiced by the dark of the moon.

People were doing it—they just weren't talking about it.

Michael Menduno (M2) shook all that up with AquaCORPS, his cutting-edge publication that ran from 1991-1996. With his passion for information and storytelling, Michael brought together an eclectic group of cave divers, "wreckers," scientists and, finally, the mainstream dive industry.

"That's what [aquaCORPS](#) was all about: people's stories," he told Tom Mount. It's the story of explorers driving a technological revolution."

The AquaCORPS revolution. Edgy, brash aquaCORPS pulled no punches, mixing rigorous technical precision with "in your face" straight talk. Even as the mainstream began to warm up to advanced diving practices, the publication's approach made some people queasy. For example, a cartoon of a dominatrix and a diver chained to a tank of Nitrox made the point but got the "Wreckers" issue banned from the [Navy Experimental Diving Unit](#) (NEDU).



Nitrox in chains. From aquaCORPS Journal #9, 1995. Courtesy InDepth Magazine.



Michael Menduno. Courtesy of The Diving Historical Society.

"I guess part of what we discovered is that the diving community is quite culturally conservative overall," Michael told the late Phil Nuytten (inventor, the "Newt Suit") in an [interview](#). "Funny, huh. People could dive to hundreds of feet down, miles back in some underwater cave, but run some provocative art and they flip out."

But the publication's integrity and expert-supported content were commanding unquestionable attention and respect.

Diving was undergoing a technological revolution, but there was nowhere for divers to get information. *Skin Diver*, *Scuba Times*, and other dive magazines of the day did not report on mixed gases, decompression, or rebreathers. Those topics were pretty much taboo, "which of course made them all the more appealing to me," Michael recalled.

So *AquaCORPS Journal* was born to "provide a trove of deep, rich accurate information about the technology, practice, and culture of diving—a kind of *Rolling Stone* or *Wired* magazine of diving," as

Michael described it. Working with friends, graphic artists, and freelancers, he began cobbling his magazine together. Friends in the computer business and the diving industry (Dr. Bill Hamilton, Marty Snyderman, Steve Gerrard, Wings Stocks, and others) offered support.

The publication grew from a bare-bones newsletter, written out of Captain Billy Deans's Key West Divers shop, to a full-color magazine. Each issue's theme—"Wrecked"—"Mix"—"Bent"—"Computers"—focused on what was happening with physiology, discoveries, people, and new developments. [Accident analysis](#) of early technical dives was part of the package.

Training with the best *

Michael completed his cave training in Florida and Mexico, then worked with Captain Billy Deans to learn mix diving. Tom Mount had joined Dick Rutkowski's International Association of Nitrox Divers (IAND) to form the IANTD, which later incorporated the European Association of Technical Divers. They launched the first trimix training program and trained out of Billy Deans's shop.

"I subsequently moved to Key West to be closer to the action and joined Billy's staff, Michael noted. "We worked to create the first tech diving (nitrox, trimix) training courses. Tech diving was all about learning



* A partial list of Michael's mentors and teachers includes Steve Gerrard, Lalo Fiorelli, Sheck Exley, Gary Gentile, Jim King, Wings Stocks, Rich Pyle, Paul Heinerth, John Crea, Chris Sorauf, Dustin Clesi, Bob Raimo, Tom Mount, Bret Gilliam, Mike Madden, Gary Walten, Eric Hutchinson, Kevin Gurr, Rob Palmer, Karl Shreeves, Hal Watts, Ed Betts, Jim Brown, and Joel Silverstein.



Left to right: Dan Alix, Michael Menduno, and Dominic Castrignano at 2025 ICDC. Photo by Fred Stratton.

and training and perfecting and pushing the art, and Billy's shop—Key West Dive—was a Mecca for tech training. Sooner or later everyone showed up in Key West. It was the place to be."

It was during this time that AquaCORPS really began to take off. The magazine flourished until 1996 when, unable to fund itself, Michael was forced to shut it down. The beloved publication was never a money maker. Its creator lived hand to mouth.

TekConferences and Rebreather Forums

By 1992, IANTD, ANDI, and other nitrox supporters wanted to exhibit at the DEMA Show in Houston, TX, and introduce their training to the mainstream. There was considerable resistance. *Skin Diver* magazine had editorialized against nitrox, believing that recreational divers lacked the discipline to use it. DEMA refused forcefully and banned them from exhibiting.

Michael, working with Dr. Bill Hamilton, Dick Long, and Richard Nordstrom (then CEO of Bill Stone's Cis-Lunar company), stepped in to organize the Enriched Air Nitrox Workshop in January, 1992. This two-day gathering held just before the DEMA show brought industry members together to discuss the issues of nitrox and trimix diving.

It was becoming clear that divers were going to be using "voodoo gas" with or without training. DEMA cautiously relented in the face of an industry backlash. The 1993 DEMA Exhibitors' Guide featured



L to R: Captain Billy Deans, support diver Mark Nease, and Michael Menduno at Deans's Key West Diver, 1995, before the invention of P valves. From aquaCORPS Journal.

a prominent “warning” about diving with nitrox on its first page. This backfired: it called people’s attention to it and raised interest. By 1996, even PADI had developed enriched-air training.

The 1993 tekConference (1993) evolved out of the Enriched Air Nitrox workshop. The idea of doing a conference each year in conjunction with DEMA just followed naturally, Michael recounted.

“My idea was to bring the magazine to life in a conference style format. And it worked! We funded the conference from aquaCORPS’s cash flow, which was pretty slim. We sold booths and sponsorships and attendees and split training class fees with instructors.”

“I was living in Key West at the time. The phone company pulled the phone from my home/office when I couldn’t pay the bill. I borrowed a calling card from a friend and ended up organizing the conference using the corner telephone at a little Cuban grocery store called Five Brothers Grocery. I spent mornings making calls then would jump on my bike and peddle three or four miles to Billy Dean’s dive shop where I would enter stuff into the computer. I never let diving poverty stop me.”

The 1993 conference evolved into a series – tek.94, tek.95, tek.96 – and then the Rebreather Forums, which began in Key West (1994) and continued in Redondo Beach (1996). These meetings created a template for modern rebreather training and accident investigation. Later iterations, such as Rebreather Forum 3 (2012) and RF4 (2023, Malta), trace their lineage directly to his vision.

After aquaCORPS closed in 1996, Michael took a break from diving. He continued to produce and host tech conferences and played bass guitar at them all. He founded and edited InDepth Magazine, Global Underwater Explorers’ (GUE’s) online publication. He also contributed to DAN Europe’s Alert Diver and was a contributing editor to Underwater Speleology and a Board member of Diving Historical Society.



Tee shirt logo from 1994 Rebreather Forum. Courtesy of AquaCORPS Journal.

A personal note

I didn't know Michael as long or as well as some of you did. We crossed paths occasionally. Renée Power introduced us formally at DEMA in 2019. We struck up a friendship and, from that point on, collaborated on writing and exchanging information, photos, and history.

One of Michael's great talents was bringing people together. When he took some graduate courses at Monterey's Hopkins Marine Station back in the mid 1970s, he was surprised to see that its scientific divers and the open-water crowd moved in different worlds. So he introduced the two groups to socialize and learn from each other. He did the same with aquaCORPS, extending a hand even to his critics and finding common cause. The conferences that he began organizing in 1992 continued this work.

Working with him writing wise was a joy. He was generous with information, photos, and contacts. We worked together on several projects for Underwater Speleology, In Depth, and the Journal of Diving History. It didn't feel like work. It was more of a great sharing and learning with big laughs all around.

Michael was full of hell and loved his practical jokes. A few years ago for April Fool's, he circulated and published an [elaborate hoax](#) of a story about Sheck's "lost tunnel" in Madison, featuring several well known divers who agreed to take part in the gag. To my great delight, he brought me in on planning the joke. Many readers believed it until the "April Fools" announcement at the story's end..

Every year he called to sing "Happy Birthday." If I missed the call, he'd leave it on voice mail. That's the kind of person he was - always thoughtful.

I used to talk to Michael—a fellow Masters swimmer—in the late afternoon before he swam laps in his Palm Springs pool. We stuck it out over the pandemic and through various subsequent DEMA shows and CDS workshops. I last saw him at the International Conference in May, where we chatted and exchanged big hugs. We planned to meet up back in California. That did not come to pass.

If you want to see what Michael was all about, look at the [back issues of AquaCORPS](#). The writing is original, immediate, and gritty. You'll get the flavor of tech diving before it was cool. You'll sense, for example, what it was like to bushwhack into the cenotes and feel Tulum's awful heat in the days before roads were carved out. You'll sit down with the explorers and the guides with burros and machetes. Or you can drive in a truck with Sheck Exley or hear Bill Stone's thoughts on the Huautla expedition. Michael has left us this rich history, and there are plans to keep it alive.

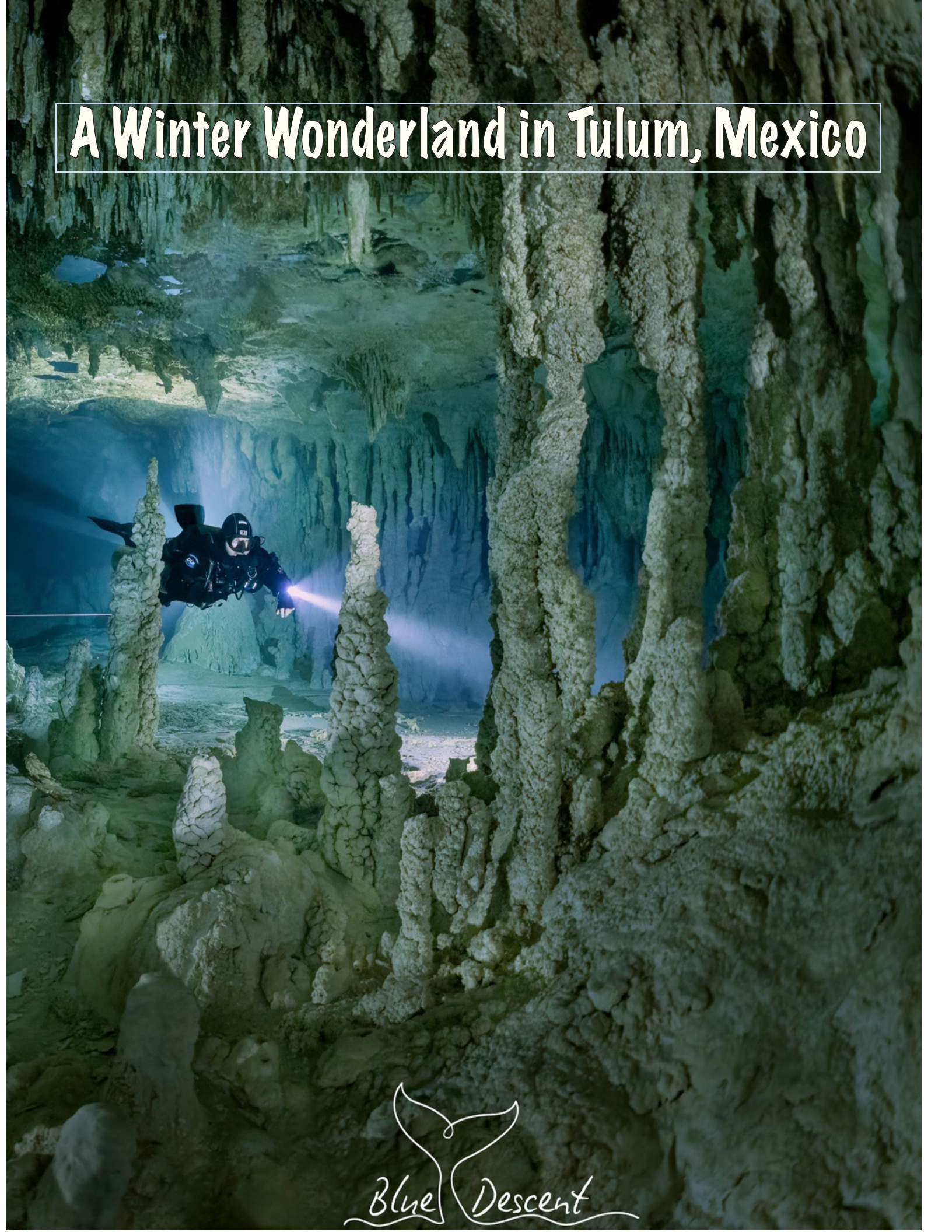
After AquaCORPS: Carrying Michael Menduno's Torch into the Next Era

Stratis Kas, *InDepth's* Editor, has announced this [quarterly series](#). It will premier in 2026 and will revisit the taboo years, the battles between Tec and Rec, and the questions that still shape who we become underwater.

Michael would be proud. Stay tuned!

Barbara Dwyer is Underwater Speleology's Editor and a cave diver since 1999.

A Winter Wonderland in Tulum, Mexico

A scuba diver in a cave, illuminated by a flashlight, surrounded by large stalactites and stalagmites. The water is clear and blue.

Blue Descent

Winter Workshop 2026

The year 2025 was a very active one for the NSS-CDS, and we will kick off 2026 with our first international event in Tulum, Mexico. We have teamed with Lanny and Claire Vogel, founders and proprietors of Underworld Tulum, to plan our 2026 Winter Workshop from the 20th to the 27th of February 2026. We are limiting the weeklong event to a maximum of 50 tickets in order to have an intimate, cozy feel. The duration is another first as our Winter Workshops are typically one-day events.

Why a week?

Well, traveling to Tulum wouldn't be complete with some actual cave diving. The Workshop's format includes several world-class speakers, accomplished divers and photographers, scientists, explorers, and cartographers. Guided and unguided diving is available as well as photographers who can capture you in the magic of Mexico's caves. Forego the customs hassle and extra weight; leave your camera at home and hire a pro!

As with all our events, a unique, limited-edition T shirt, designed by Shannon Perry, is part of the Workshop experience. The design honors Danny Riordan and Bil Phillips, Mexico-based inventors of the cookie and REM, respectively. Those are the only clues. To see the design, register online to be part of the reveal in Tulum.

Who is on tap?

We have a crazy talented group of unique human beings who will entertain and engage us nightly in casual fireside chats and formal presentations after the day's diving is done. Attendees are free to pick and choose what they want to do. We will be drawing raffle tickets nightly so choose wisely!

By Shannon Perry and Fred Stratton

Photos by Jennifer Dillaman
Graphics by Shannon Perry

SPEAKERS

The power-packed lineup* includes:

Robbie Schmittner - Explorer/Researcher

Roger Williams - XOC-Ha, NSS-CDS Instructor

Lanny & Claire Vogel - Underworld Tulum

Roberto Rojo (Chibebó) - Biologist/Speleologist/
TV Host

Ricardo Castillo - Dive Rite Mexico, NSS-CDS
Instructor

Sam Meacham - CINQAQ

Landon Lasseter, MD, MBA - Deep6

John Kendall - GUE Instructor

Germán Yáñez - Explorer, NSS-CDS Instructor

Daniel "Danny" Riordan - GUE Instructor,
Explorer, Underwater Photographer

Natalie L. Gibb - Under The Jungle, TDI Cave
Instructor, Underwater Photographer/
Videographer

* *Lineup subject to change*

(continued on page 21)

**GRAND
RAFFLE PRIZE**

WIN A CAVE DIVING TRIP IN TULUM

Over \$3,650 Value • You Choose Travel Dates
You do NOT have to be present at the workshop to win.

Don't miss out! Enter today.

*Travel dates are chosen by the winner, not pre-set.
So pick what works for you and head to the website
to enter for a chance to win!*

- 🕒 **For 2 divers!** (Need not be present to win)
- 🕒 **7 days/6 nights lodging at Underworld Tulum** (double occupancy)
- 🕒 **5 days diving** - professionally guided on 2 days* (includes rental tanks & weights)
- 🕒 **2 Underworld Tulum T-shirts**
- 🕒 **Up to \$200 breathing gas allowance***
- 🕒 **Up to \$400 rental car reimbursement***
- 🕒 **Up to \$1,000 airfare allowance***

WW26 **NSSCDS™**
TULUM, MEXICO

For more info and to enter, visit: www.nsscads.org

*See nsscads.org for full Grand Prize Raffle details. The Grand Prize Raffle is provided courtesy of the NSS-CDS purchased using proceeds from raffle ticket donations. No purchase or contribution necessary. Open to individuals 18 years or older. Void where prohibited.

Photo: Blue Descent Photography

Can't make it? You can still win big.

If you can't make the 2026 Winter Workshop and dream of diving in Mexico, buy some \$25 raffle tickets for a chance to win our Grand Prize, a cave diving trip for two in Tulum! Schedule the trip anytime it suits your schedule. Enjoy five days of diving, six nights of lodging, a \$200 breathing gas allowance, a \$400 rental car allowance, and a \$1,000 airfare allowance.

Buy your raffle tickets in the CDS online store at <https://nsscds.org/shop/>.

***** You do NOT need to be present to win the Grand Prize.** We will draw the winner's name on 26 February. The winner has until 31 March 2027 to redeem the prize. ***



Thanks to our Sponsors (in alphabetical order)

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DAN

Deep6

Dive By Design

Dive Outpost

Dive Rite

Dive Rite Mexico

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Halcyon Mexico

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Marinas Alto Manzano

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Patrick Picard

Pod Diver Lodge

Shearwater Research

The Human Diver

Scubatron

Stay Dri

Stream2Sea

Underworld Explorers

Underworld Tulum

Under The Jungle - Natalie L. Gibb

Hope to see you there!

WHY DEMA MATTERS

by Shannon Perry and Fred Stratton

The Dive Equipment and Marketing Association (DEMA) is a scuba industry group that has held a yearly trade show ever since its humble beginning in a Sheraton hotel on Miami Beach in 1977. The NSS-CDS began participating in the DEMA Shows more than 15 years ago. Some members have questioned the wisdom of spending money for us to attend these shows. That is a fair question as the thought of the NSS-CDS being a part of the “scuba industry” doesn’t come naturally to many.

Let's take a look back in history to consider the origins of the Cave Diving Section. It was founded in 1973 when up to two dozen people each year were dying in flooded caves. The CDS built a strategy for stemming the tide of these needless fatalities, and it succeeded. The founders built an instructor corps, whose members then taught open-water divers how to dive safely in overhead environments. Some of these divers such as Jim Wyatt went on to become renowned cave diving instructors themselves. (Jim is too humble to brag, so we'll share a fun fact: Sheek Exley was Jim's cave diving instructor evaluator).

In addition to leading the way in overhead instruction, NSS-CDS divers contributed to innovations in technical diving equipment, diving safety, gear configuration and exploration. These advancements had an impact beyond the technical diving community.

It's with this sense of history and modern relevance that we invested in a 10' x 10' booth (the smallest available) at the DEMA show. What's the return on investment? For a modest expenditure, we are able to interact with existing sponsors, meet new potential sponsors and donors, educate curious attendees about our mission, sponsor presentations in the Tech Resources Center, and lay the foundation upon which to build future relationships. Lastly, selling CDS swag and keeping expenses low keeps us in the black and puts our merchandise out there as walking advertisements.



Shannon, Jon, SJ, and Renee at the NSS-CDS booth. Photo by Emy Stratton.



The Last Dive author Bernie Chowdhury visits the booth. Photo by Emy Stratton.

Quite a few show attendees are already NSS-CDS members, which provides an important opportunity to connect and invite them to renew their membership. We have also had strong success signing up new members from as far away as Argentina and Greece this year!

When visitors ask what NSS-CDS membership provides, the answer goes far beyond tangible benefits. Its greatest value lies in the collective impact members make together supporting conservation, education, safety, site access, and leadership that shape the future of cave diving. As the largest cave diving organization in the country, NSS-CDS relies on engaged members to protect our caves, represent diver interests, and ensure that this community continues to thrive for generations to come.

Yes, the internet is a thing and is here to stay, and lots of scuba business is conducted electronically. But consider the very nature of cave diving: a potentially very dangerous activity in which you must develop a deep trust in your gear, yourself and your teammate. There is no substitute for regular personal contact when developing trust in your dive teammates. The same can be said about building relationships with our cave diving community and partners on land.



Stratis Kas's presentation in the Tech Diving Center. © Fred Stratton.



The crowd applauds Stratis. © Shannon Perry.



Bird visits the CDS booth. Photo by Emy Stratton.



6'8" Bruce Gillingham of Amigos Dive Center with 4'10" Emy Stratton. © Fred Stratton.



Paul Heinerth regales Brian Birch with tales of old. © Fred Stratton.

Speaking of teamwork, Renée Power and Emy Stratton rounded out our DEMA team this year. Adam Hughes provided technical support from home base. Months of planning paid off in a profitable show in terms of income, contacts, sales, members retained and recruited, and increased visibility for the Section. Thanks to our fifth team member, Stratis Kas, for his thought-provoking presentation on when the sacrosanct Rule of Thirds just may not be enough.

The 2026 DEMA Show is scheduled for 03 - 06 November in New Orleans, LA. 'See you there!'



Mill Creek (Alachua) Sink. © Bryan Beuscher

MILL CREEK SINK NEEDS OUR HELP NOW

by Bryan Buescher

It's been said you can't fight City Hall. So we decided to change City Hall. Here's the story of how and why and also our appeal for your help in the next phase.

Fighting City Hall is something my wife and I have been doing successfully for 30 years. The latest round started in July 2024 when we received word of a development with over 1,100 houses planned over the upstream portion of Alachua Sink—known more recently as Mill Creek Sink—in Alachua, Florida. Wes Skiles featured this cave in his documentary ["Water's Journey, The Hidden Rivers of Florida,"](#) which is shown in public schools throughout the state.

Fifteen years ago, the City of Alachua wanted to allow a Walmart to be built over the downstream portion of the cave. That proposal raised an outcry from the cave diving community and, as a result, the Walmart was never built.

The Mill Creek Cave system is accessed from Mill Creek Sink. It sits on property that the National Speleological Society owns and that the Cave Diving Section manages. The system has over 8,000 ft (2,440m) of surveyed passage. It is a deep cave with depths to 220' (67m), and it also has large rooms that exceed 90 ft (27m) in height.

Today Mill Creek Sink faces a new threat—the Tara Forest Developments. The City of Alachua has approved 500 units that the developer is currently building on the northeast section of the property. The developer is also seeking approval for at least another 1,100 units right next to and over the top of the cave.

If we had done nothing in July of 2024, these would be under construction, too. But we jumped in with both feet and asked if they would re-think the project. Both the City and the developer said "no."

As we dug into the records, we were able to enlist the aid of the County of Alachua. Their Environmental Protection Department sent a letter to the City outlining areas in the geological studies that were inadequate. The licensed City Planners agreed with the County but were asked by the City Manager to ignore that information and push the project at Mill Creek Sink through anyway.

As a result, three Planners with more than 50 years of combined experience resigned en masse in February, 2025. One of the Principal Planners who resigned wrote a six-page letter to the City Commissioners alleging undue outside influence on the City Manager. The letter stated that the City was actually being run by a former City Manager, now a consultant for the development over the cave. *Our cave.*

Cave divers from all over the world come here to dive. It is one of the crown jewels of North Central Florida cave diving. Re-shaping this development is a rare opportunity to be part of meaningful cave conservation, but we need your help to do that.

In spite of having only one remaining planner with only 18 months of experience, the City Manager continued to press forward on the Tara Developments. Shocked by the abrupt resignation of their Planning Department, the City Commission initially voted to start an investigation into the reasons for the resignations. At a City Commission meeting, members of the development community strongly objected to the term "investigation."

The Commission immediately voted to drop the investigation.

Two months later the City Commission election came along. The citizens of Alachua were upset about the allegations of backroom dealings and voted out two incumbents from the City Commission. Against all odds, two candidates with views favorable to our cause won.

But without three votes for a majority, more than 1,100 houses could be built on top of this fragile karst system. Because of the number of approvals, a multi-step conservation effort is required. By acting together, we can help shape the future—and save our cave.

Tell the City of Alachua to protect Mill Creek Sink

(continued on page 27)



Congratulations to the 2026 NOGI Fellows

The [Academy of Underwater Arts and Sciences](#) announced the 2026 recipients of the prestigious NOGI Awards. The 2026 NOGI Awards will be presented at the annual NOGI Awards Gala in New Orleans, Louisiana on Wednesday, November 4, 2026, in conjunction with the annual DEMA Trade Show.

[Cristina Zenato](#) of the CDS is honored for her environmental contributions. Cristina is a longtime NSS-CDS member and advanced cave diving instructor as well as an instructor for KISS rebreathers, TDI Extended Range, and is a PADI Course Director. Cristina has explored and surveyed cave systems in the Bahamas and in Florida. She is known internationally for conservation, protection, and education about sharks and their behaviors.

Other distinguished recipients include Jonathan Bird (Arts), Dr. Simon Mitchell (Science), Richard "Richie" Kohler (Sports/Education), and Howard Rosenstein (Distinguished Service).

To do this: We need your help in multiple email campaigns to let the City of Alachua know that the world is watching.

Lobby the City and County of Alachua: You can help by sending an email right now to the [Planning Department](#) and [Commissioners](#) of the City of Alachua. Let them know it is time to step up, do the right thing, and protect Mill Creek Sink.

It is important to [copy us](#) on your emails so can present them in the next Commission Meeting. This ensures that your voice becomes part of the official public record.

Your email can be as simple as:

Subject line: Public Comment -- Say No to Tara Developments

Building over a known cave system is a bad idea. Say “No” to Tara April and Tara Forest developments over Mill Creek Sink Cave System and adjacent to Mill Creek.

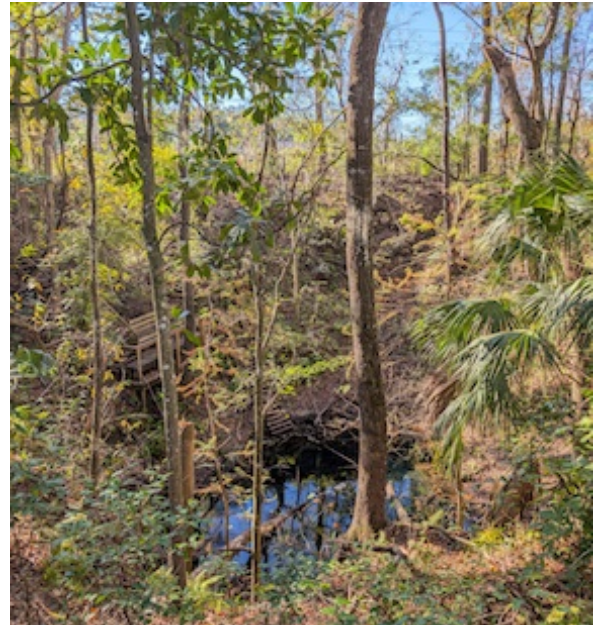
Or if you’re more inclined, you can expand the theme and write a lengthier email. We want City of Alachua to be inundated with messages from people who care—people like you—doesn’t matter where you’re from—you own the Cave. This is how we shift the political pressure: by showing there’s a powerful community that values cave conservation and clean water.

Donate: The NSS has established a link to raise funds to hire experts to challenge the proposed development. You can donate [here](#).

Your voice matters.
Your email matters.
Your donation matters.

Let’s save Mill Creek Sink—together.

Bryan Buescher is a longtime cave diver and the winner of the 2025 NSS-CDS Conservation Award.



Winning and Training on the Liberty Sidemount Rebreather

By Joerg Hess

The 2025 NSS-CDS International Cave Diving Conference offered three grand prizes for its raffle. Picking of the winning tickets for the Divesoft Liberty sidemount was eagerly anticipated by many participants. The winner himself of this prize was not present at the conference, but was surprised to receive a somewhat cryptic voice mail from CDS manager Adam Hughes.

Sponsors

Divesoft is a manufacturer of high end equipment in support of technical diving. Their main manufacturing plant is located in the Czech Republic, and they maintain a local office in Gainesville, FL. Divesoft has supported the CDS for years.

- For the 2025 International Cave Diving Conference, Divesoft raffled off its most popular CCR, the Liberty Sidemount.
- XS scuba generously added a keg of CO₂ absorbent to the raffle prize.
- Michael Oberto donated one male and one female QC6 off-board gas connectors.
- Piranha Dive Manufacturing provided additional low-pressure hoses to support the addition of the QC6 connectors to the rebreather.
- Kaplan Scuba contributed a set of two-liter cylinders with valves.
- Joerg Hess offered the required training as part of the prize.
- IANTD waived all certification fees for any training that Bob may undertake on that rebreather.

The Winner

Bob Dankert from Wisconsin was not present during the raffle draw for which he had purchased ten tickets. He was at home and even missed the phone

call to inform him that he had won. One can only imagine the surprise he was in for! We quickly sorted out logistics for him to collect his prize and get trained up on the unit. The 16-hour drive (one way) did not deter him one bit!

Bob is a very active diver in Wisconsin. He is highly trained, including CCR cave. Bob dives several rebreathers, including a true sidemount rebreather. All his CCR training, however, was based on manual CCRs, i.e., rebreathers without electronic control.

The Liberty CCR Sidemount

Part of the Liberty CCR family concept, the Liberty Sidemount is an electronically controlled rebreather with built-in redundancies. Designed from the ground up, it provides fault-tolerance to a level not achieved by other systems. With its high level of integration, it feels complicated and intimidating at first glance. Its usage, however, is streamlined and simple. Unlike most other systems, it contains all required



Bob calibrates the sensors as part of the build. Photo by Joerg Hess.



Travis (left) shows tips and tricks for easier sensor handling. Photo by Joerg Hess.

components, such as the cylinders for oxygen and diluents on board, and can be handled like a sidemount tank. It is comparatively lightweight and neutrally buoyant and trim in the water, contributing to its remarkable breathing characteristics. The positions of the manual-add valves on the mouthpiece are arguably the most ergonomic found on rebreathers today.

The design's redundancy comes from its dual electronics, each with its own set of sensors for oxygen, pressure, and helium, as well as solenoid and power supply. In normal operation, the two control units coordinate information and actions such as oxygen readings and solenoid firing.

What makes the Liberty CCR especially attractive for use in exploration is the modular design. Historically, any rebreather damage or malfunction has required a specially trained technician. In most cases this meant shipping the unit to the factory, with down time accordingly.

For the Liberty, all components are plugged together using gold-pin connections that are salt-water tolerant. As a result, a smashed handset can be swapped out by the user within minutes or a discharged battery replaced by a charged one. If a service technician is required, only the affected component needs to be shipped. Furthermore, the whole rebreather core can be part of a sidemount unit, as well as a backmount heavy or light configuration.

Training

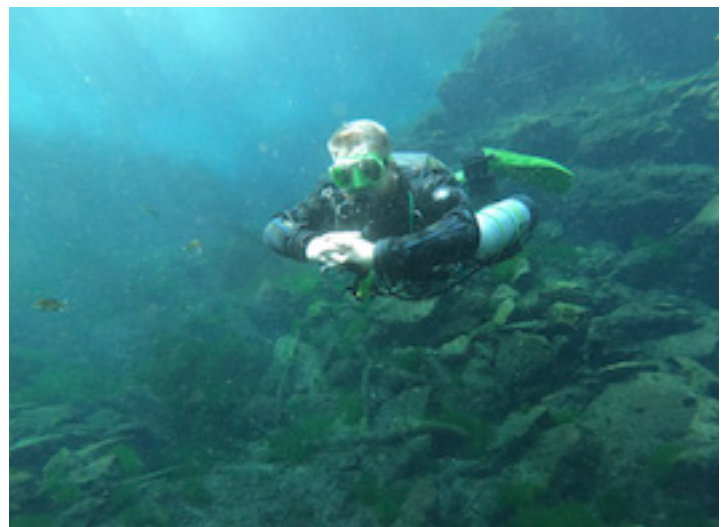
Since Bob was already rebreather trained, he was able to take advantage of IANTD's condensed "cross

over" training. Dates were set starting Tuesday August 12, 2025, with the first day scheduled for classroom training at Divesoft in Gainesville. Bob got to tour the facility and spend some time with Travis Kersting, the manager. Travis had gone above and beyond for this prize and extended the same attention to Bob.

Bob was already highly trained and knowledgeable in things rebreather, so the classroom focused mainly on the Liberty Sidemount's unique aspects—its design, function, and build. At the end of the first day, he was able to build and disassemble his unit, fill the sorb canister, operate the electronics, and run basic diagnostics and pre-dive tests. It is a lot of information to take in and made for a long day. Despite his extensive previous training, Bob kept an open mind to new concepts, asked lots of questions, and generally showed a great learning attitude.

Day two of training started in the confined water area of P2 in the Wes Skiles Peacock Springs State Park. We focused on trimming the unit in for Bob's setup, as well as basic operation of manual control and bail-out procedures. Bob showed great aptitude and adjusted well to the difference in rebreather operation compared to what he was used to. We were able to quickly move forward to other training scenarios, such as faulty sensor exclusion.

IANTD standards for previously rebreather-cave trained divers allowed us to extend our range into the overhead environment after the initial confined-water familiarization dive. Semi-closed operation and de-watering the unit ended the long day. Robert's dry suit flooded on the first dive, so he opted for his



Bob's first dive on the Liberty Sidemount. Photo by Joerg Hess.



The first in-water session. Some minor adjustments are needed. Photo by Joerg Hess.

3mm wetsuit for all subsequent exposures. The folks up north are built differently, apparently! Robert reportedly slept well that night.

On the final day, we followed up with any skills not completed by this point, but mainly spent time on the rebreather to build up muscle memory. The last dive was about 150 minutes. We finished the training session with a review of the written exam and feedback for suggested gear adjustments. In academia, such a class would be titled “Introduction to ...” meaning that it can not, and is not, designed to prepare experts. It is intended to send them on their way with the basics to build up proficiency and make adjustments along the way. Most cave divers would probably agree that this is a life-long endeavor.

Robert published a small post on social media to describe his experience. He writes:

“Just got back from an awesome trip to Florida to pick up my new Divesoft Liberty SM rebreather that I won from the NSS-CDS raffle earlier this year! This was an amazing grand prize including the breather, tanks, valves, keg of sorb, fittings, and fantastic training donated by Joerg Hess! The rebreather is amazing to dive! We wrapped up the crossover training yesterday and enjoyed a nice ~2.5hr dive at peacock.

I am feeling incredibly grateful with lots of gratitude to everyone who contributed to make this happen!

A special thanks to Travis Kersting at Divesoft for everything he contributed...”

Robert Dankert came as a raffle winner. Bob left as a friend, with hopefully more diving activities in cave country to follow!



Joerg (L) and Bob (R).

Joerg Hess is an NSS-CDS instructor and Board member, an engineer, inventor, and cave explorer.

LAYING LINE ON MY 1,000TH CAVE DIVE

by Robert H. Pritchett III

I started cave diving in 1991, at first in Florida, then mapping caves in Bermuda over several trips.

My good friend Dennie Borret invited me to the Dominican Republic in 1999. We started diving and adding line to underwater caves in the northern part of the Dominican Republic, then in the southwest region near Pedernales close to the border with Haiti.

I continued diving in the southeast at Punta Cana, Bayahibe, Boca de Yuma, as well as caves around Santo Domingo. Later I met Thomas Riffaud and Phillip Lehman, cave divers trained by Dennie. We covered a lot of caves in all the same areas and found some new caves on the island.



L to R: Thomas Riffaud, Robert Pritchett, (unknown), and Phillip Lehman at Porfidia Cave. Photo courtesy of Robert H. Pritchett III.

I made my 1,000th dive in January of 2008 at [Porfidia Cave](#), which was located behind a local woman's home. Phillip Lehman had found the location by asking the locals. The cave entrance itself was dry, so the entrance was a bit of a walk.

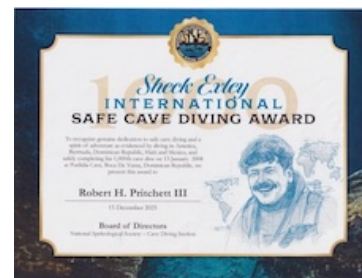
Porfidia was close to Boca Yuma and other caves we had all dived before. According to my logbook, we laid 1,028 ft/313m of line that day and stick mapped it on the way out. The dive was a moderate depth averaging 20 ft/ 6m with a maximum depth of 40 ft/12 m. Thomas and Philip returned later, extended the line, and did some wonderful cave mapping.



Robert Pritchett diving at El Dudu, North Dominican Republic, in 1999. Photo courtesy of Robert H. Pritchett III.

Being a cave diver has taught me a lot about life and about myself. I learned how to deal with challenging situations and people in my personal life as well as in the business world. In those days cave diving was a lifestyle, and I believe that this lifestyle still is with me today in everything that I do and the way that I think.

I thank two of my cave diving mentors, Tom Mount and Brent Booth. Both heavily influenced my development as a cave and a mixed-gas diver and, by extension, as a human being.



Robert is a member of La Fundación Espeleobuceo Hispanola, the Bermuda Cave Diving Association, NACD, and IANTD. He is a founding member of the Dominican Republic Speleological Society. He has been nominated for the NOGI (Academy of Underwater Arts & Sciences) Award for 2026 and is a recipient of the Sheck Exley International Cave Diving Award.

Recent Cave Safety Awards

by Fred Stratton

Congratulations to our members upon reaching the following milestones:

ABE DAVIS AWARD for 100 Safe Cave Dives

Recipient	Location
Kurt V. Lohrmann	Mayan Blue, Tulum, Mexico
Anne Lohrmann	Mayan Blue, Tulum, Mexico
Dominic Castrignano	Little River Spring, O'Brien, FL
Dan Alix	Ginnie Springs, FL
Andrew Hill	Cenote Eden, Quintana Roo, Mexico
John Rutledge	Ginnie Springs, FL
Khrista Jones	Chan Hol, Tulum, Mexico



HENRY NICHOLSON AWARD for 500 Safe Cave Dives

Carrie Spencer	Little Gem Spring, FL
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INTERNATIONAL EXLEY AWARD for 1000 safe Cave Dives in Five Different Countries

Germán Yáñez Mendoza	Aerolito Cenote, Mexico
Robert H. Pritchett III	Porfidia Cave, Dominican Republic

Have you reached a cave diving milestone? Have one coming up? Let us know, and write up your story for Underwater Speleology. Contact [Fred Stratton](#) for details.



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THE GREAT MILL CREEK SINK CLEAN-UP

by Shane Paradis

Cave diving isn't just simply showing up to a site, donning your gear, and jumping into a hole in the ground. It's also about stewardship. Sure, recreation is a big part of caving, albeit the most fun part, but there is also never-ending work to be done in and around cave sites.

The more work we do, the more we can enjoy safe access to the cave. Regular maintenance includes post-storm clean up and trash and litter removal. In extreme cases, we do graffiti remediation. While many caves and preserves are owned and maintained by states, cities, or counties, it is important to not take this stewardship for granted. There are also many privately-owned properties, and our pitching in shows the owners that we care about what they have on their land, that we want to have a stake in preserving it, and hopefully to maintain access to their cave.

On July, 5, 2025, some members of Karst Underwater Research (KUR) and the Florida Speleological Society (FSS) joined Howard Smith for a work party. Our mission was to remove a few trees that had fallen into Mill Creek Sink, a NSS preserve managed by the NSS-CDS, located in Alachua Florida. A couple of large oaks had had enough and snuffed it, ending their years by dropping into the 30-40 ft (10-12m) deep sink hole. These trees were tall and big and were now blocking access to the cave. If we wanted to safely access the cave, these trees would need to be removed.



Jon Kiernan and Howard Smith make it look easy. © SJ Alice Bennet.



SJ Alice Bennet straps for removal the branches that she has cut up. © Jon Kiernan.

If you've been to Mill Creek Sink, you know this wasn't going to be easy. It was going to be hard work. It was already very hot and humid at 8:00 am, but we were all ready to start.

As the day began, I rigged a 100 ft/30m rope to a tree at the crest of the sink. Below at the water's edge, Howard began sawing and cutting loose smaller branches from the large trees. Once cut, the smaller limbs were attached to the rope. Jon, SJ, and I began hauling them up. The rigging was admittedly rudimentary, and it became clear that what I had rigged wasn't going to be physically sustainable. We needed a better haul system, and that was beyond my expertise.

Shortly thereafter, Fletcher arrived with all of his rigging capabilities and equipment. He quickly set up a haul system that would do away with most of the grunt work of tree removal. SJ and Jon donned drysuits, took handsaws, and got to work clearing debris from the middle of the sink (some of the treetops and debris were only reachable by floating in the water).

By this time, Ken had arrived. With a full solid team we were well on our way to cutting, clearing, removing—repeat. With Jon, SJ and Howard below, myself mid sink, and Ken and Fletcher above we made quick, easy work of the task at hand.*

**Author's note: Do not be fooled by my hindsight. This work was in no way quick or easy. It was a bunch of type 2 fun though.*

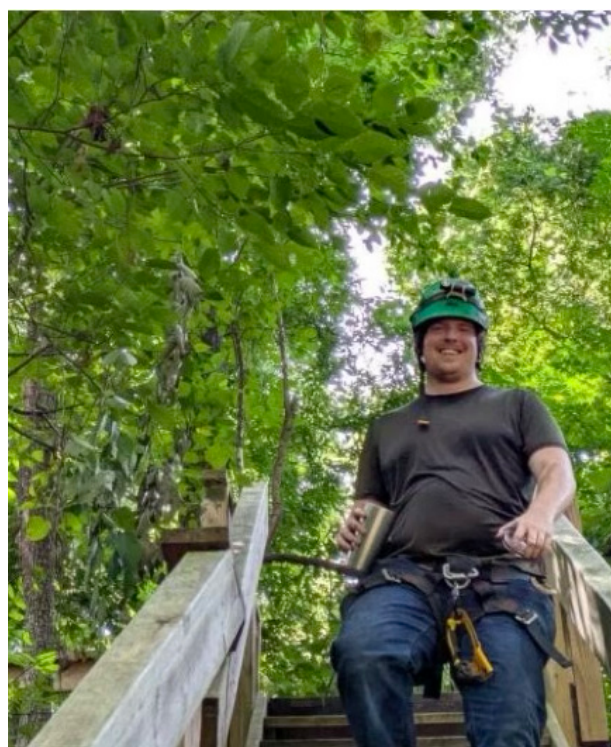
Up and down the hill and up and down the stairs, our team of six cleared the sink of tree limbs and debris in about four to five hours from when we started.

We had done well. We got a lot of work done; we battled exhaustion, heat, and dehydration (at least I did), but ultimately we were successful and proud of what we accomplished. A full body and strong cardio workout ensured that none of us really needed to go to the gym that day, and sadly Ken and I didn't get a limeade!

There is still more work to do. There are still some very large trunks that need to be removed; but is the work ever really over?

Stay tuned for a call for help on The Great Big Giant Mill Creek Sink Clean-up Part Deux

So go out there and clean a cave!



Alachua City Commissioner and FSS President Jacob Fletcher still is smiling after the long haul. © Shane Paradis.

Shane Paradis is a cave and research diver with Karst Underwater Research (KUR) and serves on the board of the Florida Speleological Society (FSS). When he's not underwater, he's usually still underground.

ADVERTISE IN UNDERWATER SPELEOLOGY

2025 ad rates are as follows:

CDS Supporter for \$350 per year:

- Four 1/4 page color ads in four consecutive issues of UWS
- 10% discount on any additional advertising in UWS
- Listing as a CDS Supporter in UWS and the website
- Prices adjusted for larger ads:
- 1/2 page \$550/year
- Full page \$750/year
- 1/4 page on inside front or back cover \$450/year
- 1/2 page on inside front or back cover \$700/year
- Full page on inside front or back cover \$950/year

Per-Issue Pricing

- \$100 per issue for a 1/4 page ad
- \$150 per issue for a 1/2 page ad
- \$200 per issue for a full page ad
- \$150 per issue for a 1/4 page ad on the inside front or back cover
- \$250 per issue for a 1/2 page ad on the inside front or back cover
- \$350 per issue for a full page ad on the inside front or back cover

CDS Instructor Ads:

- \$100 per year for a 1/4 page ad

For specs and more information, please contact UWS's Ad Manager [Nancy Winfree](#).

NSS-CDS Committees Need Members

There's always plenty to do at NSS-CDS. One great way to become more involved with the Section is to sign up for one of the committees or subcommittees listed below. Share your special skills, meet other cave divers, and possibly gain a dive buddy or two.

If you're interested or want more information, please contact [Fred Stratton](#).

COMMITTEES AND SUBCOMMITTEES

Communications

- a) IT Subcommittee: [Jennifer Dillaman](#), Coordinator
- b) Website Subcommittee: TBD
- c) Social Media Subcommittee: TJ Mueller, Coordinator
- d) *Underwater Speleology*: [Barbara Dwyer](#), Coordinator

Membership

- a) Awards Subcommittee: PENDING
- b) Elections Subcommittee: Kelly Jessop
- c) Workshop/Conference Subcommittee: *ad hoc*
- d) Fundraising Subcommittee: VACANT

Safety

- a) Accident Analysis Subcommittee: Charlie Roberson, Coordinator. Doug Ebersole, Lamar Hires, Frauke Tillmans, Larry Meyer, Vince Ferris
- b) Line/Markers Subcommittee: Ken Sallot, Coordinator. Michael Kutnya, Kyle Martin, Justin Judd, Chris Brock, Jim Wyatt.

Training: [Chris Brock](#), Training Director

Science

- a) Geology Subcommittee: Pati Spellman, PhD, Coordinator
- b) Biology Subcommittee: Thomas Sawicki, PhD, Coordinator. Marin Hawk.
- c) Conservation Subcommittee: Chelsea Dinon, Coordinator, Marin Hawk Patricia Spellman, PhD, Emily Sustarich, John Sustarich, Angela Teal.
- d) Cave Cartography Subcommittee: Jason Richards, Coordinator, Alex Brett.

Cave Access

- a) Properties Subcommittee: [Steve Dalcher](#), Coordinator
- b) Landowner Relations Subcommittee: TBD

Property Managers

- a) Cow Springs LLC: Cameron Mahaffey
- b) School Sink LLC: Bob Beckner
- c) Mill Creek Sink: Andy Pitkin, Charlie Roberson



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