

Armstrong, "Cave Diving Accidents and Incidents 2015-2016," American Caving Accidents, Improving Safety Through 50 Years of Accident Reports and Analysis, NSS (National Speleological Society), <https://caves.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/ACA-50.pdf>, p. 115

27 November 2016 Sistema Sac Actun, Quintana Roo, Mexico fatality, lost

Amy Maria Arriaga and her former cave diving instructor, Alessandro Morano, planned a day of diving together in Sistema Sac Actun. They discussed at length their dive plan of traveling through the cave to the Cuzan Nah loop. Their starting and ending point would be Grand Cenote. Their other objective was for Morano to take video footage of Arriaga and the cave. During most of the dive, the two stayed close together with Arriaga leading, making note of permanently placed markers and leaving their own when their route deviated from the mainline. As they approached No Name Cenote, Morano took pictures of the light shining into the water. When he was done, Arriaga was nowhere in sight.

He searched briefly, checking nearby cenotes where she might have exited, but decided that she must have gone on ahead of him. As he made his way back to Grand Cenote, Morano picked up the markers and dive lines they had placed. At Grand Cenote, he did not find Arriaga.

Morano went back into the cave and came across another dive team. They communicated that they had seen a solo diver fitting Arriaga's description near Cenote Ho-Tul (that team later noted that Arriaga at the time did not show any signs of being in distress). Morano did not find her there. By now, he was running low on air, so he left the cave to get fresh tanks. There, he ran into the team he met underwater and informed them of what had happened. He then entered the cave again for another search, replacing his markers as he went. Back in the Cuzan Nah loop, he found Arriaga's body. Both of her tanks were empty. He pulled her to the surface of a nearby cenote where other divers tried to resuscitate her. Morano swam her body back to Grand Cenote and turned it over to waiting authorities.

1. Alessandro Morano, Incident Report, undated.
2. Ron Engle, Letter to IANTD, undated.

Comments: Morano lost track of Arriaga in the Cuzan Nah loop. It is not known if she swam ahead and accidentally started around the loop again, got behind Morano and swam back the way they had come, or had made her way ahead and gone beyond the loop only to be confused by the second team's dive line and so turned back. Whatever happened, as soon as Morano removed their jump lines and markers (because he assumed she was ahead of him), it would have been almost impossible for her to find her way out. Losing track of a dive buddy, and then removing necessary markers before they are located, is a breach of cave-diving protocol, and here it had deadly consequences.