

**Missing Diver in Cenotes Dos Ojos Recreational
Diving Area known as the Bat Cave, on 25. March, 2021**
report by Luis Leal

Event: Missing diver during a regular cenote “cavern” recreational diving tour. Three non-certified single tank divers (the divers were Open Water Diver students but did not yet have complete their training), conducted by a local specialized guide holding the Dos Ojos Park registration card.

On 25. March, 2021, a diver was reported missing in Cenotes Dos Ojos in the area known as the Bat Cave. A cenote guide with three non-certified recreational divers on single tanks noticed that one of his divers was missing at around 3:30 p.m. After a short search for the diver the guide decided to exit the cavern to ask for help. Local authorities as well as CREER (Comité Regional de Espeleobuceo, Ecología y Regulación), the committee representing the local cave diving instructors in Quintana Roo, were informed of the incident.

The cenote guide, during his second dive, decided to take the group off the line to show them a very beautifully decorated area in the cave zone. No temporary line was installed when taking the divers off the cavern line.

At around 5:30 pm, after having obtained more information about the incident, a local cave instructor together with a local cenote guide who was still in the cenote, entered the cave area to look for the lost diver. They found some silt traces but had to exit the cave as the cenote guide reached his gas limit.

In the meantime, more cave instructors arrived and more dives were planned to look for the diver. By then, more than three hours have passed, and in the mind of many, the operation had switched from search to body recovery. However, one of the cave instructors, who is very familiar with the lines of the cave, insisted that his team takes a full tank of gas with them, though the chances to find the diver alive were slim. The instructor remembered that there was a sump deeper in the cave, more than 300 meters/1,000 feet away from the Bat Cave in a zone known as Claudia’s Line, which he wanted to reach to check if the missing diver might be there.

After another 45 minutes dive the rescue team surfaced the water with the lost diver, alive!

After being lost in the cave for four hours on a single tank, the two members of the rescue team found the diver in the distant sump with a barely breathable area. They changed the diver’s almost empty tank and brought him back out safely.

In short, a tragedy with a happy ending! Or, in the words of one the rescuers “A rare hunch and lots of luck were the key of the unlikely successful event”!

What Happened?

The dive: After a successful first cavern dive on the site known as the Barbie Line, the group of divers headed to the second site known as the Bat Cave Line. The guide informed the divers during the briefing that he was going to take them away from the sight of the guideline.

During the dive, the guide surfaced in the Bat Cave air dome, talked to the group for a moment and went back underwater. The guide followed the normal route and a few minutes later decided to take a detour away from the sight of the guideline. As he made the group aware of this detour in his briefing, he expected them to follow.

Making a turn on an area with no guideline, the guide noticed that the last diver was missing. He took the other two divers to the closest surface zone, went back underwater and did a fast search with no success. He then immediately exited with the other divers and asked for help.

The lost diver: Being the last member of the group, the diver got distracted for a moment and lost the sight of the group. Finding himself without guideline, he noticed a passage in front of him and thought the group went in that direction. After a short distance he found a line. He knew it was not the same line as the one of the beginning of the dive, but he started following it with the hope that it would bring him to another exit. At some point, he noticed the sump...a kind of an air dome with a barely breathable area. He checked his air and made an attempt to go back. He followed the line to the end but as he could not see any light nor useful reference for the exit, he decided to go back to the small air dome and to wait there for help.

Analysis of the Incident

Causes of the near fatality: Diving in the overhead environment without guideline.

Aggravating factor: Taking non certified divers on overhead diving tours.

Contributing factors to the successful outcome of the rescue:

- The guide's fast action to ask for help after taking the other two divers to the surface and having done a quick search for the missing diver, has been crucial in the successful outcome. In addition, the guide's statement on where he got off the line and where he possibly lost the diver, provided the rescue team with a good starting point of the search.
- The lost diver keeping his calm and making the right decision to wait in the sump certainly contributed to the successful outcome of the rescue.
- The insistence of the cave instructor to check the far away sump for the missing diver, although the chances to find the diver alive were slim.

Word of Advice to Professional Dive Guides:

It cannot be stressed enough that when guiding recreational divers in the overhead environment there is no thrill, no challenge and no adventure. **ALWAYS FOLLOW THE GUIDELINE** that leads to the exit and keep divers, who put their lives in your hands, safe!

If you are bored and have the urge of getting off the guideline, it might be time for you to look for another profession!