

Introducing Team Hector - DEEP TECHNICAL SAFETY DIVERS

For the 100m CNF record attempt in December (Project Hector) we will be employing a team of deep technical divers to provide safety for William during the dive. They will all be equipped with closed circuit 'rebreather' systems, which increase the depth and bottom time for these divers and mean there won't be a column of ascending bubbles in Dean's Blue Hole (which can create powerful currents that play havoc with the freediver).

Two of these team members, Brian Kakuk and Paul Heinerth, are introduced here. Both were part of the original team that assisted William Trubridge in his first successful world record dive to 82 meters in Dean's Blue Hole in 2007.



Brian Kakuk is a former US navy diver who is based out of Abaco island, in the north Bahamas. Brian began exploring the many blue holes and cave systems of the Bahamas in 1990, and has set several world records for distance traveled inside a submerged cave system. Imagine following an underwater passage for over a kilometer through narrow openings and over ominous rockfalls, removing your equipment to push it in front of you through the tightest constrictions...

In 1994 Brian broke a world record for distance penetration in an underwater cave system. The previous record had been set by a team of six British divers stationing 14 tanks so that one of their number could travel 1.1 km back into Conch Sound Blue Hole on Andros island. Brian entered the same cave alone, and carrying all the air he needed with him he brought out the British team's flag, after replacing it with one of his own 30 meters deeper into the cave.

You can see some images here from a recent National Geographic article that documented Brian's explorations and archeological excavations inside Bahamian blue holes.



Paul Heinerth is one of the very first pioneers of the extremely dangerous and technical sport of cave diving. He certainly has more experience than anyone else alive in diving Florida's porous countryside and the Cenotes of Central America. He was one of the first divers to explore Weeki Wachee Springs (site of the famous underwater ballet and mermaid shows that began back in the 1940's) and has conducted countless dives inside this incredible cave system, with bottom times of over 5 hours at 100 meters. Battling currents at times so strong that they can knock your mask off your face, he has mapped hundreds of meters of this cave, to depths of over 120 meters.

In 2004 he retrieved the bodies of two cave divers who lost their lives at 100 meters inside the 'Eagle's Nest' sinkhole in Hernando county. Read more about this retrieval and the dangers of cave diving here.

Brian and Paul will be stationed at 100 meters (330 feet) and 80 meters (260 feet) during William Trubridge's record attempt. Hanging in the empty darkened waters of Dean's Blue Hole, they will watch William carefully as he descends to the bottom plate and starts his ascent. In the event of any kind of emergency they will be ready to intervene by clipping

him to an ascender or lift bag so that he can be brought to the surface rapidly and safely.

If all goes according to plan they won't have to do anything other than watch the show!



During their decompression stop, Paul Heinerth (left) and Brian Kakuk (right) congratulate William Trubridge after his successful record dive to 82 meters without fins.

Project Hector



In December this year I will attempt to swim without fins 100 meters down below the surface of the sea and back on a single breath.

hectometer /ˈhektəˌmɛtər/ (abbr: hm) a metric unit of length equal to one hundred meters.

Announcing a dive in this way creates a very different dynamic to a competition, where there are no set expectations other than to do your best (whatever that might be). With Project Hector there will be only one target, and only one way to get there...

It is the first time since 2007 that I have announced a world record attempt as a stand alone event. There are two main reasons we are doing it this way. The first is that it allows us to plan the dive better, especially the filming and safety systems that we will use. The second reason is that I have a weakness for the idea of a 'pure dive,' and in competitions the only feasible way for safety is to use a lanyard attached to the freediver, effectively 'tethering' them to the descent line. Instead for Project Hector we will have a team of divers stationed along the descent line who can intervene in the event of an emergency, but who otherwise stay at a distance. Without the necessity for a lanyard, it will be a completely 'free' freedive.

I'm excited, if slightly intimidated, by the task ahead of me. When I first got into freediving, the world record without fins was 60 meters. It seemed like a freakish, unrepeatabe performance. Gradually, as I started to discover the sport I realized that the boundaries might be a lot deeper. I set a goal for myself of 76 meters in two years time, thinking that if I aimed for something outlandish then even if I fell short I might still be at a world class level. Three years later (2005) I was at 76 meters, but the world record was by then 80, so I shifted my goal to 92 meters (which made a nice round number of 300 feet). Even before I reached that earlier this year, people started asking me about the 100 mark. "Do you think it's possible?" "When do you think you'll get there?"

Ahh, numbers...

Sometimes its worthwhile to remember what a meter actually is:

the distance travelled by light in a vacuum in one 299,792,458th of a second.

So 100 meters is just 100 of those. And 100 itself is only a fancy number because we happen to have ten fingers to count on. Meters and multiples of them aren't written into the sea, or anywhere in nature, and becoming fixated on these abstracts is like getting scared by a monster that you yourself have dreamt up. And yet we do.

I guess whether it's a manmade construct or not, the number is a symbol that we can use to place a line in the void and pause for contemplation.

But don't worry, I won't be doing any of that at 100 meters!

William.

If you are interested in owning a piece of this dive then go here to find out how:

http://www.verticalblue.net/project_hector.htm