

# Rebreather Fatality in Jackson Blue, FL

## 19.9.2008

### 3) Bericht des Partners

Post from Dan Weyant, the diver that was diving with Richard Mork when he passed away.

<http://thedecostop.com/forums/showpost.php?p=385870&postcount=12>

Re: Jackson Blue, Richard Mork

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As promised, here is the write up of the events leading up to the tragic accident that claimed Richard Mork's life at Jackson Blue on 9/19/2008.

I am going to do this as just a dump of information. I'm sure a lot of it will be extraneous, but I think that is better than possibly leaving out something important. I will refrain from making any commentary, and simply state the facts as I believe them, to the best of my ability.

Richard and I made 2 previous dive trips together to Northern Florida in the past year; we had around 15 dives together as buddies in Florida caves. He is the only rebreather diver I've been cave diving with.

On Thursday, September 18th, I left Georgetown, Texas for Marianna, Florida around noon. At approximately 3:00 pm, I arrived in Houston at the apartment of Richard's friend. Richard was staying with this friend because of Hurricane Ike.

During the trip to Marianna, Richard and I discussed dive planning for the dives we wanted to do on this trip. We proceed from Houston to Marianna, Florida, arriving at Cave Adventurers' rental trailer at approximately 1:45 am on 9/19.

We woke at around 9:00 am on 9/19. Richard had fruit and a bowl of instant oatmeal for breakfast. We then drove to the Marianna Winn Dixie to get lunch supplies.

The original plan was to dive Hole in the Wall using one of Edd's rental boats. However, when we got to Cave Adventurers, we found that all of his boats were rented (our fault; with the Hurricane, we had both forgotten to call and reserve a boat). We decided to push off our Hole in the Wall dive until Sunday, and instead spend the day doing a couple dives in Jackson Blue. We had both been in Jackson Blue together before.

From Edd's, we headed to the Sheriff's office to sign in (approximately 10:00 am). We arrived at Jackson Blue at approximately 10:15 am.

After arrival, we started to put our gear together and discussed our dive plan. It was agreed that I would dive Ip104's (back mount) with a 6cf Argon bottle, two al80 stages and an al40 O2 bottle (32%). Richard would use his **Meg rebreather** with two al80 stages/bailout (32%) and one al40 stage (32%), along with his normal rebreather tanks, and an al40 with bailout oxygen.

The dive plan was for us to scooter to about 3300 feet (me - long body Gavin, Richard - an X-Scooter). Richard had recently done some work on his X-Scooter, so he said he was not comfortable scooting past 3300. Richard would drop one of his AL80 bottles at the back of the trash room to be used for bailout/safety use on dives later on Friday and Saturday. After we dropped the scooters, the plan was for us to swim to approximately 3900 and then make the jump over to DeLoches delight, continuing until I hit 1/3's or we completed the circuit.

As I was preparing my gear for the dive, I observed Richard prepping his Meg for the dive. I watched him analyze and label each of his tanks. Although I did not observe him packing his scrubber canister, my belief is he was using a radial canister. Richard had told me on the drive over that his oxygen sensors were 18 months old, but still operating within acceptable parameters.

We geared up and entered the water at approximately 12:45 pm. I initially had an issue with bubbles on my left post that we discovered during our s-drills. Richard was able to help me correct the issue (grit on the O-ring) without me having to leave the water. I observed Richard pre-breathe his rebreather loop, and to the best of my somewhat limited knowledge of rebreathers, he performed all of his normal pre-dive checks (as I had seen on previous dives with him).

At 1:04 pm CDT we began our dive, Richard leading and me following. Both Richard and I deployed our Oxygen bottles in about 30 feet of water, just inside the entrance. We made it about 100 feet into the cave when it became obvious that Richard was not happy with the performance of his scooter. He made several adjustments to it, but after approximately 3-4 minutes, he asked me (through hand signals) if I wanted to park the scooters and swim. I agreed, so we both turned the pitches down on our scooters and attached them to the beginning of the gold line.

At 10 minutes into the dive, we descended down the chimney to a depth of ~90 feet. At ~900 feet penetration, I reached 1/2's + 200 psi on my first stage, so I shut it down and dropped it on the main line. At the first T we proceeded to the right.

At ~1500 feet (I'm not as clear on this number), I reached 1/2's + 200 psi on my second stage, so I shut it down and dropped it on the main line.

We reached the third T at ~58 minutes. Richard made a left and headed down the Rabbit Hole. I began to follow Richard down the rabbit hole, but he stopped just inside the entrance. **After Richard swam in place for about 5 seconds, then I noticed a relatively large (about equal to an OC exhale) amount of bubbles from his head area.** He continued to swim in place for another 5 seconds, and I flashed him with my primary light. My intention was to get him to turn around so I could suggest that we take the other direction around the T. Almost immediately after I flashed Richard, he began to turn around (my belief was that he was acknowledging my flashing). **By the time Richard got turned around (at most 5-10 seconds), I could tell something wasn't right. His light was flashing around (like he was holding it loosely) and his movement was jerky, not his normal very fluid movements.**

**Richard bolted past me towards the T and the entrance.** I immediately turned to follow and overtake Richard. **After several seconds, and almost exactly 60 minutes into the dive, Richard stopped swimming.** This was about 5 feet downstream from the Third T and right on top of the gold line. I was on top of Richard in less than 5 seconds.

**When I reached him he was jerking, and his loop was floating above his head (his loop had been in his mouth just seconds earlier when he swam past me). I immediately deployed the OC reg from one of his 32% bail out bottles. I put the reg in his mouth, and when he did not immediately attempt to breathe off of it, I purged the reg for him.**

For the next 15 minutes I held the regulator in Richard mouth purging it at regular intervals in the hope that he was getting some gas and at some point he would begin to breathe. At first it seemed like he might have been trying to breathe, but that quickly subsided, and after that he was completely unresponsive. **After 15 minutes, I had to make the decision to leave Richard.** My own gas situation was becoming critical.

On the exit, I had to stop myself at one point (I was swimming at well over 200 fpm) because I was over breathing my regs and could not get enough air. I was able to get my breathing back under control, and got to my deco stop without any further incident.

When I reached my deco stops (~88minutes) I had 8 minutes of deco. I performed ~2 minutes of deco on O2, and then did an ascent.

On the surface there was a group of divers on two pontoon boats gearing up for a dive. I was able to get their attention and have them call 911.

I forced myself to wait on the surface for about two minutes (DCS concerns) then I exited, went to my car, and called Edd Sorenson. I briefed Edd on the situation, and as I was doing so I walked up to the front of the park and opened the gated for the emergency personnel.

The police are working on their reports, and my understanding is that Richard's gear will be sent to NEDU for evaluation.