

Update on Octopus Wrastling.....



For those divers who have traveled with me to tropic waters, you know that I love to hunt for octopus as they are incredibly beautiful and inelegant creatures that I enjoy interacting with while underwater. And you may have seen a video of me diving when suddenly an octopus jumps out of a coral craig and latches onto me for reasons unknown? Well that's my story anyway....

This story is about the continuing struggle to wrestle or "wrastle" with the proverbial octopus of a second stage necklace wrap on a ccr diver. You can see previous articles on this subject on my other CCR News Scrubbing Bubbles issues.

Divers will regularly ask me questions about configurations such as BOV or not to BOV, Stage Left or Stage Right, and how to stow or carry a 2nd stage bailout regulator. My answer is always considerate, meaning that I am not middle of the road but more that I have been down so many roads that I know that there are people who not only drive on both sides of the road but that they survive diving techniques that I do not follow. I am considerate to point out that there are always choices and always negatives to go with any positives. If a diver thinks that any one techniques in the only way to dive, well they haven't been around much to see the real world.

The term "Octopus" is really a recreational term used to designate a second - second stage that is used to hand off to a fellow diver in an out of air situation. For our sake I will assume that you have used a long hose regulator in cave or tech to do a neck wrap, so in this case the term octopus will be the analogy of a diver grappling with an entanglement.

My first encounter with a diver wearing a long hose "neck wrap" underneath a rebreather loop was when a former student who is also a ccr cave instructor started wearing it about 3 years ago. It was the mixing of two genre of sport where one has not totally accepted the other that has created this technique. To explain the concept I feel compelled to go back in time to see the evolution and pruning techniques in the tree of technical diving.

When I took my ccr cave course with Tom in 2001 it was the first IANTD course and along with classmate Leon, we worked with Tom, Mark and others in cave community to develop the course content and standards for IANTD. Upon certification I was met with much disdain at cave sites in N. Florida as the community was not ready to accept rebreathers as a tool for cave diving. Then after about a ten years passed the cave community was losing its grip and the local instructors realized that they had to accept rebreathers as they were losing the argument, and customers. So they way that N. Florida cave instructors adapt is to say "ok, we acknowledge the use of rebreathers however you will dive them the way we feel is correct." And by ignoring decades of rebreather use, the N. Florida cave instructors would insist on things like divers using 32% Eanx as diluent, since this was the gas that divers used in doubles for all the local caves? Sorry doesn't work like that! And while some pioneer cave instructors such as Lamar would support and understand, he would also develop a technique of carrying two Al 40's side mounted as stages verse one Al 80 for cave bailout. First it was balanced, second it was slimmer profile, and third it had two regulators for breathing in event of a single failure with no options. The sport had at the same time developed a popular open circuit technique of Side Mount diving that appealed to not only the cave community, but wreck and techreational as well. In addition the rebreather community has grown to adopt sidemount as a serious rebreather tool.

So the premise is that nothing is static and everything changes, so you should be flexible to see the changes and consider how they may be adopted or perhaps dismissed if not relevant. I have always encouraged divers to stay active and keep an eye open and mind open to new changes.

The evolution of the ccr cave long hose wrap is a compromise with the community entrenched in tradition, a choice of BOV verse DSV, and a merge with the new concept of side mount rebreather. Ok, that was a mouthful so I have to break this down step by step. The first step was to appease the open circuit cave community who has used the muscle memory of neck wrap hand off. The second step is compromise in the battle with the BOV divers, and those who choose a standard DSV. The necklace placement of a second stage is a good if not reasonable location for a ccr diver to spit out loop and switch with least vertical movement. However the concept of long hose neck wrap is to hand off the neck wrap with an unwinding pass over head technique, not practical when diving a loop. As well as handing off the neck wrap would require the ccr diver to remove their loop from mouth which is no good! So a diver who places a second stage on necklace is appeasing some of the BOV advocates, but not all. And the neck wrap is appeasing some of the o.c cave divers, but for mistaken reasons.

Now the merger of side-mount oc/cave as well as Lamars concept of splitting a single bailout side slung to two cylinders worn side-mount, and ccr side-mount has improved the technique of neck wrap to be used as soley for the ccr diver as they will wear the left stage with necklace, and pass off a long hose on a right hand stage bottle. This eliminates the proverbial Octopus Wrastling as the ccr diver would not be required to remove the ccr loop if having to pass breathing gas to a dive buddy.

The point of this article is not to delve into the subject of DSV verse BOV, but to look into the concept of how it impacted the decision of neck wrap. And the point is to discuss that there are trade off and or considerations with any technique. Lets look deeper into some of the trade offs.

I will assume that we covered the benefit of necklace placement of second stage is advantageous for proximity if ccr diver themselves needs bailout. I will ignore the appeasement of any entity who demands that divers goose step to a rhythm as this is purely political. The negative is if the source is a single source and a ccr diver would need to remove the loop to donate gas, or hand off stage bottle. This could be disastrous to have a panic divers needing gas and a ccr diver would need to remove the loop from their mouth to unwrap, or to pass a stage. And always remember that two fatalities are not a better outcome just because the one diver tried to help.

If the diver is wearing the "Side-Mount" style neck wrap, they are choosing to wear two stage bottles. One with long hose to hand off and one with necklace wrap. More gear is not always better as you reach a point where more becomes more equipment to deal with. Two stages worn left / right for bailout is new and un-conventional. This is not bad, however if we follow a few conventions that are popular we need to educate divers in new techniques. It is one of the strengths of the fanatics who goose step to the mantra of "Doing It Right" . Now all kidding aside, there is much to praise if you have only one way of carrying stages. Not that it is my cup of tea to stack all cylinders on the left, but you have to admit if everyone used only one style then mixed team divers would not encounter confusion in an emergency situation.

One more issue is the ability of handing off stage bottles as you may need to pass gas to an OOA dive buddy, or remove a stage for exit cave / wreck. And divers must consider that what works in N. Florida 70 degree water with bare hands is not the same in 34 degree Great Lakes water with dry gloves.

In the end we all need to consider that "What Works, Works" and what is important is that you work with your team members to have a cohesive strategy that works for everyone. And always keep an open mind.

Safe diving

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