



CCR Cave Are You In The Dark?

Just a bit of history to let you know how dark my view is on cave diving and the use of CCR's in caves. It was the mid 90's when I went to N. Florida full of piss and vinegar as a Great Lakes wreck diver and PADI Master Instructor, ready to take on the challenge of cave diving. This is dinosaur open circuit stuff, and my instructor Steve Berman was kind and gentle in showing me how deep a puddle of piss I was actually standing in. It was not a pretty sight. But I made it to Intro Cave, before the floods shut down the caves and I needed more sites to complete full cave. Well time got away and every chance I had to return, the darn caves were shot? Then sadly my instructor passed away. Well its 1999 and I've had my fill of Semi Closed Rebreathers and ready to make the leap to full CCR. Uncle Tom talks me out of a CisLunar and the hot kid on the block is the Inspiration. As a bonus I could buy two Inspirations for the price of the Cis. Ok, Ill take two, and I did! Now its time to finally wrap up that pesky cave course, and I call Tom and set up a class with my new Inspiration. I show up at Ginny and meet this guy who is my classmate. I introduce myself and ask this tree trunk of a guy who he is, and what rebreather he dives? He replies, "I'm Leon and I dive the Meg" I think there was some grunting too, but edited out as not necessary..... Ok, cool but what is a Meg?? It was the first generation Megalodon, and Tom who was IT, and Mark who was teaching the first IANTD CCR Cave Course were also diving the Meg. To give a short synopsis it was to take the agency course outline and insert the abbreviation "CCR" into the document and then spend a week trying some different skills drills. One that is common in all cave courses is the lost line drill with lights out, simulating zero vis. So ok, you do it with your ccr and you shut off your light, but you have a back light on the handset or a HUD that you could not ignore if you were immersed in mud, so at least you can see your PPO2 but otherwise you are in a cave and your lights went out? If it were due to a light going dead, then stop and deploy your back up and exit the cave. If it were lost line in silt out, Stop Moving and try to remember where the line was last seen, on the floor, middle or ceiling.... My two cents are that if your PPO2 is ok, then stop - relax - don't panic and go through your drill as taught in cave course. You have time on a ccr. So what can happen on a ccr that is different from O.C.??? Well one is that you could flood the unit, lose all PPO2 electronics, or have unintentional gas (oxygen/diluent) inject into loop. These are all skills that you practice in the basic CCR Mod 1 course, except you are not in an "overhead" environment. The overhead environment adds the challenge to have sufficient bailout gas. That's about it? In my CCR Cave course we used Al. 40 cu. ft. cylinders as team bailout, and at no time had less than 4 cylinders (4 team members). Our test bailout was in high flow cave exiting with the flow so we could travel quite a long way in a non panic mode and exit with a reserve. On, and on with routine cave skills while we are wearing ccr, then throw in a couple Kaboom scenarios. It was a fun and memorable course, except for the sneering and jeering that was coming from the peanut gallery. These were the old dog, good ol' boy cave divers that did not cotton with the concept of rebreathers having any part in caves. From 2000 until around 2005 it was the same evil stares, glares, sneering and snide comments from the dinosaur crowd..... Then around 2010 to 2015 I saw the tide turn and eventually you would count more CCR's at a cave site than OC divers?

Ahhh those were the good ol days. And there is nothing more that I detest than sitting around cave country and listening to people talk about those good old days when cave instructors really taught buoyancy, and these divers today don't know shite! Bla-bla-bla it never changes. But the old dinosaurs could not ignore the tidal wave of both new and old divers seeking rebreathers. Letting go is not easy, and in desperate attempts to inject as much old dogma as they could, the OC cave instructors would insist that ccr divers use 32% in their diluent as this was what cave divers used for back gas at Devils, right??? No, that is not how it works with a CCR, but that did not stop the belligerent old cave divers from trying to impose their beliefs.

Recently I joined one of my CCR students for his CCR cave course and with time allowed he completed very well to "Apprentice CCR Cave". We had one day before heading home and he asked his instructor if he could do an apprentice dive with me at Devils, a system that he knew well from his training and we would do only a simple main line dive with no jumps as specified with his apprentice level. Since the instructor had a prior obligation he was enthusiastic and said "yes, go have a fun dive and be safe" or something to that point. The manager at Ginny who I know very well said *"NO WAY! Not at my site, there is no CCR Apprentice as they do not know their limits with a rebreather"*. I try to reassure with we are only doing a mainline, in - out simple dive, no jumps... Even after a phone call from the instructor it was *NO!* I do not fault her and understand that the number of CCR deaths at this system is beyond acceptable, but then again the OC deaths are also unacceptable?

So is it true that an Apprentice CCR Cave Diver cannot be trusted with the "temporary or probational use of CCR in a Cave" due to the fact that they do not know or respect the limits? I think it is hugely hypocritical to say that an Open Circuit "intro to Cave" Diver has a greater sense or knowledge of limits verse a Closed Circuit Diver "Intro to Cave". A diver who is trained to an Intro level is at an introductory level of experience, and has been given a set of limitations on their diving activities regardless of OC, CCR, Side-Mount, etc... It is saying that divers who make an equipment choice of rebreather are pathologically not capable of respecting limits? Should we now stop training rebreather divers on trimix to 200 foot depth as we cannot trust that they will dive deeper?

I do accept the idea that a piece of equipment such as a DPV can have a serious consequence on a cave divers plan as it does allow you to get way beyond your normal swimming profile. And today it is an accepted norm to require even "experienced open circuit full cave divers" to show a DPV Cave C Card before they dive at certain cave systems. But I also know several very experienced OC cave divers who have used DPV's for many years before this rule/convention was adopted. So what changes, or what has occurred that precipitates the need to create a certification?

Something to consider is how the dive industry has acted in past can help us understand how the industry reacts to new or emerging technologies. It was the introduction of Nitrox that showed us how an industry full of hypocrites makes a tragically wrong Knee Jerk reaction. Nitrox was considered so dangerous that the industries only trade show (DEMA) banned the advertisement or any language of Nitrox used at the convention. Doom and Gloom scenarios of mass casualties were posted by the largest dive training agency, who flip flopped to turn around and claim that they have always supported and perhaps may have invented the concept? The real decision was based purely on economics as this training agency failed to see the income potential of certifying "Techreational to Recreational" divers in nitrox.

But if we look deeper into the process we see that the original Nitrox certification did not consider the use of enriched mixtures above 36%, then along comes a semi closed rebreather that has a minimum mixture of oxygen as 40% . Ok, we now need an Advanced Nitrox certification as divers are not responsible enough to use mixtures above 36%. But as we have previously seen in the industry that divers were for many years using pure oxygen to 30 feet as a deco gas without any nitrox training agencies in existence. These pioneers are now out of touch with the current dive community as they are performing deco dives using pure oxygen without a "Technical Diving Certification Card"

So there is a long history of the dive industry making Knee Jerk reactions whenever new technologies are introduced as it is assumed that divers are not capable of making safe or sound decisions. Certification Levels are created by fear of lawsuits, liabilities, or possibly financial reasons?

Now I recall my first drysuit dives in the early 70's and this was with a basic diver certification level, as there was not even an "Advanced Open Water" or an imaginable "Dry Suit Specialty". Yet today we consider this piece of equipment as an optional level of certification and nobody restricts cave divers in use of a drysuit, or requires a C card to operate?

But I do realize that caves are a uniquely dangerous environment and we have a history of learning by bad example that has been used to improve the sport and make it safer. Yet the only piece of equipment that the cave community has singled out is the DPV and CCR. And while there may be rumors about side-mount, there is no restrictions at this date? Sign this up as just another hypocrisy of open circuit cave divers who were originally certified on dual independent double, then the manifold, isolation manifold, jerry can bcd, stab jacket bcd, wing, and now we have side mount, or no mount cave diving..... I myself relish in the fact that I am a professional hypocrite as I hold a CCR cave C Card and I have participated in Side Mount Open Circuit cave dives while in Mexico! Not only do I not have an Open Circuit Certification card, I am practicing the gas management of two independent cylinders mounted on my sides..... "SCUBA POLICE!"

So a trend appears that a technique or a technology has to grow to a level where enough divers were to become active that the dive industry either pinches its butt cheeks together, or perhaps opens its wallet and looks at the empty spaces and then makes a decision that a new restriction needs to be imposed, ie C Cards are created.

For about 10 years the rule, practice, or convention has been that OC full cave certified divers who then train on a CCR would show both cards and they are ok to dive. And the Good Old Boy network has been looking the other way when it comes to the old dogs in the dive community. Names that are on cave maps, cave passages named after some, and icons who are not officially CCR Cave certified have been doing so for almost two decades. Well, damn fine is what I say as there is no reason to be a Good Old Boy unless you can reap the benefits of being in the network. Right? A Good Old Boy only needs to ask his buddy who simply passes him a card, no class, no paperwork, no dives required.... its ok, its "Bubba" and everyone knows he is qualified.

The dive industry operates in a climate of Self Policing as there is NO government law that regulates the training process or methods. It is the liability and lawsuits that must be managed to a point where the blood sucking lawyers can leave the host barely alive. And yes it has already been proposed to dump all the lawyers in the sea, but nobody wants to drive the truck as I grab the bodies??? So what happens is that we end up with a process that has a common convention, meaning that if ABC, DEF, and XYZ all do it this way then I can either buck the system and have to defend myself against the common way or I agree to go along. At some point "We" all agreed that you need to be issued a C card to go scuba diving in the first place.

And most recently I've had a few students whom I've certified as CCR divers to Full CCR Trimix send me emails asking what to do as the rules are changing? Well I can't print all that I have told them to do, as some of these suggestions while they may not be considered "illegal" may be considered morally reprehensible..... But what are the options?

- They can take a CCR Cross Over Course
- They can ignore the rules, but in certain cave locations they cannot violate the policy or they can get banned!

Now you may be thinking, if I am an Instructor Trainer for multiple agencies then why would I buck the system??? Do I see a problem with other instructors teaching courses and benefiting from the profits. The answer is, no I do not have a problem with instructors teaching courses, as I know full well after 37 years of teaching that there is very low profit in this line of work and its most often done by divers to support their own "crack habit" of diving.

But as an admitted professional hypocrite, I cannot look at these divers in the eye and say to them "You are simply not qualified to operate a CCR in a cave environment" as many of them are far superior cave divers than I will ever be. Its pure and simple SILLY BULLSHITE?

So what I would propose to the industry is some measure of an "Administrative Cross Over" where these divers could simply attend a seminar at a local dive show, or better yet an On-Line tutorial and have the divers sign a statement of understanding, perhaps an affidavit of X years of OC Cave Diving, Y years of CCR diving and Z amount of CCR Cave Dives that they have participated in before this hypocritical new rule has been imposed.

With my superior hindsight, I am at this moment booking a conference hall, nearby a nice brew pub of course, where I will be offering some CCR certifications to beat the dive industry to the punch! Why worry about getting denied access to the local dive charter as you do not have a CCR Boat Diver C-card, or miss out on that immaculately preserved wooden schooner in Presque Isle as your open circuit wreck diver specialty does Not have the CCR Wooden Sailing Ship Diver endorsement! I'm no dummy as I grew up watching Rockford Files and with a ID Card Printer in the back seat. I am ready to help you embrace the future.

Sign up now as the cost is less than the disappointment you will feel when you are denied access in the future!

Gib Anigav

Do as I say and Not as I do,

But Dive Safely!