

"I want to see the end of the cave. This one just happens to be vertical."



Jim Bowden discusses his attempt to bottom out Zacatón.

People are going to read this story and think, Jesus, these people are crazy. I mean, Exley died doing this dive, you nearly ran low on gas and got hurt, and now you're going to go back and try to do it again. Is it a suicide wish? How do you explain it?

I've matured a lot after losing Sheck. I don't think that there is a way to explain it. So I don't try. What's the old saying, if you have to ask the price, you can't afford it.

No, I don't have a death wish. I don't really feel there is a career in deep diving either. But I want to do it, and I'm working day and night to insure my safety as much as I can, and to insure that I can have a bail-out so that I can abort if it doesn't work. I'm firmly convinced that if I had had the volumes [of gas] last time, then I would have done it. Because my dive went very, very well.

#### All to bottom out Zacatón.

I've spent a decade and a half exploring caves. That's my passion. All of every day. And a cave explorer wants to see the end of a cave. This one just happens to be vertical. And I think I can do it. If at any time I feel I can't, well then, I'll move on. You're only as good as your last fight anyway. There are other systems I want to get into. But this is exciting, and I would not trade the experience.

I don't feel that this is the most significant thing I've accomplished either. I'm very proud of the Belize project and that was two solid years of living there, and my deepest dive was 46 f [14 m]. I think it had every bit the dangers and excitement and drama. A lot more cerebral stuff and not as much time at the computer.

#### What aspect of the dive are you most afraid of, or that worries you most about it?

Having a bad day. Just having a bad day. I don't think you can afford a bad day. That was Sheck's reservation, too. When we first talked about doing this, and honestly, Sheck was the one who encouraged me, 'cause he knew my financial situation, to seek sponsorship. And to seek sponsorship you have to seek exposure. Sponsors don't do it out of the goodness of their hearts. We also both agreed that we've seen the camera kill people. Sheck was too mature to fold to that, and that was not the case there. This next time, I'm really considering who I'm going to have there, or if I'm

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◀ **Bowden** going to have anybody there. Like NBC, I'm sorry they weren't there. They want to be there next time from what I hear. Can you imagine going up there and having that little gut feeling. You've had it, haven't you? Haven't you pulled a dive for just nothing specific, it just doesn't seem right? It's better you do that with few media guys there.

**There is that pressure. Sheck wrote about it in *Caverns*. Just the whole pressure of saying, "Well, they're here. Let's just do it." Are you beyond the limits of scuba?**

I think we're approaching them. Though there are people who would say that it's already way passed. I don't know and I don't particularly care. When Sheck broke Hassenmayer's record (656 ffw/195 m), nobody gave him a rat's ass chance of succeeding. But he did, and then he went back and broke his own record.

#### Is that what you're after?

I've already got the record. I don't need to go break the record. And even if I break my own record, which I will with a successful dive, which I'm confident will be successful, I really believe that somebody will eventually break it. And, yes, I think some people will die.

Do I sound invincible? No, I'm not invincible, and no, I don't have a death wish. I'm going to start a family when I'm eighty. If I do reach the bottom, it'll be the result of several months working on the perfect set, on correcting the mistakes I made last time. Then, if I don't feel that I can, I won't do it. I really don't have anything to prove. I just would like to see the bottom of Zacatón like somebody would like to see, I don't know, the dark side of the moon or whatever. I just would like to see it. It's a personal thing. And if that's a shallow desire by other people's standards, well, so be it.