

Blue Springs diver dies

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Man who died cave diving was Marianna resident

Officials confirmed Tuesday the identity of the diver who died inside a **spring cave at Blue Springs Recreational Area**, as well as details surrounding his death.

Jackson County Sheriff John McDaniel said Harry Milliser, 48, of Dogwood Heights near Marianna, died of drowning Monday after becoming stuck in Jackson Blue, the spring cave that lies in close proximity to a recreational diving board inside the park.

Milliser is survived by his wife and two daughters. He was the owner and operator of Air Services, where he designed and built automotive paint booths.

According to McDaniel, Milliser had been a **certified open-water diver** for more than 20 years, but he **did not have the required certification for cave diving**. He had frequently dove at other caves, including Twin Caves and Hole-in-the-Wall at Merritt's Mill Pond in Marianna.

"Cave diving is a trial enough when you do have the training and certification," said McDaniel, "When you do it without the certification, you're just asking for trouble. It's like flying a plane into the wild blue yonder without being trained to fly."

McDaniel confirmed some of the details surrounding Milliser's death. He said Milliser was diving with his friend, certified cave diver Gordon Smith of Marianna, when Milliser apparently **became stuck**. Smith surfaced and called for help.

The sheriff's office and local cave-diving expert Edd Sorenson responded within minutes. McDaniel said that the sheriff's diving squad is not cave-certified, so Sorenson did a search inside the spring cave for the missing diver.

Sorenson recovered Milliser's body **four minutes into the search**, approximately **600 feet** from the mouth of the cave (ca. 200m vom Eingang), which lies about **85 feet** from the surface (ca. 26m Tiefe).

Milliser was **no longer wearing his double tanks**, which he probably **removed in a state of panic**, said McDaniel. An autopsy later confirmed that the cause of death was drowning.

As for Milliser's diving partner Smith, whether or not he will face any charges has yet to be determined, pending investigation. A sheriff's press release reported that Smith has been a diver for about 30 years and works at an area dive shop.

McDaniel, who is a diver himself, said the longest part of the process of recovering Milliser's body was most likely Sorenson's ascent after finding him. Sorenson might have had to stop for decompression before exiting the water.

McDaniel said that this is not the first diving fatality in Jackson County. "We've had divers all over this county drown, **usually people who aren't cave certified**. I'd say about **eight to 12 people in the past 30 years**," said McDaniel, "When you push your limits or experience level, you're putting your life on the line."