

Low Anxiety

Getting Marked In Belize's Great Blue Hole



DAVID HAAS/PHOTO

This is an account of narcosis – and violation of recreational depths. While we can state clearly that this diver exceeded the 130-foot / 40-meter recreational limit, we also know he isn't the first person to dive that deep in the Belize Blue Hole or elsewhere. Cold-water divers take off for the trip of a lifetime every day, diving in the Caribbean, forgetting how deep they can venture and still see the surface.

This diver tells us he was "marked," high on nitrogen, in a way. Ultimately, it could have caused him greater harm, but he was fortunate. He stayed with his dive buddy and made a safety stop; and when he ran dangerously low on air, he borrowed his friend's second stage and eventually surfaced safely.

He recovered rapidly from the deleterious effect of nitrogen narcosis, despite his ventures well beyond recreational limits (to

150 feet) and the fact he had experienced the narcotic effects of compressed air at depth.

Still, there were factors he failed to consider. He refers to being able to spend only eight minutes at 150 feet because of the rapid air consumption. This is off the tables. U.S. Navy Tables have a maximum time of five minutes (including descent time) at that depth without required decompression. He would have realistically had about two to three minutes at depth. For the record, DCIEM Tables give seven minutes without required decompression stops, and Royal Navy Tables don't allow 150 feet without two required decompression stops for a total of 10 minutes at depth and 10 minutes of deco.

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