



COMISION NACIONAL DE RESCATE EN CUEVAS

*De la Sociedad Nacional de Espeleología de Estados Unidos
Afiliada a la Asociación Nacional de Búsqueda y Rescate (NASAR)*

REGION DEL CARIBE

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TO: Puerto Rico's Speleological Community

RE: Rescue at Juan Nieves cave, Ciales, P.R.

On, Saturday October 2, 2010 a rescue operation was executed in Juan Nieves cave, located in the town of Ciales, Puerto Rico. Two cavers, José “Chino” Gómez and Carlos Acevedo planned to exit the cave no later than 0200 hrs. of Saturday October 2, 2010, but could not do so, due to high water level at their location in the cave.

The aforementioned cavers enter the cave around 1000 hrs. on October 1, 2010. They were part of a production attempt to film a pilot program of “Caving” that is planned to be broadcasted on a National TV by Discovery Channel. For this casting a group of cavers in PR as well as cavers from the States was contacted.

During the morning of October 2, 2010, at 0500 hrs. a rescue call was started. Following is a timeline of the rescue.

- 0500 hrs. It's confirmed with a security guard on the set that they didn't come out of the cave.
- 0510 hrs. It's established that Clemm Akins will be the Incident Commander and Roberto Miranda will be Operations Chief.
- 0530 hrs. Cavers working with the production were wake up to start the Rescue.
- 0541 hrs. PR cave rescuers are put in Standby alert.
- 0650 hrs. An IRT (Team 1) is sent inside the cave to do initial search. Proper debrief is given to them explaining area of high probability of success. An operational timeline of 12 hours was established for the rescuers.

Rescue at Juan Nieves cave, Ciales, P.R. (continuation)

- José Morales, TL PR
- Ben Ludy, US
- Shane Snyder, EMT US
- Nelson González, PR
- 0730 hrs. Team 2, Communications Team (*from them on COMMO*) was assembled
 - Kellen Feyerharm, US
 - Mike Hills, US
 - Jason Record, US
 - Mariel Padilla, TL PR
- 0742 hrs. COMMO Station at Base is ready.
- 0800 hrs. COMMO test at entrance of cave successful.
- 0913 hrs. COMMO at balcony of the cave, COMMO check ok.
- 0945 hrs. Team 3 is sent with a Sked, OSS and a rigid litter just in case that is needed.
 - Luis Nieves, TL PR
 - Pablo Acevedo, PR
 - Anthony Castro, PR
 - Mike Green, US
- 0948 hrs. State Firefighter (Special Operations Division) Lieutenant Jose Nieves is contacted and informed to establish contact with local authorities and notify the incident. As part of the rescue protocol for the recording, Lieutenant Nieves was identified to be the Liaison between the production and local authorities. He was informed before hand that a group of cavers will be exploring a cave in Ciales PR.
- 1000 hrs. people in the outside start working on a belay line in case that is needed. As part of the Pre-Plan for the production a rope going all the way down to the bottom of the pit was in place. The belay line was intended to go right next to it.
- 1025 hrs. Víctor Sánchez, OMMEAD Director (*Oficina Municipal para el Manejo de Emergencias Ambientales y Desastres*) arrives at scene.
- 1125 hrs. Problems with the belay line arise. Three cavers were sent to solve the situation. After the belay problem is solved a team member of that team will act as an Underground Coordinator and another one as a Runner in case that is needed.
 - Carlos Lao, TL and Underground Coordinator PR
 - Armando Asencio, PR
 - Juan González, PR
- 1130 hrs. Efraín Mercado reports to IC & OPS Chief. Act as liaison with agencies until Lt. Nieves arrives to scene.
- 1140 hrs. José Morales and Nelson González, (Team #1) start to walk to exit the cave.
- 1240 hrs. COMMO Team went to Water Fall #1. They will re-connect communications at 1315 hrs. or when they reach water fall#1.
- 1249 hrs. José and Nelson arrive at Cave Entrance and exit the cave. (IRT Team #1 member)
- 1300hrs. Team 4 is assembled and sent to cave entrance, in case that is needed.
- 1305 hrs. IRT made it to Water Fall #3. Water Fall #3 is turned into a Siphon, water levels is going down. IRT members (Team 1) decide that since is impossible to go through, to move downstream and intercept COMMO team and Inform.

- 1310 hrs. Production personnel, Gordon Brown and Joel Tower enter the cave. Their duty was to film as much as possible without interfering with the rescue operation.
- 1315 hrs.
 - Remaining IRT Members (Shane and Ben) Joined up with COMMO Team.
 - COMMO Team at base of Water Fall #1.
 - They inform that Water Fall #3 is turn into a Siphon and that is impossible to pass through.
 - Water level at WF #3 to high, big probability for original team of 2 to be trapped at the other side of WF #3.
 - They are informed to make an attempt to water fall #3 and wait until water level goes down, to see if it can be passed.
 - Next Communication at 1400 hrs. COMMO Team and IRT Teams proceeds to Water Fall #3.
 - Ron Richards enters the cave to monitor and inform water level.
- 1320 hrs. Angel Pérez, AEMEAD (*Agencia Estatal para el Manejo de Emergencias Ambientales y Desastres*) Zone #2 Director arrives at scene with members of his staff. They were debriefed by Operations Chief. Rescue trucks arrive at scene.
- 1350 hrs. COMMO team notifies that they are on their last spool of COMMO wire. Next Communication will be at 1500 hrs. They haven't reach Dragons Back formation (cave landmark before WF #3) yet, slow progress.
- 1357 hrs. Heavy rain starts at surface.
- 1410 hrs. Luis Nieves, a caver belonging to Team 3, exit the cave, since he was not feeling well. (Team #3 member)
- 1415 hrs. Mariel Padilla (COMMO Team member) and Juan Gonzalez exit the cave.
- 1427 hrs.
 - COMMO team has reached Dragons Back (cave landmark)
 - Almost out of line
 - Water level dropping
 - Advised to continue ahead as far as possible with next Communication at 1530 hrs.
- 1432 hrs.
 - COMMO team out of wire
 - Water level at Dragons Back much lowers than previous trip (0.5meters).
- 1510 hrs. Mariel Padilla, Nelson Gonzalez and John (Clemm Sherpa) enters the cave to help production personnel as well as to address the exit of fellow cavers.
- 1515 hrs.
 - 2 lost cavers are returning under their own, they were trapped pass WF #3 for 14 hrs.
 - Water level has risen 4" after last COMMO.
- 1527 hrs.
 - Water has risen another 1.5"
 - All 8 remaining cavers (Carlos, Chino, COMMO and IRT Teams) are together and on their way out of the cave.
- 1600 hrs Chino and Carlos exit the cave. They are evaluated by EMT personnel.
- 1610 hrs. Armando Asencio and Carlos Laó exit the cave. Mariel Padilla becomes Underground Coordinator from now on.

Rescue at Juan Nieves cave, Ciales, P.R. (continuation)

- 1640 hrs. Pablo Acevedo and Anthony Castro exit the cave.(Team#3 member)
- 1727 hrs. Ron Richards exits the cave.
- 1750 hrs. Shane Snyder exit he cave. (IRT Team member)
- 1805 hrs. Ben Ludy, exit the cave. (IRT Team member)
- 1826 hrs. Mike Green exits the cave. (Third Team member)
- 1835 hrs. John (Clemm Sherpa) exits the cave.
- 1845 hrs. Kellen Feyerharm, exit the cave. (COMMO Team member)
- 1857 hrs. Gordon Brown and Joel Tower (production personnel) exit the cave.
- 1924 hrs. Mike Hills, exit the cave. (COMMO Team member)
- 1953 hrs. Nelson Gonzalez exits the cave.
- 1958 hrs. Jason Record, exit the cave. (COMMO Team member)
- 2000 hrs. Mariel Padilla, exit the cave. Underground Coordinator out.

We want to make clear that the production crew did not interfere with the rescue process. On the contrary they were more than helpful giving us support like shelter, food, water, supplies, radios and other things to aid the rescuers as well as the patients.

The same goes for the OMMEAD office and personnel that attend the emergency. Which gave us their full support and didn't interfere with the rescue process either. Thanks to a Collaboration Agreement that was establish a couple of years ago, between Cavers and the Agency, for this type of events.

At least 60 emergency responders arrived at scene. From this group 70% were cavers, the other were agency personnel and a couple of bystanders. This is without counting the people that were already there.



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NCRC Regional Coordinator
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