

Caver Alan Cressler lowers himself into the first pit below the entrance to Krubera — the world's deepest cave.

# The Deepest Cave

- 1 When Sergio García-Dils de la Vega kissed his girlfriend good-bye at the entrance to Krubera Cave, he promised to return the next day. But it would be two long weeks before he met her again.

- 5 García-Dils was a member of an international team exploring Krubera. The team members hoped to be the first cavers to reach a depth of 2,000 meters, a feat that would be compared to conquering the North and South Poles. During the descent, team member Bernard Tourte injured himself going through a **tight** passage. García-Dils decided to stay with him at an **underground** camp, missing the chance to return to the surface before the team descended further.

- 10 Krubera Cave in the western Caucasus Mountains<sup>1</sup> is the deepest known cave in the world. Descending into Krubera, one team member said, “was like climbing an inverted<sup>2</sup> Mount Everest.” The team members brought five tons<sup>3</sup> of equipment and other **necessities** with them and established camps at key locations along the route. They cooked meals together, slept five and six to a tent, and worked for  
15 up to 20 hours each day. They left **ropes** behind to **ease** their return ascent<sup>4</sup> and telephone lines to communicate with people above.

<sup>1</sup> The **Caucasus Mountains** lie between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea.

<sup>2</sup> Something that is **inverted** is upside down.

<sup>3</sup> A **ton** is a unit of weight equal to 2,000 pounds or 909 kilograms.

<sup>4</sup> An **ascent** is an upward journey or movement.

Sergio García-Dils says good-bye to his girlfriend ► as teammate Bernard Tourte prepares to enter Krubera Cave.





◀ A team member crawls through a narrow passage in nearby Snow Cave.

In the third week, progress was blocked at 1,775 meters by a sump—a cave passage filled with water that gives cavers few options. There are basically three techniques available: dive through it, empty it, or go around it. Gennadiy Samokhin dove to the bottom but was disappointed: “No chance to get through,” he said. Searching for a way around the sump, García-Dils risked entering a cascade<sup>5</sup> of near-freezing water and discovered that his dry suit had holes in it. “The water was so cold I lost the feeling in my fingers,” he said later. He, too, was unsuccessful.

Finally, two teammates found a way around the sump through a tight passage they called the “Way to the Dream.” The team was exhilarated. The passage led to yet another sump at 1,840 meters. After a short test dive, Samokhin emerged, smiling. There was a promising passage, he reported. But it would have to wait. After nearly four weeks, with supplies running low, the team had run out of time and would have to return to the surface.

Four weeks later, a team of nine Ukrainian cavers led by Yuri Kasjan went back to Krubera. Following the path opened by the previous team, they reached the sump at 1,840 meters relatively quickly. After much searching, a pit<sup>6</sup> (later named the “Millennium Pit”) was discovered that allowed them to pass the 2,000 meter depth. More pits and passages led them to 2,080 meters, a spot they named “Game Over.” But the caving game is never over. Deeper caves will probably continue to be discovered—and call out to be explored.

<sup>5</sup> A **cascade** is falling water.

<sup>6</sup> In caving, a **pit** is part of a cave that falls straight down.

