

Project Update: August 2013

I have successfully completed my first field trip to the Yucatan Peninsula this summer. The research trip started on July 15th 2013 and ended on August 6th. Now I'm back in the US and I have started to process the collected data and samples at Texas A&M University.

The trip was very successful. Beyond completing the objectives of my research, I was able to bring along another student to look at the presence and distribution of heavy metals in the system. I believe this will give another dimension to the pollutant study I am carrying out in the cave system as part of this Rufford project. I was able to make new connections with researchers and students working at UNAM (Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico). This will be a great advantage in regards of the continuation of this project in the near future as well as on a long run. On one of the pictures, you can see me prior to a research dive in the opening pool of the cave system I study.

As part of the pollutant study I tried to identify potential sources of pollutants in the vicinity of the cave system (>240 km of surveyed passages). I did that just by driving around to see surface land use and developments. Unfortunately, I have found more types of potential sources than I expected. For example, the attach pictures show a paint spill next to a road. The spill is just over the flooded cave system I study. There are several reasons why this is problematic. For example, these underground waterways are fresh water sources for local people and the caves and cenotes attract countless tourists every year. With the help of Mexican researchers, I am trying to get in touch with local media and newspapers to talk about this particular paint spill incident.

One objective that I wasn't able to complete but I originally planned for the first field trip was to get started with the shots for the educational movie. Since the research was more time consuming than I first expected I didn't have the capacity to fulfil this objective on this trip. However, I'm planning to catch up on this on my next field trip.

To continue the field work, I am planning to go back to Mexico in December 2013 or the beginning of next year.



