
Wythe Davis Sims
https://ufdc.ufl.edu/UF00073793/00190/6?search=orlando+otters+scuba+club

IN MEMORIAM

Wythe Davis Sims, II
The profession in Florida will mourn the loss of its colleague, Wythe Davis Sims, II, AIA, who drowned on Sunday, August 16, 1970 while probing the depths of a sinkhole for the body of another diver. Wythe was a member of the Orlando Otters Scuba Club.
Wythe Davis Sims, II for many years faithfully served his profession on a local and state basis. He served as President of the Mid-Florida AIA Chapter and was currently serving on the Board of Directors of the FAAIA. He was the current President of the Construction Specifications Institute (CSI) Orlando Chapter.
His memory will be with us. Our deepest sympathy to his family.

W.D Sims
http://www.thediversassociation.com/index.php?/incidents/&sortby=col_1&sortdirection=desc&page=1

W.D Sims aged 44, Rescue diver looking for the body of 16 year old sports diver Fred Schmitz (Apparently blacked out and then disappeared into the depths) who was diving with 31 year old Hal Watts (Who suffered a DCI and was treated in a DDC for 5 hours at Cape Kennedy during the SAR operation), both were members of the Orlando Otters SCUBA Club diving in a 400' deep sinkhole looking for equipment lost on earlier dives.

Speculated that the rescue diver, Sims, suffered from nitrogen narcosis, got entangled in safety ropes, ran out of air and drowned.

Rescue operations were then called off pending the use of deep diving equipment. Unclear if this was a 'professional' or amateur rescue attempt.

St. Petersburg Times
Search Continues For Scuba Diver, Navy Flying In Deep-Diving Gear

The search continued late Thursday night for the body of a 16-year-old scuba diver who drowned in at least 350 feet of water in a sinkhole off Fairbanks Avenue Thursday afternoon while seeking lost life vests.

The victim was identified as Fred Schmitz, member of a scuba diving club and one of four persons in the Orlando area qualified for diving at the 150-foot level.

 Authorities said Schmitz was diving in the sinkhole known as Emerald Springs at 850 W. Fairbanks Avenue. The hole is said to be 500 feet deep.

SGT. GEORGE Barge of the Orange County Sheriff's Department said the Navy will send a "Hollis" diving unit to help recover the body. The team and equipment will be flown from Charleston, S.C., today.

The equipment mixes helium and oxygen, enabling divers to go as deep as 600 feet for as long as an hour.

In addition, the sheriff's office was calling throughout Central Florida late Thursday night trying to locate deep diving equipment to continue the search.

Barge said Schmitz apparently blacked out as he and Hal Watts, who leased the sinkhole for scuba diving training and who also operates a diving gear store, became entangled in guide lines.

THE TWO DIVERS were at about the 150-foot level and coming up when they became entangled in the lines, Barge said.

Watts said they cut themselves loose but when he looked back he did not see Schmitz. He said he saw a light Schmitz had been carrying sinking to the bottom.

The diver said he swam toward the light but was unable to reach it before it went out at about the 100-foot level.

Watts said he blacked out momentarily from the pressure at that depth but managed to make it to the surface.

BILL THOMPSON and Wythe Simms, specially trained to dive at great depths, attempted to locate the body at 375 feet but were forced to surface after 40 seconds because of the pressure.

Simms said the visibility is "fair" at the 200-foot level but the sinkhole is bell-bottomed. He estimated that nearer the sides of the hole the depths could reach 500 feet.

A needle on Simms' depth indicator was jammed at the 310-foot reading, the deepest depth recorded on the instrument.

Barge said dredging operations would be impossible because of the size of the hole, which is about 75 feet in diameter. Schmitz' depressurized body, weighted down with diving belts and tanks, will not surface, he said.

THE WATER level is the sinkhole is below the water table, Barge said. Several visible springs around the steep 100-foot embankment above the water level trickle into the hole.

The property is owned by William Cornett and is popularly known by divers as "Mystery Sinkhole."

Watts, 34, holds the record of 380 feet for diving in scuba gear with compressed air. It was set in 1967 in the Atlantic Ocean.

Suspended Jane Asks Trial Delay

The attorney for suspended Seminole Constable Bob Jane Thursday asked for a continuance of Jane's Sept. 14 trial in circuit court at Sanford on a perjury charge.

James C. Daukash Jr. claimed the defense would be unable to prepare for trial by that date and said he has 10 other cases scheduled for trial that week.

The 33-year-old Jane was indicted by the Seminole County grand jury on charges of perjury, assault and battery, and two counts of falsifying public records.

CIRCUIT COURT Judge William Akrige granted a state motion shifting all but the perjury charge to Seminole County Court for trial.

Jane allegedly beat Joseph J. Surrupant, 65-year-old retired Seminole engineer, Dec. 21, 1968, and then arrested him on a public drunk charge.

The suspended constable is charged with falsifying reports to say Surrupant was arrested at Regency Square, in Casselberry, when the alleged incident took place in the district of another constable.

Jane pleaded innocent to the charges when arraigned Monday.

Missing Boy Found Unharmed

Roy Alex Sandage, 10, object of a widespread search in the Union Park area after he disappeared from home at 1:30 a.m. Thursday, was found at 2:30 a.m. Thursday and returned to his parents.

The son of Mr. and Mrs. Roy Sandage, 161 Northwood Drive, was last seen going into the woods behind his home Wednesday night. He spent the night there, according to police. The Sandages reported Roy missing at 8 a.m. Thursday.

Roy lost his dog, a 20-pound greyhound named Duke, in the woods and his father said he may have tried to find the dog.

The boy was last seen running along the railroad tracks near his home. He was not found in the woods when police searched there.

The Sandages said their son was returned in good condition and was not hurt.
Sinkhole Remains Mystery

By ANDY WILLIAMS
Staff Writer

“AUG. 15, 16-year-old Fred Schmidt of Orlando drowned while scuba diving in the lake with Hal Watts, owner of Hal Watts Diving Supply, 1300 N. Mills St., who leased the rights to use the water for deep diving instruction.

Three days later, Bob Sims, 45, of Winchester Drive, Winter Park, drowned during the extensive search for Schmidt’s body. At the same time, Watts, 35, suffered the bends while trying to save Sims and nearly died himself. He was rushed to Kennedy Space Center hospital and placed in a recompression chamber. From there, Watts went to Orange Memorial Hospital. He is now at home, recuperating.

According to Sgt. George Barge of the Orange County Sheriff’s Department, Sims became entangled with lines being used in the search for Schmidt’s body. Other divers tried to cut him loose, but Sims apparently panicked, lost his mouthpiece and swam to the surface very rapidly, not bothering about decompression.

People in the television boat above (a closed circuit television camera was used by deputies in searching for Schmidt’s body) heard and felt a thud and saw a light falling rapidly down in the hole after the thud. Barge theorized it was Sims going down, although no one below him saw him pass by.

Watts, Barge said, followed Sims to the surface before he realized Sims was out of control. Watts managed to stop near the surface, although he was already suffering from the bends. Watts had to stay under water for some time until an ambulance was summoned and arrangements made to get Watts to a recompression chamber.

BARGE SAID Sims was already dead before he hit the boat, by ascending too fast and not letting the pressure inside him be equalized.

Schmidt also became entangled in lines, and Watts turned back to help him when Schmidt went to the bottom. Watts reported seeing only Schmidt’s light as it sank. He could not find Schmidt.

HOW DEEP the lake is, is anyone’s guess. Mrs. Cornett said the lake was studied by the U.S. Department of Interior Geological Survey in 1956 and in 1966 by the U.S. Navy sonar research department.

Both groups reached similar conclusions: They could only estimate the maximum depth at over 300 feet. The minimum depth, she said, is 330 feet.

(SINKHOLE—Continued. On Page 2A)