And They Dived Happily Ever After

Isn’t it common knowledge that women want fairytale endings? They want a family, kids, and live and love happily ever after?

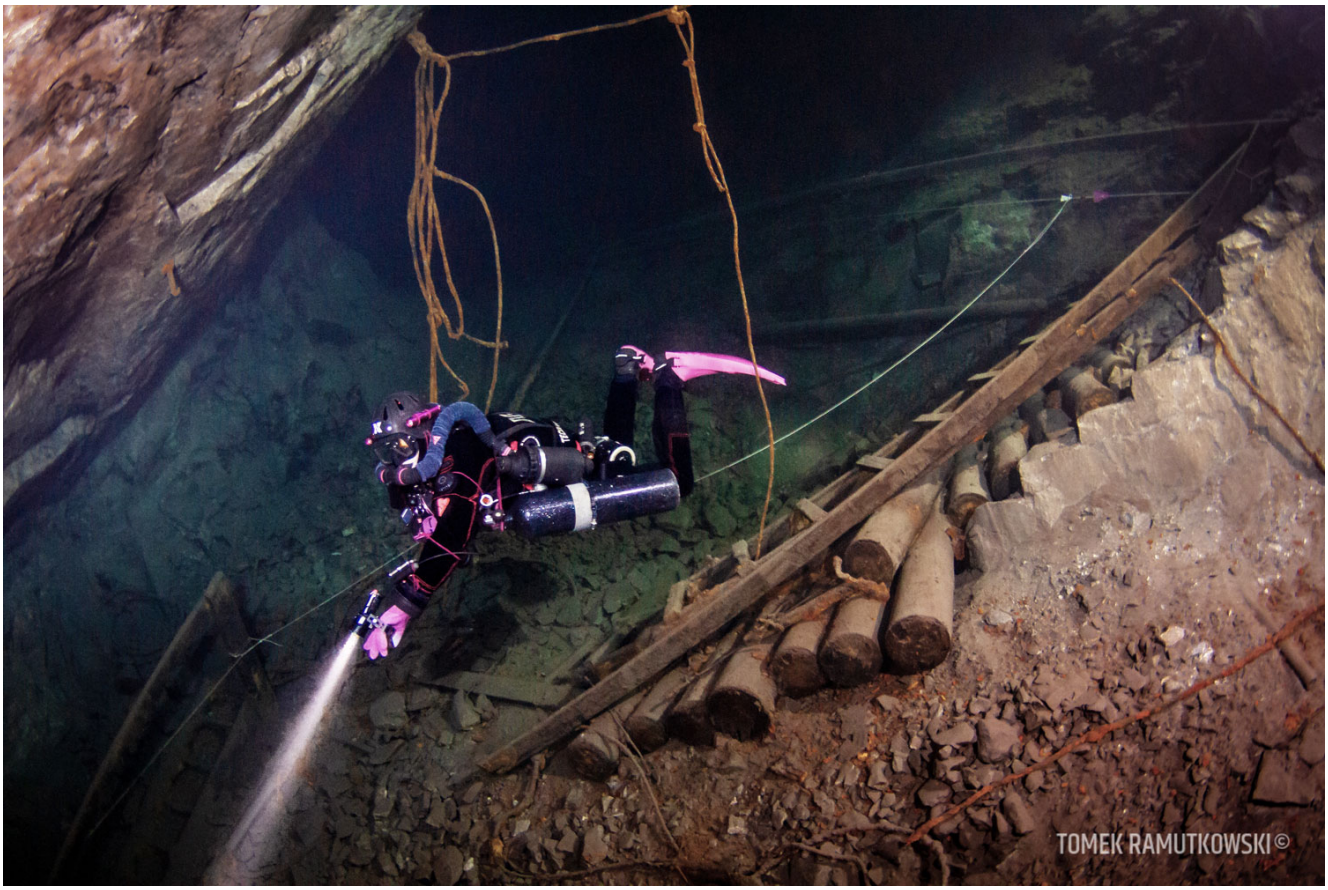
Well… meet *The Cavettes*. We want the same… almost.

All we want is a dive family, CCR kids, and to dive happily ever after.

Our story begins as befits a fairytale: Once upon a time, there were three women who shared a passion.

Sara Banderby —a cold-water, backmount rebreather (CCR) diver and recreational (rec) instructor from Sweden; **Joanna Wyrebek**—a Polish backmount CCR diver and rec to deep diving instructor living in the UK, and **Sanne Volja**, a sidemount CCR diver and rec/intro to tech instructor from Belgium who loves to explore. Together, we founded *The Cavettes*.

Our diving careers each started in a different way. But over time, all of us were drawn to **technical diving**. Its rigorous training and the challenges of our dives made us ever more motivated. When we eventually met, there was an instant connection: we do not quit, and we keep working towards our goals.



Being a woman in the male-dominated world of diving has its own, separate set of challenges, but they never scared us. We only found that they made us work harder. This is the message we want to bring to other women. Don’t be scared of technical diving. You are good enough, and you can achieve anything if you train for it. Yes, you will get negative comments. Yes, you will feel that you need to prove your worth, and yes, you will encounter setbacks and learn to get back on your feet. But what is holding you

back from following your passion? That's right! Nothing. Just be you and do. Motivation and training can take you anywhere, as long as you believe in yourself and are surrounded by people who do.

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The Cavettes plan to organise one women-focused dive trip per year. We will focus on cave diving, but we also want to attract divers who are still on the fence about taking technical or cave training. During our trips, we will hold workshops with tips and tricks, livestream interviews with badass woman divers, share our experiences, and last but not least, go diving in all-female teams.

Don't get us wrong, we are not against male buddies. But there are some topics that a woman can only talk about with another woman. How to properly apply the She-P? No doubt, many men have watched the video "How to apply the She-P valve" for fun, but the only legitimate feedback can come from a fellow woman diver. Other topics, such as diving while having your period, fitting into dive gear with boobs, and the compatibility of long hair with silicone neck seals are common discussions among women.

Eight months and lots of online chats later, we finally met in person in December 2021.

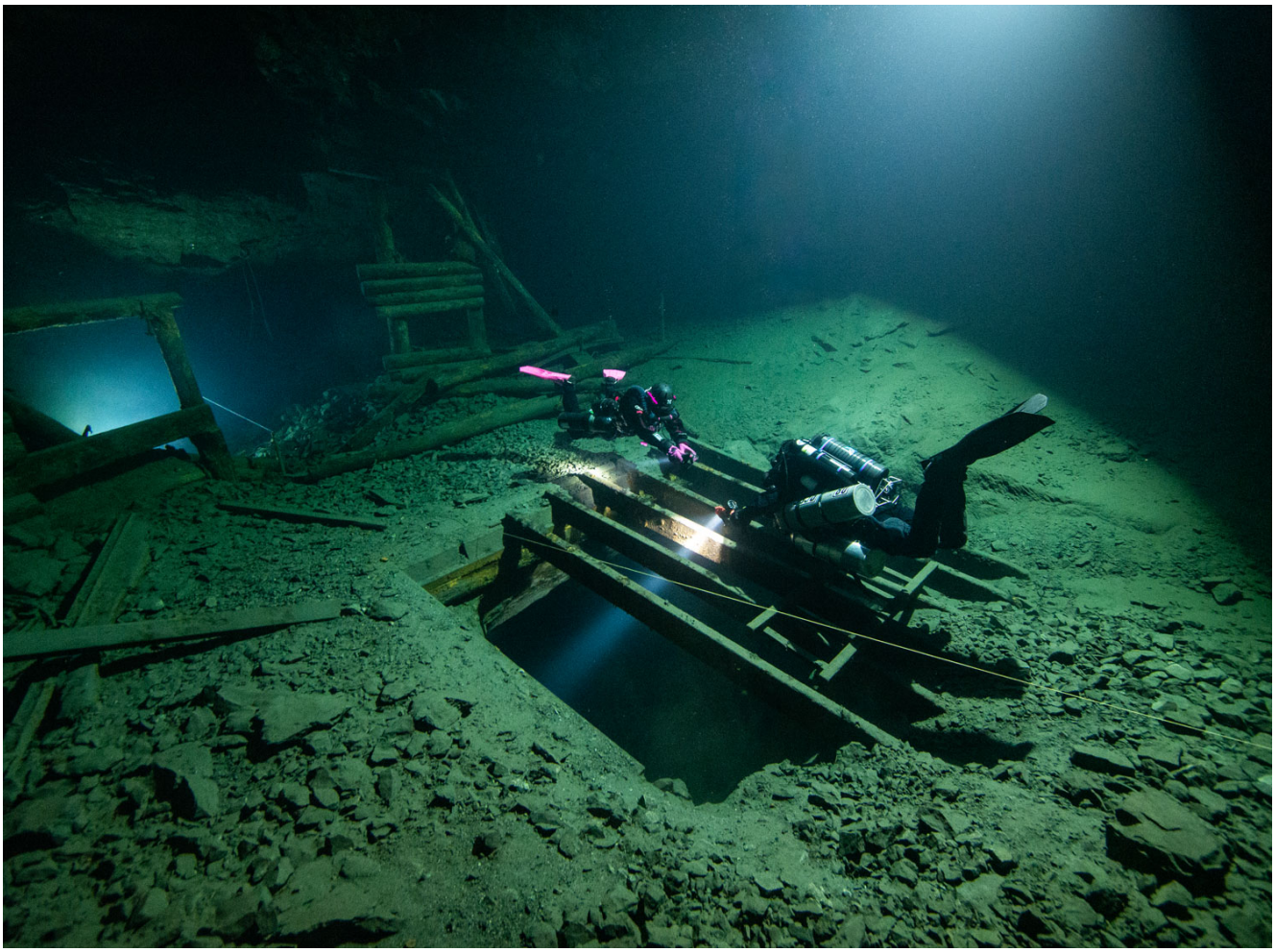


Photo by Guy Trees

Our first trip brought us to Sweden. We went diving in the old iron mine of Tuna Hästberg. Sweden is the home base of Sara Banderby, one of the co-founders of *The Cavettes*. We had the pleasure of welcoming our first guest, Maria Bollerup from Denmark, a member of the Xunaan Ha Expedition.

On this trip, we focused on **cold water overhead diving**. Joanna and Sanne thought they already had some experience in cold water with the 7 ºC mines in their countries. However, if you think there isn't much of a difference between 7º and 4º water, then think again! We needed to adapt our undergarments in order to manage the cold. Sara helped us with tips and tricks.

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Getting cold during a dive can lead to vasoconstriction and increase the risk of decompression illness. Proper preparation was required. We started off with short dives to get used to the temperature. We started out with 45-minute dives and gradually increased our time underwater to two hours at the end of the week, adapting our undergarments with help from Sara. None of the Swedish nor Finnish divers we met were wearing heated undergarments. The “Southern European” divers among us (Belgium and UK) were still shiverering after each dive. Luckily there was a heated changing room to warm up post-dive.

No more excuses for not going cold mine diving! To be sure, you should add Tuna Hästberg to your bucket list. The adventure begins 80 m below ground level. The depth of the mine reaches 600 m, and everything beneath 150 m is still unexplored. The mine is frozen in time (and almost literally frozen, in 4 ºC water). There are still a lot of artefacts left, which offer information about the working conditions of miners back in the day. The mine brings joy to every kind of diver; it’s deep, with narrow passages and big halls. There’s even an area for open water divers, essentially a lake that has formed in an area of the mine.

Still not feeling the electricity crackling within you? Then maybe you should follow the sign marked VASTRA (west) towards the machine room. This room lights up everyone’s fire.



It was a week full of support, respect, and encouragement. Being able to talk with other women cave divers and do women-only dives felt really rewarding. It made us feel even stronger, and motivated us to go on. We helped each other at every step, and there was more of a team feeling than when diving with our male buddies.

During our talks in the sauna (because what would a trip to Sweden be without going to the sauna?), we formed an idea for our next trip. We would like to invite women to join us in Belgium (Sanne's home country) in June 2022 — see our Instagram page for more information.

Admittedly, we haven't been telling the whole truth – there were some men who joined us on our first trip. The focus of *The Cavettes* is women supporting women, but we must give credit as well to our support team of male photographers and videographers, and whom we proudly call friends. We are fortunate to be surrounded by such an amazing group of talented people.

We hope every woman who loves diving can stand up for herself, be strong, keep training, and get respect and support from both female and male buddies.

Although we represent different levels, genders, dive training agencies, and countries, we all share the same passion. Isn't this the perfect statement to conclude our fairytale? We are happy diving and living, but our story doesn't end here!

To be continued with our upcoming *Cavettes* adventures. We hope you can be part of it.

About the author

My name is Sanne. I'm a recreational and technical instructor with InnerSpace Explorers (ISE) and live in Belgium. Most of the time, you can find me exploring our Belgian forests searching for old mines and natural caves to dive in. As a diver/explorer in this magnificent underwater world, I keep learning every day. I think that is the most beautiful part – exploring not only the environment, but also my own path. And I must say this path is amazing. I dive mainly sidemount OC or a Sidewinder sidemount CCR.