



Freediver Herbert Nitsch - Official Biography

WWW.HERBERTNITSCH.COM

"Each time I think I've reached a limit...there is a door...it opens...and the limit is gone."

"*Freediving*" is diving underwater for as deep or as far as possible on a single breath of air. Of the eight freediving sporting disciplines, the deepest and most extreme is "No Limit", which uses a sled to descend and a buoyancy device to ascend. Only six freedivers on the planet dove beyond 170 m (560 ft), during which two died trying. Herbert, as only person so far, also dove beyond 700 ft and 800 ft.

As the current freediving world record holder, Herbert is named "*the Deepest Man on Earth*". This prestigious title was given to him by the media when he broke his own No Limit world record at an incredible depth of 214 m (702 ft) in 2007. He surpassed this own record again with a No Limit dive to 253 m (830 ft) in 2012.

Herbert can hold his breath for more than 9 minutes, and has set a total of 33 world records. 32 of these are across all of the eight freediving disciplines – unrivaled achievements in the freediving history. Herbert has also set an additional world record in the traditional Greek freediving discipline of "*Skandalopetra*".

He is also the first freediver ever to reach 100 m (328 ft) without fins or sled (in the free immersion discipline, in 2003). He retired from competitions in 2010 to focus solely on No Limit (which falls outside of competitions, and is an individual pursuit).

On June 6th, 2012, Herbert dove to 253 m (830 ft). During the No Limit sled-dive, well after having reached the planned depth, Herbert temporarily fell asleep due to nitrogen narcosis and consequently missed the planned one-minute underwater decompression stop on the same breath-hold. At the surface he was alert and asked for a mask to return underwater to recompress on pure oxygen, which is a standard after-dive safety feature to further off-gas. But it was too late.

While decompressing underwater, Herbert felt the onset of decompression sickness. He incurred severe DCS (type 2) which would eventually result in multiple brain-strokes. It is interesting to note that DCS symptoms occur *after* a dive and in serious cases can take up to 24 hours to appear. He arrived comatose at the hyperbaric chamber and his future did not look good. With a prognosis of remaining a wheelchair-bound care-dependent patient, he dismissed himself from longterm facilitated care, and took his healing into his own hands. Two years later, against all odds, Herbert is fit, training and deep-freediving again.

Unlike other elite freedivers Herbert is self-taught. He is a pioneer in every way. He developed his own freediving techniques over the years, a methodology that largely differs from traditional styles.

He brought novel ideas to the sport that meanwhile have become common elements in the current freediving scene. For example, he introduced the monofin to both distance and depth disciplines, setting first world records in all of the fin-disciplines with it. Herbert also brought inventions to the freediving scene, such as: the neck weight, pipe mask, decompression stop on breath-hold, oxygen-use after deep diving, and the EQUEX (*equalization extension tool*). He designed and developed advanced hydrodynamic sleds of ultra-light materials for the No Limit discipline, with multiple safety, back-up and override systems. Furthermore he is keen about every technical detail and design of his equipment.

High safety standards and detailed preparation and planning are always part of every dive Herbert makes. He was an airline Captain for the Austrian Airlines Group for 15 years, a profession where check-lists and worst case scenarios were his daily routine. This risk-avoiding and high-security attitude helps him to achieve his ambitious goals within freediving.

Herbert's motives are about the unknown, about crossing physiological and psychological boundaries, achieving goals that seem beyond the limits; overcoming mental challenges; and exploring, understanding, controlling and fine-tuning his own bodily functions (heart rate, blood pressure, blood distribution, oxygen intake and consumption, understanding energy efficiency, etc.).

Very little scientific research has been done so far on the physiological effects of freediving, especially as deep as Herbert is diving. His lung volume has been measured to be 10 Ltr (2.6 Gal) at rest, which Herbert can expand to 15 Ltr (4 Gal) with a special technique called "packing" or "buccal pumping". As a comparison, healthy adult males have a lung capacity of 6 to 7 Ltr (1.6 to 1.8 Gal).

In December of 2013, Herbert proudly joined the Ocean Advocacy Advisory Board of the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, which is active in protecting the ocean's wildlife and environments. He is also a well-sought after lecturer and key-note speaker world wide for corporate events and for the general public.

Print and TV media world wide have covered Herbert's freediving adventures. He has graced the pages of Red Bulletin, Men's Health, GQ, Playboy, ESPN, Spiegel, Apnea, Deep, Tauchen, Stern, Paris Match, L'Equipe, HOME, Profil and others. He has appeared on various TV shows and documentaries for CBS 60 Minutes Sports, BBC, ORF, ZDF, ARTE, SRF, UPPROX, and for RedBull and Stern TV.

Sponsors included Breitling watches, Hyundai, Landrover, Shell V-Power, Coors Miller Light, SeaBob underwater scooters, Canon cameras, Trygons freedive equipment, FilmOne productions, SeaCam underwater housing, UK-Germany underwater housing.

His unique freediving career started with a single coincidence. In the late nineties, while Herbert was on the way to a scuba dive safari, his diving equipment got lost somewhere in transit. So Herbert went snorkeling instead of scuba diving during the entire vacation. There, Herbert discovered his natural talent for freediving very quickly. He was fascinated by the nature of this sport and was progressing fast. After freediving for ten days only, he was 2 m (6.5 ft) short of the Austrian National record.