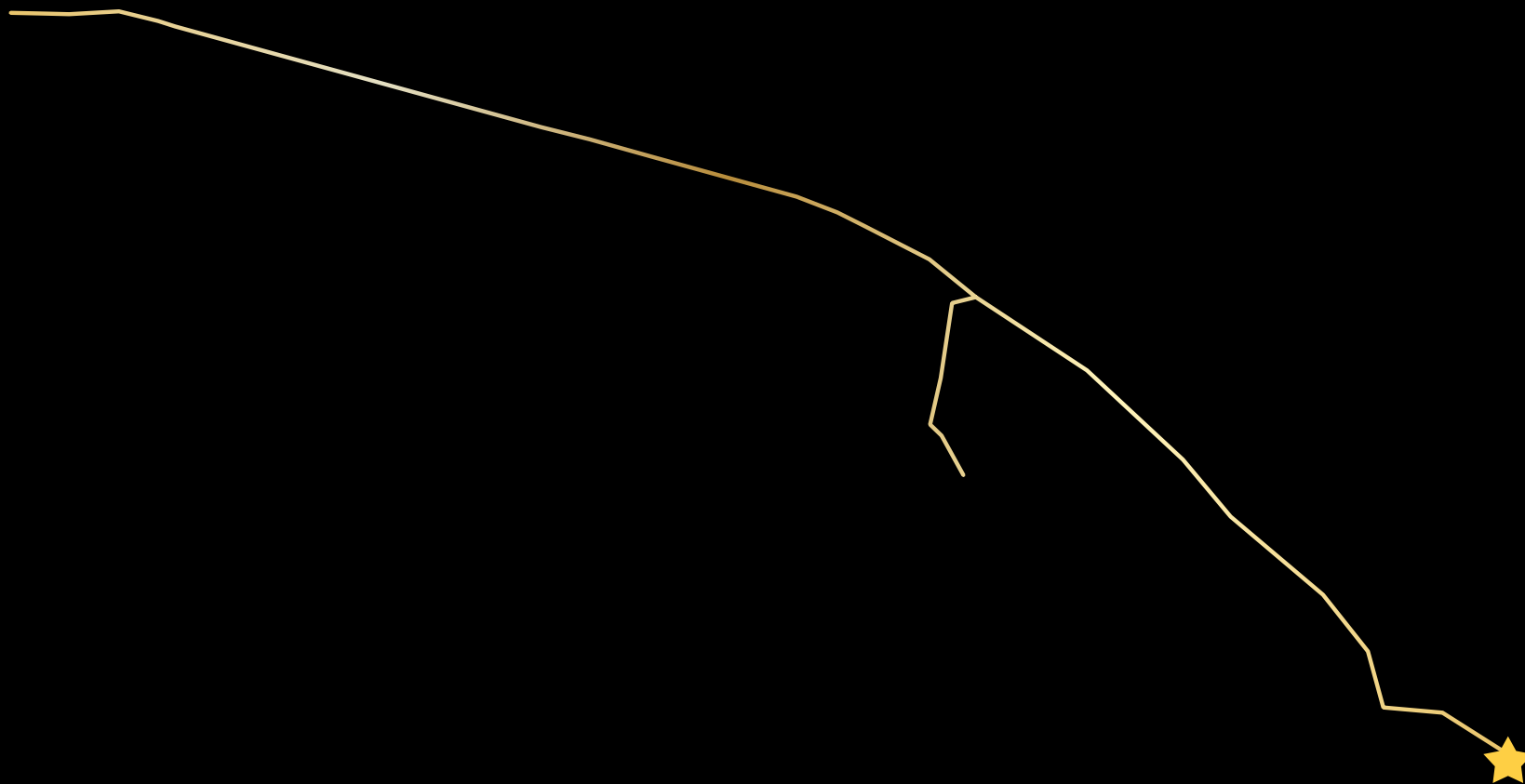


Senderos





Page 119: Cenote Senderos' deep pool of crystal-clear water is centered in a large limestone depression formed by an ancient cave collapse.

Left: The nicely appointed nature path at Senderos.

Right: Floating at the surface of Senderos on our first day of exploration. Here, we shine our lights down into the cavern to discern what we may expect to find on the dive.

An exciting element of the project was the exploration of Ciudad Mayakoba, across the highway from the Mayakoba Resort. Ciudad Mayakoba is a newly built mixed-use residential area that, like the resort itself, has large amounts of preserved greenspace and jungle.

Generally, the caves get bigger, deeper, and more extensive as they move away from the ocean, so we were delighted to see what we might find in this area, versus confining ourselves to the resort property itself.

To look for caves in Ciudad Mayakoba, we used everything at our disposal—satellite images, bushwhacking, and asking construction crews and resort staff if they knew of anything that looked like a cave. A long list of potential leads in hand, we started to check things out.

The most prominent cave on the property is Senderos. The entrance is obvious and had been turned into a relaxation area for the Ciudad Mayakoba residents.

Senderos sits in the middle of a huge circular depression with deep, crystal-clear water on the western upstream side (we never found a downstream section). It is a very nice area, with a newly built staircase complete with wooden walkways.

Plunging into the water for the first time, we were surprised by the size of the cave. A wide passage made of chalky limestone, this was a true *power cave*, and swimming into it was somewhat intimidating the first time we did it.









Left: Matt runs the primary line for the first dive at Senderos.

Right: The bird called the motmot, or *toh* in Yucatec Maya is the subject of a well-known legend. Occasional visitors to the cenotes, we view these birds as good luck and appreciated this toh's visit on the first day of our exploration at Senderos.

Descending quickly to a depth around 15 m (49 ft), the freshwater section of the cave extends for a few hundred feet before dipping through a halocline at 19 m (62 ft) that leads to a saltwater section with a maximum depth of 23 m (75 ft).

After eight dives in Senderos, our cave survey showed a total length of 259 m (850 ft) before it terminated into a very tight area that we couldn't occupy for more than a few seconds before the visibility went to zero. While possible that the cave may continue, we decided that pushing farther wasn't justified.

We wrapped up our work at Senderos by doing a full survey with left-right-up-down measurements at each survey station, so that we could make a three-dimensional model.

There is still much more to discover in the vast expanse of Ciudad Mayakoba, and we have a number of exciting leads to explore that we didn't have time to inspect before we finished the dives for this book. ♦