

Exploration Dive Report

Indian Cellars

Many divers have heard about Indian Cellars in Hollis, Maine. According to various historical texts, Maine natives (the real ones) used the cool cellars to store food during the summer. The cellar is actually one or more caverns adjacent to the Saco River. In the river near the cavern there are historical reports of a whirlpool, which may or may not have some impact on the creation of the cavern.

Eventually, paper companies built dams along Maine's rivers to generate electricity. The Saco was dammed and the river level rose, obscuring the actual location of the Indian Cellars.

Bob Costigan undertook the difficult task of tracking down the historical data in an effort to determine the location of the submerged Indian Cellars. Through a combination of direct research, historical photos and interviews, Bob eventually discovered the probable location.

On Saturday, June 19, 2010, at 0900 Explorers Bob Costigan, Pete Boilard, Lorna Boilard and Jeff Toorish met to explore the potential Indian Cellars site. Bob, Pete and Lorna acted as surface support while Jeff did the actual dives.

Water Entry

The entry is along the banks of the Saco River. Vegetation includes grass and trees. The actual riverbank is slate rock, much of it broken into small pieces. The slate is remarkably stable. While there is a small cliff, the entry is relatively simple.

For the exploration, Jeff used a sidemount harness with a single AL80 tank. Sidemount is a common equipment choice for exploration diving involving difficult or unknown entries. The diver can step into the water and then don fins and tank. Once the dive is complete, the diver can hand up the tank, fins and other equipment, making the climb out safer and simpler. Sidemount also allows two tanks to be used, although for this exploration, a single tank was used.

Prior to entering the water, Jeff tied off a 400' cave reel and to a tree. While this was not technically an overhead environment dive, it was decided that Jeff would keep a line to the surface because Maine rivers often have submerged trees, extreme low visibility and suspended sediment which present hazards to divers.

The River Condition

There is heavy particulate matter in the extremely tannic water. Major silting is a constant challenge. Normally the Saco river is known for dangerous current, during the dives Jeff noted no discernable current during any of the dives at any depth.

From a depth of about 20 feet down, there is virtually no surface light visible. From about 30 feet of depth the water is black, with particulate matter reflecting dive lights.

During the dives Jeff found no evidence of the whirlpool. However, this should not be viewed as an indication that the whirlpool does not exist. Most likely, the dams were closed. With closed dams, there is no current and nothing to cause the whirlpool.

The Dives

During a series of short dives, Jeff explored from to the right and left of the entry point. Facing from the riverbank, to the right, the river depth is relatively shallow but gradually slopes to a depth of about 40 feet where there are a series of large tree trunks. These could be remnants of Maine's historic log drives, which ended in the 1970s. It is also possible the logs were arranged there as a structure. The logs present an overhead restriction of sorts and there appears to be an indentation or possible cavern in the vicinity of the trunks.

This is an extremely treacherous area because of the number of large tree trunks, lack of light and extremely limited visibility. At one point, Jeff found himself under several large trees, relying on his reel to find his way out.

On a subsequent dive, heading to the left from the riverbank, Jeff descended while swimming approximately one foot away from the wall. The wall ended at 59 feet. Jeff then swam back along the base of the wall. The river floor gradually rose and at a location nearly directly below the tie off point, Jeff discovered an area of extremely dense debris, including sticks and larger pieces of trees. The overall shape of this debris pack matched the known shape of the Indian Cellars opening.

The debris pack itself was far too dense for any type of penetration. It is not clear how thick or stable the debris pack is. The debris pack presents a serious threat of entanglement.

Conclusion

Based on the historical record, including documentary photographs, it is likely the area to the left is the original Indian Cellars location. The entire area is known as Indian Cellars, so it is possible there was more than one such cellar. The area to the right may represent an additional cellar.

This is a dive site that presents significant dangers, including extremely limited light, no light, dramatic silting, entanglement hazards and various overhead situations and depth. Any diver attempting to dive in this area should have appropriate training and experience, including overhead environment diving, deep diving and low visibility diving. Additionally, such dives should include appropriate lights, redundant gas supply,

knowledge of running reels, entanglement avoidance and strict adherence to the buddy system.

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