



Accident Database

Report ID# 828

Help

2003-09-14

Date

Scott Manning

Victim

0

Victim Age

Kings

River

4. Pine Flat Dam to Centerville (Route 180)

Section

gauging weir below Pine Flat Dam United States California, US

Location

1300 cfs

Gage

Low

Water Level

N/A

River Difficulty



Cause

Cause Code(s)

- Caught in Low Head Dam Hydraulic

Injury Type(s)

- Does not Apply

Factors

- Failed Rescue

Extensive Experience

Victim Experience Level

Private

Trip Type

Whitewater Kayak

Boat Type

Group Info

Other Victim Names

Reported

Status

Accident Description

An unidentified kayaker died in the backwash of a gauging weir below Pine Flat Dam on the Kings River near Fresno, CA. This low head dam has been the site of trouble before. AW's Paul Martzen reported on Boatertalk that the trouble started when a "Class IV Boater" who was new to the area told a local paddler he wanted to try to surf the reversal. Despite strong warnings against doing so, he entered the backwash. He could surf it, but he couldn't get out. Another kayaker moved in and attempted a rescue, inadvertently breaking the most basic rules of working around dams. He too was caught by the hydraulic. He flipped, bailed out, and began recirculating helplessly.



trapped men, and then ran a second line down the shore to a spot below the dam. From here it was possible to pull the Class IV boater downstream to safety. He suffered nerve damage to one arm that he wrapped the rope around, testifying to the force of the pull needed. The would-be rescuer, unfortunately, was unconscious by the time the rope arrived. In a few minutes he was stripped of his PFD, and then washed out of the hydraulic. They pulled him to shore and began CPR, but could not revive him.

The following was posted to the Boater Talk thread a year after the accident:

Scott Manning who lost his life at Pine Flat Bridge one year ago today is sadly missed by many. Mostly his 2 children Daniel age 15 and Jessica age 12. So many tears have been shed and so much unneeded animosity created. It's very sad that such a tragic loss has brought such bitterness and resentment to the foreground. Unfortunately, my children have not been able to have closure. They have not had the opportunity to talk to or meet any of the people who were at the river when their father died. They have only read the report in this forum for which I am very grateful for its existence. The original victim asked us to contact him last year and then changed his mind about talking to the kids and asked us not to contact him. Unfortunately, the kids have not had much emotional support or sympathy from their fathers friends or family. I know Scott would be very proud of them for handling this unfortunate situation with more maturity than the adults involved.

If anyone who was there on September 14, 2003 and witnessed this drowning would be willing to share their story with my children, I would be grateful. I think they are still looking for that one more thing that maybe their Dad said or did that day...

To the person who tried to save Scott's life-thank you! You have no idea how much that means to all of us.

Cindy

Drowning on Kings River, California; September 14, 2003

Mike Latandresse called me this afternoon to report on two kayakers caught in the gauging weir below Pine Flat Dam. Mike and his beginner kayaking class performed the rescues of the two kayakers who were not part of his class.

The initial victim was an experienced kayaker who has recently moved to the Fresno area. He stated that he was a class 4 boater, was new to the area and was looking for people to boat with. He expressed interest in the reversal underneath the bridge and Mike told him that it was dangerous and should be avoided. Nonetheless, this kayaker paddled out to look at the reversal. He either decided to give a try or got too close and was sucked in. He successfully side-



Two other kayakers were also nearby launching to float and fish (perhaps on sit-on-top kayaks). One of these paddled out to attempt a rescue, even though his partner and Mike both yelled at him to stay away from the bridge. I believe that Mike gave chase, yelling at this kayaker to stop and come back. Mike was unable to catch him before this novice kayaker was also caught in the reversal. This second kayaker was immediately upset and swimming in the reversal.

Mike returned to shore as quickly as possible, grabbed throw ropes and went up on the bridge above the trapped kayakers. The pourover is easily visible from the upstream side of the bridge but it would do no good to throw ropes from that vantage. Mike had spectators grab his legs and hold him over the downstream side of the bridge. Mike first threw the rope to the swimmer, but this person was already unresponsive and rope did not snag him. Mike then threw the rope to the kayaker still upright and side surfing the reversal. Mike then connected the rope to several other ropes which were run along the bridge, down the bank and downstream far enough that rescuers could pull the trapped kayaker downstream out through the reversal.

Mike states that it took a tremendous effort by several people to pull the kayaker out of the reversal. Also, in order to hang on to the rope, the kayaker wrapped the rope around his arm, where it cut off circulation and may have done some nerve damage. He got out of the hole alive though.

During this same period, the unconscious kayaker was stripped of his lifejacket by the reversal. Soon after the lifejacket came off, he was flushed out the bottom of the reversal. Kayakers from Mike's group were able to bring the body to shore, where they began cpr. Mike believes CPR started around 12 minutes after this kayaker entered the weir or lost consciousness (I am not clear on this point.). Park rangers and Army Corp personnel arrived within minutes, but an ambulance with defibrillation equipment did not arrive for a considerable time. This kayaker did not survive.

Mike said that the experienced kayaker was very shaken, somewhat by his own close call, but especially by the death of someone trying to rescue him.

The Kings River below this point is considered class 1 and 2. Flow was around 1300 cfs, which is low for this section. I do not know the names of the victims at this time.

Background:

When launching into the lower Kings below Pine Flat Dam, one typically drives across a bridge to launch on nice gravel beaches on the south side of the river, just downstream of that bridge. The reason no one launches on the upstream side of the bridge is that a gauging weir is built into the base of the bridge. The pourovers and reversals formed by this weir are guaranteed to trap and



The purpose of the weir is not to kill people but to make it easy to calibrate and measure the flow coming from the dam. In addition the weir is designed to dissipate the energy of the water falling over its perfectly smooth and even drops. The main current flows smoothly over the rounded top of the weir. The water then dives to the bottom, flows along the bottom to the downstream end of the bridge where a low concrete wall kicks the current back towards the surface. This creates a high upwelling that drops back into the pour over. No floating object can escape this trap.

This weir and others like it are not needfully dangerous. Their purpose does not inherently demand any lethal characteristics. A slightly modified design could accomplish the same purpose without any danger to the public at all. This weir was simply made with no thought of boaters or swimmers ever being in the river nearby. Water safety was simply not a part of the design of this weir. So a simple, seemingly elegantly symmetrical and smooth weir was designed. Its design has no irregularities that would allow a boater or swimmer to escape its hydraulic deathgrip. The crazy thing is, that even now, minor additions to this structure could be made that would direct the flows to quickly eject any boater or swimmer that fell into its clutches.

Paul Martzen
Fresno California

(See photos of the killer dam at the Reach Description,
<http://www.americanwhitewater.org/rivers/id/226.>)
<http://boatertalk.com/forum/AW/450516>



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