



Accident Database

Report ID# 420

Help

1996-05-09

Date

Jay Hickham

Victim

38

Victim Age

Big Eagle Creek

River

West side of Indianapolis, IN

Section

Low head dam near the 10th st. bridge. United States Indiana, US

Location

High

Gage

High

Water Level

N/A

River Difficulty



Cause Code(s)

- Caught in Low Head Dam Hydraulic

Injury Type(s)

- Does not Apply

Factors

- Other

Extensive Experience

Victim Experience Level

Private

Trip Type

Whitewater Kayak

Boat Type

Group Info

Other Victim Names

Reported

Status

Accident Description

May 9, 1996 saw yet another incident involving low-head dams, this one being compounded by a lack of safety gear. Two kayakers planned a late afternoon run of Big Eagle Creek on the West side of Indianapolis, IN. The river, which was running high after recent rains, is flat except for a low-head dam near the 10th street bridge. Jay Hickham, 34, had supposedly run Class IV rapids in West Virginia prior to this trip. He was paddling a Kiwi-style kayak. His partner, a first-time kayaker, was in a similar boat, also owned by Hickham. No life vests or helmets were worn. Both men live close to the river and knew about the dam.

The pair reached the dam at around



avoid hitting his friend and was pushed on through. As Hickham surfaced, he shouted for his friend to retrieve his kayak, then suddenly disappeared. Resurfacing, he shouted for help before going under for the last time. His partner tried to paddle upstream to help him, but fortunately for the partner, the current prevented him from doing so.

His partner remained for ten minutes, searching for his partner. When Hickham could not be found he landed his boat and called police. The initial search for the victim was unsuccessful. The next day the gates of an upstream dam were closed but still Hickham could not be found. His boat and paddle were recovered quickly, but the body was not recovered until ten days later, some distance downstream.

SOURCE: Jordan Ross and Bill Lawless, Hoosier Canoe Club; Indiana DER Boating Accident Report

ANALYSIS (Walbridge): While dams are deadly, they are also capricious, they may catch one person, then let the next one through. In this case, survival was due to sheer luck. The man who came through was a first timer, while his friend was supposedly experienced. The lack of PFD's and helmets makes us inclined to doubt the experience claim, however.

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