

Accident Database

Report ID# 107

Help

1989-05-16
Date
Ken Kajiwara
Victim
0
Victim Age
Pequannock River
River
Newfoundland (Rte 513) to Alt Rt 511, Pompton Lakes
Section
United States New Jersey, US
Location
1200
Gage
High
Water Level
N/A
River Difficulty
Caught in a Natural Hydraulic
Cause

Injury Type(s)
– Does not Apply

Factors

Extensive Experience

Victim Experience Level

Private

Trip Type

Whitewater Kayak

Boat Type

Group Info

Other Victim Names

Reported

Status

Accident Description

JERSEY DAM CLAIMS EXPERIENCED KAYAKER

Pequanock River near Pompton Plains, New Jersey: May 17, 1989

River Volume: Near Flood; Classification II (Portaging Dams)

DESCRIPTION: The Peaquanock River through Pompton Plains creates, at high water, a passable after-work run for local paddlers. The good news is that the rapids are not difficult, and have good waves and strong eddies. The bad news is that the four or five dams on this short run have to be portaged, and the steep concrete-lined banks make access difficult in many places.

The victim, Ken Kajiware, was part of a group of locals making the run on May 17th. He was an experienced boater familiar with the run, described by his friends as "a very go-for-it" person with the nickname "Kamikaze Ken".

The others in the group were equally competent, but more conservative in temperament.

On arriving at the first dam, the group portaged. Kajiware felt that the dam could have been run, and berated his buddies for having pulledd him into the carry. At the second dam the group pulled over into an eddy formed by a pumping station. Kajiware ignored their warnings and paddled right on past. He hit the hydraulic upright, and was immediately flipped. Bailing out, he was caught in the maw, far out of reach of throw bags. His horrified companions could only watch in horror until he was recirculated for fifteen minutes. He washed out only to float over two other dams before being pulled out by non-boaters. He still had a heartbeat and was taken to a hospital by rescue squad members where he died the following day.

SOURCE: Mark Sonder; Eric Ryan

ANALYSIS: This run showed an appalling lack of judgement on the part of the victim. Dams are dangerous ! They don't look bad, but their currents form a deadly trap. We say this over and over, but an increasing number of trained whitewater boaters seem to have to learn from experience. Although expert boaters can safely run dams at appropriate water levels, pre-scouting and setting safety personnel downstream are mandatory. Had Kajiware placed rescuers below the drop he might have been rescued, but this was a huge, dangerous hydraulic which posed a grave danger to back-up personnel. As it was, he didn't even bother to scout! His run was the kind of irresponsible activity which gives paddlers a bad name and leads to the closure of fun places for whitewater paddlers in populated areas.



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