

# Accident Database

**Report ID# 145**

Help

1994-04-02

Date

Jonathan Lapp

Victim

15

Victim Age

Cocalico Creek

River

United States Pennsylvania, US

Location

Medium

Water Level

II

River Difficulty

Pinned in Boat Against Strainer

Cause

- Cause Code(s)
- Pinned in Boat against Rock or Sieve

- Injury Type(s)
- Does not Apply

- Factors
- One Boat Trip

Victim Experience Level

Private

Trip Type

Open Canoe

Boat Type

Reported

Status

## Accident Description

### BOY DROWNS UNDERNEATH LOW-WATER BRIDGE

Cocalico Creek, Lancaster County, PA : April 2, 1994

DESCRIPTION: Jonathan Lapp, 15, lost his life when a canoe carrying him and another boy capsized upstream of a submerged concrete bridge on Cocalico Creek, a class I run near Ephrata, Pa. The two scouted the bridge on the steep west bank and decided to carry it on the opposite shore. While crossing, they hit a submerged log jammed against the bridge and capsized. The two were thrown into the water and sucked under the bridge. Seven large culverts carried the water under the bridge, and each boy was pulled into a different one. One was clear and it flushed the first boy through unharmed. He was wearing a PFD and surfaced downstream. The other tube blocked by tree limbs and trapped the victim underwater. The canoe bent double and wrapped around the bridge between the tubes.

The survivor summoned help at a nearby farm, and the Eden Fire Company, assisted by the Lancaster Sport Divers, responded. They were prepared to divert the creek around the bridge and tear it apart. The water level dropped, and they spotted the body. The elapsed time was about five hours.

SOURCE: Pennsylvania Fish Commission; [Lancaster Sunday News](#); Dave Restad, Lancaster Canoe Club

#### ANALYSIS:

- 1) Although both boys were wearing life vests, they were not particularly experienced. They made an error in reading the water and lacked the skill needed to keep their canoe upright and under control when crossing the fast-moving flat water above the bridge. They may not have known how to do an upstream ferry.
- 2) Man-made hazards should be approached with extreme caution, even by expert paddlers. It may make sense to carry your boat some distance upstream to gain extra room when making a ferry.



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