



Accident Database

Report ID# 618

Help

1999-09-17

Date

Paul Santoni

Victim

34

Victim Age

Quinnipiac River

River

near the Cheshire town line

Section

Dam just below a pipeline that feeds the Broad Brook Reservoir United States Connecticut

Location

Gage

High

Water Level

N/A

River Difficulty

Caught in Low Head Dam Hydraulic

Cause

Cause Code(s)

– Caught in Low Head Dam Hydraulic

Injury Type(s)

– Does not Apply

Factors

– High Water

Some Experience

Victim Experience Level

Private

Trip Type

Whitewater Kayak

Boat Type

Group Info

Other Victim Names

Reported

Status

Accident Description

The Quinnipiac River near Cheshire, CT is a very benign river with very little whitewater. There are probably no more than one or two stretches of Class II. But unfortunately two paddlers chose to paddle on September 17, 1999, during the flood waters left by a hurricane. The storm was over but the river was still rising. Paul Santoni, 34, was an avid outdoorsman. He and his friend, Adam Jandreau, put in about a quarter-mile upstream. They had run the river many times before. They were using sea kayaks without sprayskirts, and wearing a helmet and life jacket. The Connecticut DEP had issued warnings that the river was above flood levels, but it wasn't clear that the pair was aware of this.

The stretch they ran has an outflow pipe that is normally visible and easily run. Because of the high water the pipe acted like a low-head dam and created a bad hydraulic. The two ran the pipeline, and became caught below the drop. Jandreau fell out of his kayak. He struggled to stay above the water by alternately wading and grasping his boat. A few seconds later Santoni also flipped. The two struggled in the backwash for about ten minutes. They both clung to their kayaks, and yelled for help above the roar of the rushing water.

The first person respond was Jandreau's landlord, Randy Porter. He asked how many there were and they said two. Porter placed a 911 call, but the two would have to remain in the water for at another ten minutes. Jandreau managed to grab an overhanging tree limb, and turned to help his friend, but Santoni lost his grip on his kayak and was swept away underwater

SOURCE: Ed Milnes (president of ConnYak); The Meriden Record-Journal; the Hartford Courant

----- Original Message ----- From: Wayne Smith Newsgroups: rec.boats.paddle
Sent: Saturday, September 18, 1999 8:32 PM

Subject: Kayaker death in Connecticut

From The Hartford Courant: "A local man drowned friday when he was ejected from his kayak and trapped in a whirlpool in the raging, rain-swollen waters of the Quinnipiac River. Paul Santoni, 34 of Willis Avenue, died after he and Kayaking companion, Adam Jandreau, 27 also of Meriden, ran into dangerous currents on the river off River Road shortly after 6 PM. LJB note: most vertical bars in body of letter are quotation marks Subject: Re: Kayaker death in Connecticut

From: Mickie mickie@ct1.nai.net

Date: Sun, 19 September 1999 08:00 PM EDT

Message-id: <37E5792A.D4D6C40C@ct1.nai.net>

Here is another article from the Meriden Record Journal. My condolences to the deceased's family and friends

Meriden: Kayaker was caught in trap of rushing water

By Simon Eskow Record-Journal staff

MERIDEN - The Quinnipiac River was more itself on Saturday. The effects of Hurricane Floyd had died down, and by the afternoon, the river had dropped below flood levels. On Friday afternoon, however, the river claimed the life of Paul Santoni, 34, an avid outdoorsman. Santoni and his friend, Adam Jandreau, both of Meriden, were tossed from their kayaks in a rough current. Santoni drowned, and Jandreau only narrowly escaped with his life. The incident was both a tragedy and a cautionary tale. The two had set out after the storm had blown over, but while the river still swelled. They were caught up in a stretch of the Quinnipiac, near the Cheshire town line, that was known by many to have its hidden dangers. For instance, a pipeline that feeds the Broad Brook Reservoir traverses the river there, causing the current to flow back against itself. Whatever comes across this area is trapped, and the force plunges it underwater. Jandreau and Santoni were caught in such a trap.

They had set out at 5:30 p.m. about a quarter-mile upstream. The Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection had issued warnings that the river was still above flood levels, but it wasn't clear whether the pair was aware of the danger. They had taken normal precautions: each was wearing a helmet and life jacket. They crossed the line from Cheshire into Meriden and made it over the pipeline. A few hundred feet downstream, they came to a drop in the river. "When the water's lower, it's a bigger drop, and you could get over it easily" a shaken Jandreau said Saturday. "But the water was very high." The turbulence there caught the two, and Jandreau was tipped out of his kayak. Jandreau struggled to stay above the water,

wading and grasping his partially sunken boat. "We were close together and the water was so high," said Jandreau. "He turned. I don't know if he was trying to turn towards me to help." It was then that Santoni also fell from his kayak.

The two were in the water for about ten minutes, Jandreau estimated. They both clung to their kayaks, attempting to yell for help above the roar of the rushing water. The first person to see the two in the water happened to be Jandreau's landlord, Randy Porter. "I don't know how he heard us in the water," said Jandreau. "He asked how many there were and we said the two." Porter placed a 911 call at 6:09 p.m. The two were in the water for at least another 10 minutes, Jandreau said. Jandreau managed to reach an overhanging tree, and while clutching the limb he turned to help his friend, who soon was swept under the water.

Early Saturday morning, Jandreau returned to the river to retrieve the kayaks. One had grounded on a small island downstream of Carpenters Dam on the south end of Hanover Pond. "I went to look at the river this morning," said John Quine, a member of the Quinnipiac River Watershed Association and a longtime kayaker. "I saw one of the fellows there talking to a firefighter. We looked over the situation and got the kayak. By that time, the river had died down." Jandreau retrieved Santoni's kayak, but his own will remain underwater until the river gets closer to normal levels.

Santoni's relatives and his longtime girlfriend, Phyllis Sawallich, mourned the loss and made funeral arrangements. "It's going to be difficult for a long time," said Sawallich. Santoni and Sawallich had dated for nine years, and were both active in outdoor sports. They were members of the Meriden Ski Club, they went camping frequently, and two years ago they took kayaking lessons. "He liked to make people laugh," said Sawallich. "That's what everyone is going to miss about him. He was witty and smart. Sawallich said he was good with his hands and could fix anything. "He reminded me of MacGyver," she said, referring to the title character of a television series. Santoni grew up in Meriden and graduated from Wilcox Regional Vocational-Technical School in 1983. Even then he was adept both with tools and with people. He was a member of a machine-oriented club for four years, and class president for one. Santoni worked for Hiese Industries for 16 years, where he eventually met Jandreau, and served as his foreman for some time. Experienced boaters looked at the event as a hard-earned lesson for the future. "I viewed the river Friday morning and the water was fierce," said Quine, who has taught kayaking. "I absolutely would not have gone out there. Nobody could have battled those currents. I don't think anyone with a lot of experience would have gone out."

The kayaks the pair used were designed for the sea, and not for white water. Quine says that while those kayaks would be less maneuverable on a raging river, it probably contributed less to the accident than the current itself. "The river really is a very powerful operation," said Quine "An expert kayaker could do a roll and pop up. But when you have a flood, with all kinds of debris and trees, it's more dangerous. You have to use extreme caution even when the water is a little higher than normal." "Even when the river is in its normal state, we don't let people go over that section in the canoe race," said Mary Mushinsky, Executive Director of the QRWA, which hosts a canoe race every May. Mushinsky said that the QWRA has all the racers portage just before the pipeline to avoid any turbulence. They then bring their canoes overland to just below the dam. "This was sad and unfortunate," said Mushinsky. "But we're going to continue to educate. He had followed most of the precautions, but he didn't follow all the precautions. The further caution: don't go out during a flood stage." By Saturday afternoon, the river was still above normal at least in two places, but it had fallen below flood stage. But earlier in the day, it was still dangerous. "When I was coming from the river, I saw a car with a canoe on the top," said Quine. "I thought 'these people aren't going out in this thing.' But sure enough they were going out on the river. That river was still at a height where I'd call off the trip."

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The two kayakers had somehow become entangled in a swirling whirlpool at the base of an approximately 3 foot high dam in the river, Meriden firefighter Cliff Monges said. Water depth at the site was at least 6 or 7 feet." The article goes on to say further that Jandreau was flushed out immediately, and that Santoni was later found in shallow water, already dead. The river was running at or above flood stage at the time of the incident. My condolences to his friends and family. Let's all be careful out there! -- Wayne Smith wsmith16@snet.net Homepage: <http://pages.cthome.net/wsmith16/home.html> On September 17th, the rains of Hurricane Floyd had passed through New England, raising many river levels past flood stage. Paul Santoni, 34, decided to paddle the Quinnipiac River near Cheshire, Connecticut with a friend. According to Edwin Miles, a local paddler familiar with the river, the Quinnipiac is a benign little river with a few rapids in the Class I-II range. The pair was using sea kayaks, and paddling with life vests and helmets but no sprayskirts. The accident occurred where a pipeline crosses the river, creating a small drop. The high water turned it into a, very nasty hydraulic, much like a low-head dam. The pair attempted the run, capsized, and became

trapped in the backwash. They clung to their kayaks and screamed for help. Eventually a homeowner heard them, investigated, and called 911. The victim's friend managed grab hold of an overhanging tree limb until firefighters arrived. But Mr. Santoni lost his grip on his boat and was quickly swept under water.

ANALYSIS: (Walbridge) Although the pair were aquatinted with the river at normal flows, they were not skilled whitewater paddlers. They lacked the skill and the gear needed to run the river at those flows. They also failed to read the water and recognize the dangers of the pipeline drop.



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