

Accident Database

Report ID# 113

Help

1999-08-01
Date
Kyle Tyree
Victim
24
Victim Age
Little
River
5. Dam at Melrose to the Tennessee River
Section
United States Tennessee, US
Location
Gage
High
Water Level
N/A
River Difficulty
Caught in a Natural Hydraulic
Cause

Equipment Trap

Injury Type(s)

Does not Apply

Factors

Failed Rescue

High Water

One Boat Trip

Inexperienced

Victim Experience Level

Private

Trip Type

Whitewater Kayak

Boat Type

Group Info

Chip Koella

Other Victim Names

Reported

Status

Accident Description

: On August 1, 1999 two kayakers were running the Little River halfway between Knoxville and Townsend, TN. This section of the river is mostly flat water. Heavy rains had brought the river to a high level, which was very unusual for that time of year. The kayakers encountered the Rockford Manufacturing Company Dam in Rockford, TN. At around 5:00 p.m. Kyle Tyree, 24, scouted the drop (!) and attempted to run it. He and his boat were immediately caught in the hydraulic. He flipped, swam, and began recirculating. News photos showed pictures of a nasty backwash containing an unconscious paddler floating amid lots of large debris.

Earnest Koella and his son Chip, witnessed the event. Along with employees of Rockford Manufacturing, they attempted to assist. The pair was courageous, but had no swiftwater training. Both made the mistake of tying themselves to a rope before entering swift current. First, the younger Koella tied a rope to his waist and swam into the hydraulic. He was caught between the dam and a large log and killed. Then the elder Koella tied himself into a rope. The plan was to lower him to the lip of the dam so he could stand on the structure. As he approached the drop the current pulled him under water. He was hauled back upstream and convinced not to make another attempt.

Rescue crews arrived, and tried for several hours to recover the bodies of the two men. The search was called off because of darkness at 9:30 p.m., and resumed the next day. The bodies of Kyle Tyree and Chip Koella were recovered some distance downstream. They are the son and grandson of a state senator so the press coverage was heavy.

ANALYSIS: (Walbridge)

- 1. Dams are deceptively dangerous, especially at high water. They kill many paddlers, and should not be run except in unique circumstances.
- 2. Dams kill almost as many rescuers as they do paddlers! Rescuers should reach into the hydraulic with ropes, tag lines, and other techniques. They should never enter the backwash, or they will be trapped, too.
- 3. Never tie yourself into a rope before entering fast-moving water. There are many circumstances when the current will pull you under and keep you there. The only exception is for those using a rescue life vest with a reliable quick release system. Even then, they are not recommended for swimming rescue around dams, as the line can get caught by recirculating debris and override the harness mechanism.



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