

DB Cooper's money

On Wednesday, November 24, 1971, a man calling himself Dan Cooper walked up to the counter of Northwest Orient Airlines at the Portland International Airport and bought a one-way ticket on Flight #305 to Seattle. Shortly after the plane took off, he demanded parachutes and \$200,000 in \$20 bills, threatening the crew and passengers with what he said was a bomb in his briefcase.

The flight landed in Seattle, and Cooper got what he wanted in exchange for releasing the passengers. The plane took off again, this time headed for Mexico City. A little after 8:00 pm, Cooper—soon to become infamous as “DB Cooper”—jumped off the plane with the money and a parachute and vanished into the night.

Nine years later, a young boy named Brian Ingram was digging a fire pit on the shore of Tena Bar—a sand bar on the Columbia River. Buried in the sand Ingram found \$6,000 in three bundles of twenty-dollar bills with serial numbers that matched Cooper's ransom money. The bills were badly deteriorated around the edges, and the bundles were solid lumps that had to be separated professionally and authenticated in a lab, but they were the first—and so far only—evidence that has been found in this case.

The site where the money was found was 30 kilometers from where Cooper was believed to have jumped, and so how the money got to Tena Bar became a mini mystery in the DB Cooper saga. At the time of the money's discovery, geologist Leonard Palmer investigated the site and proposed the *Washougal Washdown Theory*: the money fell into a stream when Cooper jumped from the plane, was carried into the Washougal River, eventually into the Columbia River, and then washed ashore and was buried by sand on Tena Bar.

Fast-forwarding four decades, amateur scientist Tom Kaye uncovered a new clue and published his findings in the journal *Scientific Reports* in 2020. Kaye studied the diatoms, a diverse type of algae that are found in water all over the world, on the recovered money. “The diatoms that we found [on the Cooper money] are a spring species,” said Kaye. “They bloom in the spring. They do not bloom in November when Cooper jumped.” That's key, according to Kaye, because it shows that the money ended up in the river months after Cooper jumped on November 24, 1971.

Because the bills only had one season of diatoms on them and did not have diatoms that bloom in the winter, Kaye believes that the money landed on the bank of Tena Bar after only a few weeks or months in the water. “The money was not floating in the water for a year, otherwise we would have seen diatoms from the full range of the year. We only saw them from the spring ... the springtime bloom. So, this puts a very narrow range on when the money got wet and was subsequently buried on Tena bar,” Kaye said.

Of course, how the money got to Tena Bar and what happened to Cooper remains a mystery.