

# Mill dams are deadly relics

By BRIAN GEOGHAN  
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## Dover teen latest victim of their turbulence

All summer long, dozens of area kids make the trek, some by bike, some by foot, some of the older ones by car, to where Big Mount Road crosses the Conewago Creek.

Downstream, a low-head dam creates a pool of water, normally about six to eight feet deep, just enough to allow swimming and bridge jumping.

And the bridge, with its steel trestles reaching to the sky, is a natural challenge for daredevil

youths. The 20-foot drop from the bridge — a high-dive shot at your local pool — becomes a 40-foot plunge from atop the trestles.

**Jumping not illegal:** Bridge-jumping isn't illegal, at least not in the jurisdiction of Northern York County Regional Police — if the area isn't posted "no trespassing."

But it can turn deadly because of old mill dams — the

relics of York County's mill days that can create enough turbulence to entrap a swimmer or boater.

Joe Keller, 14, of Dover died last week after four days in intensive care, the result of a swimming accident at the dam.

He and his friends had been out on one of the worst days of the summer. Rainfall from remnants of Tropical Storm Beryl had the water teeming up the creek's banks and churning

over the dam.

They got too close to the dam and went over, then got caught in the undertow on the other side. Joe and a friend had been trying to help two other friends; Joe went under.

A week later, before Thursday night's rain, no water ran over the dam, and the drop to the base of the dam was nearly 15 feet.

**What is the dam for?:** "I

really question their (the dams') purpose," said Dave Keller, Joe's father. "If these things serve no need, I sure would like to know why they're still there."

Without the more than 100-year-old dam, known as Ort's Mill Dam, there is no hazard. The water would be considerably lower under the bridge, eliminating jumping altogether.

"It's like any of several hundred of this type of dam in the commonwealth," said Joe

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