

# Quarries, Pits Prove Fatal To Swimmers

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They look so inviting with their cool, glistening, rippling green water. Secluded from the noise of the world and surrounded by magnificent, 75-foot-tall carved stone precipices, they are the pictures of solitude.

But, like the graceful cobra or the sprawling iceberg, they are killers, having claimed numerous lives over past years. Abandoned years ago by industry, they are the rock quarries and sand pits, full of water from fresh underground springs and now popular illegal swimming spots.

Local residents know the hidden dangers at the quarries and choose safer swimming spots. Most of the swimmers are fleeing from the heat of the concrete of the inner cities. No-trespassing signs are posted and police and property owners continue to patrol the rural swimming holes, but despite numerous arrests, the swimmers continue.

The latest adventurer to drown in one of the frigid, hundred-foot-deep quarries was 22-year-old Christopher Valvano. Police say that on the afternoon of Aug. 20, the youth dove from a 75-foot ledge into the Perrucci Quarry, off Quarry Road in Warren County's White Township, apparently striking his head on a submerged rock.

Valvano's body was not recovered by a State Police diving team until the next afternoon. A township official said one of the divers nearly lost his life during the search after becoming entangled in one of the quarry's submerged cables.

In the past 10 years, there have been 10 reported drownings in quarries and sand pits in north-west New Jersey.

The most recent reported serious injury involved 17-year-old David Sacco of Clinton. The North Hunterdon High School track star was paralyzed from the neck down after he fell 70 feet into the Perrucci Quarry after losing his footing while scaling one of the cliffs.

Of all the quarries, the most beautiful is the Perrucci Quarry, where three young men have drowned in 1976, 1978 and 1981. Set amid the corn fields and woods in Warren County, the quarry was the former Thomas A. Edison Cement Co.'s source for limestone until the 1930s.

Now, on a typical hot Sunday, residents say upward of 30 cars line the gravel Quarry Road, a quarter-mile from the banks of the beer-can strewn quarry.

Gertrude Farrell, longtime clerk for White Township, called the quarry the "armpit of the world." She said it was common knowledge among residents that the bottom of the quarry is lined with various kinds of debris, from cars to railroad ties to steel cables to the unrecovered bodies of drowning victims.

Farrell said that last week state troopers arrested 18 trespassers. In one recent week, 40 arrests were made. She said security was impossible and "even if you put up a 10-foot fence, they'd climb over it."

A State Police spokesman from the Blairstown barracks said police are frequently called to the quarry, but they can't patrol the area constantly.

"Under the water there are ledges, tree stumps. You never know what's floating around," the trooper said. "The main thing is you can't walk out of it. People hit the water, panic and that's the end of them."

The Hardyston quarry in Sussex County is part of an old series of mine shafts that dot the area. Two youths drowned at the quarry last year and officials say the danger is not submerged cliffs but lack of lifeguards.

Surrounded by steep cliffs and hidden from the road, the quarry has never been open for public swimming but has been used illegally for more than 30 years, one township official said. The land is owned by the P.K. Racquet Club Inc. and the official said the owners are planning to upgrade the quarry and open it to the public. Officials of P.K. Racquet Club



were unavailable for comment.

Roxbury Township's half-dozen abandoned iron ore mines and sand pits, fed from underground streams, have been the scene of numerous drownings over the years, police said. The most recent accident involved the death of a 17-year-old Dover student at the County Concrete sandpits behind Dell Avenue.

Police said swimmers are aware of the dangers of the sharp drops in the pits and that publicity will only attract more daredevils.

The last reported drowning at Pequannock's Wildam Lake sand pit occurred in 1978 and police said they are frequently called to

remove trespassers. Adjacent to the Lincoln Park public beach, the sand pit is hidden by woods. Police said the drownings have occurred in the shallow part of the pit and involved non-swimmers.

Boonton police said increased patrols have dissuaded dangerous swimming near the swiftly moving, cascading waterfalls on the Rockaway River at a spot known as "Deep Hole." The last drowning was in 1978 when bathers were unable to rescue panic-stricken Clifford Goggins Jr., 24, of Fairfield.

"The word is out that if you swim at Deep Hole you'll get locked up," police said.