

Man drowns in Manchester lake at former mining quarry

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MANCHESTER — A 23-year-old Plainfield man drowned on Saturday while swimming in a lake at a former mining quarry.

Edwin Caballero's body was discovered Sunday morning, some 16 feet under the surface of the water in Crystal Lake.

The "lake" is actually a former open pit mine located on a property known as the Heritage Minerals former mining site. The area is also known by the name ASARCO, because of its previous ownership by the American Smelting and Refining Co.

Caballero was last seen on the shoreline of the lake between 5 and 6 p.m. Saturday, according to police.

Family reported Caballero missing late Saturday, but they were unsure if he had returned to the lake or walked into the nearby woods, Manchester police said.

Authorities launched a search around 10 p.m. and were aided by local firefighters, the Brick Police Department's drone unit and the New Jersey State Police aviation unit.

The State Police Marine Services Unit discovered Caballero's body Sunday morning, submerged below the waterline of Crystal Lake, according to Manchester police. State Police Technical Emergency and Mission specialists recovered his body.

The bodies of water throughout the former Heritage Minerals site are former open pit mines filled in by the underground aquifer. Police said the "lake" banks and bottom are dangerously unstable and have depths that can exceed 60 feet. Police said estimates of the largest lake place its depth at 300 feet.

Manchester police said a preliminary investigation indicates the death was accidental.

"These 'lakes' are filled with mineral-laden spring water from the underground aquifer and as such buoyancy is reduced," police said in a news release. "Additionally, the water is also much colder, which can result in a swimmer, even an accomplished one, tiring much faster. The characteristics of these 'lakes' to include unstable shoreline shelves and water composition have been attributed to several drownings which have occurred on the property."

Police said the property is private and that anyone entering or on the site could face fines or jail time.

Anyone who may have been at the lake and witnessed this incident is asked to contact Manchester police Detective Christian Nazario at 732-657-2009, ext. 4221, or Ocean County Prosecutor's Office Detective John Carroll at 732-929-2027.

Amanda Oglesby is an Ocean County native who covers Brick, Barnegat and Lacey townships as well as the environment. She has worked for the Press for more than a decade. Reach her at @OglesbyAPP, aoglesby@gannetnj.com or 732-557-5701.