

Eno River State Park quarry beckons despite warnings

McClatchy Tribune

DURHAM — Signs warn would-be swimmers of the dangers posed by the steep banks, underwater rocks and deep water of the quarry at Eno River State Park, where a Raleigh teen drowned Thursday.

But neither the signs nor the death of Lamont Burt, 17, were enough to dissuade more than 50 people who were enjoying the lake Friday afternoon.

Burt had dived into the lake from a cliff and began to swim before going under at about 4 p.m. Thursday, according to park superintendent Keith Nealon. A scuba diver found Burt's body about 16 feet underwater, wedged against a tree at about 7:35 p.m., Nealon said.

Nealon returned to the lake Friday to give what he called his "quarry spiel" to each group that entered the area.

"We've had a lot of issues

out here," he told visitors. "Someone drowned out her yesterday."

Then he reminded them that the water is 70 feet deep with formidable underwater hazards and told them that swimming was not recommended.

"I don't want what happened yesterday to happen again," he said.

Nealon said the quarry was privately owned until 2003, when the state purchased the property. That summer, he said, it conducted a study to determine if the body of water was safe to swim in. State officials concluded that "it was really too inherently dangerous" but still opted not to ban swimming altogether because so many people use it as a recreational area.

"It's sort of a twisted reasoning," Nealon said. "People have heart attacks on the hiking trails, but we don't ban hiking trails."

The oval-shaped, man-

made body of water has a dark green tint owing from the leaves of the trees that encircle it. The water is lush and warm. Swimmers reclined on colorful floats far from shore.

Among the swimmers were Ann and Evan Stark from outside New Haven, Conn., who were visiting the quarry with their son Daniel Stark, who owns The Shed jazz club in downtown Durham. Ann Stark said she swam a half-mile stretch of the quarry.

"It's the most spectacular water to swim in," she said. "It's not cold, and you don't have to worry about cramps or getting hypothermia."

Jim Blanchies is a frequent visitor to the park and was wading about 25 yards from shore, telling several teens about the rock formations underwater. He also pointed to the fish lazily swimming.

"It's a good place to socialize," Blanchies said.

About 500 yards away, a group of teens and young adults jumped off the cliff and swam where Burt sank and never resurfaced.

Alamance County high school students Zack Barringer, 18, who has had lifeguard training, and his running buddy Mitchell MacDonald, 17, have been coming from Elon to the

quarry for several years.

Barringer did a series of swan dives off the cliff Friday, and MacDonald jumped in behind him. They knew someone drowned the day before, but they both think it was "a freak accident."

MacDonald thinks Burt might have hurt himself while in the air, or perhaps

landed on the rocks because he didn't jump out far enough. He thinks Burt was injured when he hit the water and should have cried out for help sooner.

"When most people are drowning, they don't call out for help," MacDonald said. "They try to figure it out themselves before they realize it's a problem."

COME FIND YOUR DREAM HOME



145 Almont Forest Drive

4 BR, 3 1/2 Bath one level all brick home with a finished basement and garage to accommodate 4 cars. Approx 3600 SF with new Pella windows and Plantation shutters. Heated pool w/9' deep end & diving board. Below appraisal!

2015 North Carolina quarry warning

Clipped By:
usmra_rob
Sep 27, 2024