

Myths About Harvey's Lake Diver Reveals Underwater Mysteries

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Both Harvey's Lake and its history have been filled with old myths and legends that have been passed down from generation to generation, and we've all heard at least some of them from time to time. Favorites include the legend that tells of no bottom to the lake, or that huge caves exist under the darkness of the water. Others are stories about huge fish with razor sharp teeth and even one that accounts a sighting of what resembled a sea monster from unknown depths. Are these mysterious stories fact or fiction? According to Thomas O'Brien, owner of the Harvey's Lake Diving School, Inc., many of these myths are indeed that, just myths. However, he also states that many of the facts that surround the lake are just as fascinating as the legends.

"This idea of having no bottom to the lake is a bunch of nonsense," said O'Brien. "I know it's got a bottom because I've been there. Right now the deepest you can go is 95 feet. Back in 1932 it was 102 feet deep, but over the years she keeps on filling up with mud. When I first opened my school 30 years ago, some men told me the lake had no bottom, and I said, 'Well then, what holds up the water?' Doesn't make sense, does it!"

Another story, which has had its share of difference versions, is the one about the horses that were drowned at the lake. One account tells of a team of horses and a sleigh breaking through the winter ice, resulting in the horses' demise. Another one tells of an accidental mishap causing a rig with its horses to be tossed into the water of the lake. Other versions have been passed on through the years, but no matter which story you've heard, the ending is always the same. Supposedly, the horses were preserved and petrified by the cold waters, and to this day can still be seen tied to their rig, sleigh, and so on. Just myth? According to O'Brien, it's partly true and partly false.

"Over by Alderson, there was a platform about 60 feet from the shore, in fact the pyramid to it is still out there in about 20 feet of water. They used to have a boom on top of it to raise the logs up out of the water at the saw mill. There's a section there where it's shallow near the shore, about two and a half to three feet deep, but as you go out about 100 feet from shore, it goes almost straight down like a hill. They're all glacier rocks. Anyway, years and years ago, when they were timbering this place back in the early 1900s, the boys were cutting timber. It was a hot day in August, and they decided to go for a swim. Well, they took the horses down, which were still in their bridles, and let them go in the water. They walked out in the shallow part and got tangled up in their bridles, and let them go in the water. They walked out in the shallow part and got tangled up in their bridles, and then went out in the deeper water. Because they were all tangled up, they drowned, so they put an article in the paper that said the horses drowned in

the lake. What they didn't do is put a follow-up story in the paper telling how they went out there with a Model-T Ford and pulled them out on a Monday morning. The paper didn't report that part, so therefore the people still think they're down there. I still have some people ask me if I've ever seen the horses and buggy, and I tell them that I have and I was just riding it the other day."

"We did find a skull down there about five years ago over in that area," he continued, "but I don't know if it was from a mule, a pony, or a horse. It was a skull from one of them though. When I threw it up on the boat, however, I found that the cavity was full of maggots, so I tossed it back into the water. I wanted to dry it out and hang it up, but because of the maggots, I just tossed it into 40 feet of water."

O'Brien claimed that he has also retrieved antique bottles, terra cotta jugs, and other artifacts from the bottom of the lake. All of these are currently on display at his school on the Sunset section of the Lake. O'Brien also stated that he has been called upon to retrieve other, less pleasant, items from the lake's floor.

"It was about seven or eight years ago," he recalled. "The Chief of the Forty-Fort (Police) Department contacted me and asked me to search the water for a body. It seems a woman parked her car over near the little store across from Sandy Beach, and it was there for two days. I didn't know it at first, but they also found her shoes and a note down along the wall (near the shore). On the back of the note, she played Tic-Tac-Toe, you know, the game you play with the X's." Well, she lost. Like I said, I didn't know about the note and they asked me if I'd take a look, and I said sure. I crossed the area about three or four times and I came back a little disgusted because I didn't see anything. That's when I asked the Chief if he was only playing a hunch, but he told me she had left a note and that she was definitely in there. I hadn't tried out by the Yacht Club, so I swam straight out and made a circle, and sure enough, I saw something bright ahead of me. It was her. She was laying on her back. I went up to the surface and yelled to my boys to bring the boat over, and I covered her up with a blanket and brought her up."

Most frequently O'Brien's diving is for his own pleasure, and he's usually taking other students of his school down to both teach them the techniques of scuba diving, and to view the "sights" of the underwater world of Harvey's Lake.

"It's a lot of fun," admitted O'Brien. "If it wasn't any fun, I wouldn't have been in business for so long. It's so different down there. Unlike anything you've ever seen before; so beautiful. After you go down 75 feet, it gets pitch black because the sun's light can't get down there. When you get down that far, you have to take your own underwater lights."

"I know there are some big lake trout down there," he added, "but people have really inflated this theory of huge fish. Whenever I come to a big cloud of mud

down there, I know I've kicked out a lake trout. They're pretty big. Back in 1965 or 1968, I was looking for a 40 horse-power motor. My buddy was pulling me along on a sled, and I have 70 feet of rope trailing behind the sled in case I want to stop and inspect something I can just get off the sled and let the rope slip through my fingers. You see, I can't communicate with my buddy driving the boat, so this is the easiest way to do it. Anyway, I was looking for this motor when I saw something to my right that was dark, so I thought I'd better check it out. I held my breath, because I didn't want my bubbles to scare whatever it was, and when I got there I saw that it was a big Lake, (Lake Trout). It was a good 48 inches. When I exhaled and let the bubbles out, he slapped that big tail and took off. He left a cloud of mud three feet high. Boy, he was a biggy. That's the biggest one I ever saw."

"I found an old sunken hydroplane (boat) about 27 years ago out in the middle of Sandy Beach," he continued. "It seemed to be in really good condition. I found out that years ago, a lot of the hot shots around the lake had these hydroplanes, and they would race them. Well, it seemed as though whoever owned this one had it tied to a buoy out there, and it had a small leak. So, every weekend the owner would go out there and bail it out. Well one weekend he went away and forgot about his boat, and it sank. Thirty-five feet of water was a lot back then, and they just couldn't figure out how to get it out, so they left it there. After I found it, we had it raised, and it stunk like a sewer pipe. No one wanted it though, so I took it down to the Outlet and found a nice patch of weeds to let it sink back into. I take my students down there because the water is so clear, and I figured it would be neat for them to have this sunken boat there. Well, would you believe it was only there for a year before someone stole it? I don't know where it was taken, but I hear a rumor later that some guy was going around taking sunken boats and making tables and chairs out of them. Most boats are made out of cedar or mahogany, so the wood would be good for furniture."

"I've got four boats sunken out in front of my place in 25 feet of water," he claimed, "but no one's going to take them because I put them there. They're for my students to look at. They get a big kick out of that, and it's also good for attracting fish. There's a 28 footer, two motor boats, and a cabin cruiser."

"The former Chief of Police for Harvey's Lake, Fred Swanson, was the Chief from the 1920s to the 1930s," added O'Brien, "and he told me about a Model-T Ford truck that went down (into the lake) when they were cutting ice years ago. Noxen Road was open, like a road coming on the ice. Well this fellow came along and asked Fred where the ice cutter was, and he told him over by Sordoni's. So the guy drove his truck onto the ice, but about a half hour before that, Fred told me that he had put some pine boughs on a section of ice that was too thin. It was over near Point Breeze somewhere. Well, the wind blew the boughs away, and before he knew it, he saw this guy driving his truck towards the thin ice. He said he took out his gun and fired three times, but with the wind howling, he couldn't hear him. Pretty soon, the front wheels went plow, right down, and it only

hesitated a minute before sinking. That minute gave the driver enough time to jump off and swim over to the ice. The truck has been down there ever since. It's in about 75 feet of water. So now, some of my students and I are going to raise it when I find it. We're hoping to do it sometime this month."

"I'd say that the oldest relic I've ever seen that was taken from Harvey's Lake was the butt of a gun one of my students found," he concluded. "It was about 15 years ago, and we had just completed a dive when this kid showed me this butt of a gun, or stock, he found. It must have been from the early pioneer days because the whole gun was no more than two and a half feet long. It was an old musket. He didn't have the barrel though, cause when he first saw it, it was sticking up out of the mud, and when he grabbed it, the barrel broke off. When he later examined it, he realized that it was the stock of a gun. Right where the butt goes against your shoulder, there was a little compartment for your powder and (musket) balls. He didn't know what he had there. Whoever lost it, must have lost it along the shore years and years ago."

Whatever you wish to listen to, the facts or the fictitious stories about the lake, both are fascinating.