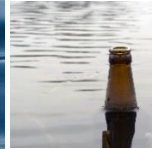


# TALES OF THE RIVERMAN 157



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sinking and rising.



My Tales are meant to be educational and interesting, so here goes with another, perhaps not a nice subject, but certainly it carries a warning. I don't know if as a youngster, you ever played with bottles in water. My friends and I used to; well, we were never away from the river, that was our playing field. An empty bottle floats high on top of the water, a half full bottle floats upright, vertical. The more you fill the bottle, the lower it floats in the water. On an aside, bottles floating vertically with their necks sticking up above the surface, were one of the dangers you had to look out for while sculling or rowing. Your oar would clip the bottle neck the blade could break, it could cause the oar to fly out of your hand and you could capsize. I tried to remove any bottles I saw floating like that, as I rowed up and down the river and there were hundreds.

But to my story. If you almost fill a bottle, it can sink and then slowly come to the surface. So, we used to have competitions to see whose bottle could stay down the longest but still come up again. Little pockets of air can keep things afloat, lose the air, and the thing sinks. A heavier bottle requires more air to float it, and just like the bottle, the more and the heavier the clothes a person in the water is wearing, the lower in the water the person floats, and if they sink, it takes a lot longer, more air being required, for them to re-surface. Having said that, the more clothes, the more chance there is of trapped air keeping the person floating. This is why you have to approach a person who is floating, especially if they are low on the surface, or just below the surface, with the greatest of care. If the wash from a boat hits the person before you catch hold of them, the person can roll over slightly, lose the air that is keeping them afloat, and they sink. Approaching a person in the water, I always judged the distance and ran to the bow of the boat, leant over and caught the person before my wash hit them. Unfortunately, I have had to recover bodies of persons who sunk due to the wash of other boats. With good intentions a boat was commandeered and went to try

to save a woman floating in the river. Their wash hit her before they could catch her and she rolled over and sunk. I arrived and brought her to the surface quickly. If a body is not recovered immediately, it could be a long time before it surfaces, a long agonising wait for relatives and friends, and less pleasant work for those dealing with the aftermath. Recovery, rather than rescue is always sad, though there is satisfaction in carrying out this task as quickly as possible. There have been many instances where the wash from a boat has caused a person to sink. I cannot emphasise enough that you must catch hold before the wash reaches them.

When it is nighttime and a person enters the water, everyone looks to the place where the splash was seen. Depending on the height the person has entered the water from, the more they will sink down into the water. Everyone is looking to the splash, but, like the bottle, if there is air in the clothing, the person will slowly rise to the surface again and if there is flow on the water, they may rise some distance away. Often the person is left floating just under the surface, and drifting with the currents. By looking at the splash site, no one notices the body floating away. This is why when I arrived at the scene of an incident, and the person had disappeared, I would search up or down river depending on the state of tide, in the hope of finding the person still floating. Like the bottle, the person could go down then gradually return to the surface. Check and double check the area. I often found a body floating just under the surface, hours later, perhaps, next morning in daylight. As youngsters, we were taught to make floats out of our clothing, but in all my years on the river, I never saw anyone doing this.



Teaching survival in a swimming pool, Trousers filled with air.

I answered a question in the magazine “New Scientist” regarding flotation. It can be found at the following.

[https://parsonageriverman.com/images/Resources/Dead\\_Weight.pdf](https://parsonageriverman.com/images/Resources/Dead_Weight.pdf)

If we are all careful, we should not have to worry about any of the above. Be safe out there.