

Dive Site Report¹ – Upper Stonecliffe Flooded Village

This is an interesting dive site, of historical and nostalgic value to local residents and history buffs. During the construction of the hydro-electric dams at Rolphton in the 1950's, a section of the Ottawa River (from Rolphton to Mattawa) was flooded to create the reservoir now known as Holden Lake. The flooding resulted in a number of small communities, farms and lumber depots being flooded. While the buildings were all removed before the flood came, the foundations and other semi-permanent features were left in place. Many of the depots and communities are now under 60 to 90' of water, but the upper Stonecliffe village is only under 15 to 30' of water, making the site quite accessible. Photographs of this and other villages are available for viewing along with interesting story lines at the "Virtual Museum Canada" web site www.virtualmuseum.ca (the sub-site can be found by searching using the parameter "swisha", which will point you to "The Swisha Project").

Attractions

Flooded village – building foundations, fence, railway bed, artefacts.

Site Overview

The upper Stonecliffe village consisted of a railway station, one church (**Saint Zephrim Roman Catholic Church**), one general store (McKechnie's General Store), and several residences. The map below shows the outline of the village. The boat launch at the present Stonecliffe village site was the main roadway that passed through the upper village, then descended to the lower village, which was situated close to the Ottawa River of the time. Although the Ottawa River water is dark (stained brown), a guideline extends from a near-shore position to the front steps of the church. One branch off the guideline (to the right) leads to the foundation of the railway station. Little is left of the general store, mainly just a pile of red bricks which once formed the chimney. The bottom is littered with artefacts, probably the remains of small back yard dumps – broken plates, boots, shoes, shingle piles, jars, frail tin cans, but nevertheless they are interesting to look at. Sitting on the front steps of the church is an interesting experience if you prep the dive with a view of photos of the church before the flood came. These same steps carried people to and from church services and weddings and funerals for decades, but now they sit silent in the dark water.

An interesting way to dive this site is to tour the main features using the guidelines, then run traverses (using a compass) at right angles to the guide lines. This is how you'll find features like a fence section, a telephone pole crib, and an outhouse (or a dug well – not sure which).

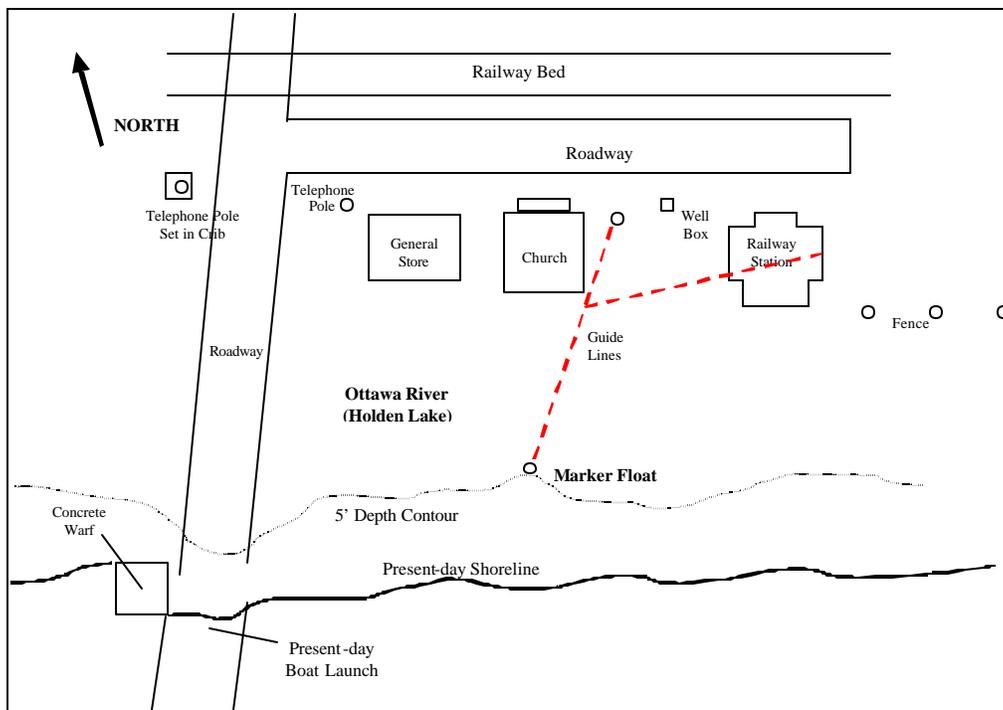
¹ **NOTE:** the DRUC assumes NO responsibility, *direct or implied*, for the safety of diving at this site using this information. The information in this report presents *general* information on conditions and certain known hazards, but conditions are variable and other hazards may exist from time to time. It is every diver's own/personal responsibility to ensure that the conditions are adequately safe with respect to his/her training and experience – ***THIS INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE AT YOUR OWN RISK!***

Being the Ottawa River, VIS is limited by the limited light. Under a sunny sky, VIS at 15' is around 8' during the summer months (less in the spring), and at 20' the VIS is more like 6'. By 25' the VIS is nearly zero because of the absence of light, but good lights will bring the VIS back to 8'. Being a flooded landmass, the site has a very firm bottom, but enough silt has accumulated in 50 years to make silting an issue. The challenge with diving at this site is keeping far enough off the bottom to keep the silt undisturbed, yet be close enough to the bottom to be able to see the features that await. For this reason, this site is best visited in small groups (2 or 4).

Being a shallow site, there is not thermocline to contend with. Water temperature rises slowly over the summer because of the large size of the reservoir, but the plus is that the body retains the heat well into the fall (November).

Access

Access to this site is excellent! Simply park at the public boat launch in the village, gear-up either on cultivated grass or on the small concrete warf, then enter the water at the launch. The start of the guideline is normally marked with a small jug. When standing in the middle of the boat launch, facing straight towards the river (lake), the marker should be roughly 70 m from your position in the 1:30 position. The marker is in roughly 5' of water, at the top of a gradual drop off. The church is located at the end of the guideline, which is roughly 100 m long.



Flooded Upper Stonecliffe Village Dive Site Map

Hazards (refer to footnote 1)

The site has only a few hazards –*silting* and *boat traffic*.

Silting – as mentioned, because of the limited VIS, the challenge with diving at this site is keeping far enough off the bottom to keep the silt undisturbed, yet be close enough to the bottom to be able to see the features that await. Be vigilant with buoyancy control, dive this site in small groups (2 or 4), and be prepared to encounter zero VIS conditions at times.

Boat traffic – with the site being located next to a boat launch, you can expect to periodically have overhead hazards – *surface with care*, and be sure to drag a *diver-down flag* during your dive.

Recommendations

1. This is an interesting site that you should visit at least once – but ***dive only in bright conditions*** (or at night with lights) to optimize VIS.
2. ***Dive with a slate board*** to work on a sketch of the features of the site – you’re your sketch to the DRUC web site for updating our sketch.
3. Before diving at the site, ***explore the historical accounts*** of the site at www.virtualmuseum.ca (“The Swisha Project”).