

The Moon Roach and the Jersey Devil

So today I embarked on an excursion to find the locally legendary Blue Hole. If you're not from the Pine Barrens area, the Blue Hole is this very strange phenomenon set right off the Black Horse Pike in Winslow Township. A circular lake fed by two very small tributaries of the Salem River, it is ice cold (around 45 degrees) even in the dead of summer, and is rumored to be bottomless. Stories of an evil spirit dwelling in the lake have been the norm, as tales of swimmers suddenly being paralyzed and pulled underwater and more than a few deaths have been associated with it.

Two popular stories exist to explain the Hole. One is that it is the home of the Jersey Devil. The other is that it is the impact crater of an ancient small meteorite. That second one makes sense when you see the lake for yourself. It's almost perfectly circular and the the edges are raised, much like what you would get if you threw a rock into a mound of loosely packed dirt. As far as the other aspects of the Hole, it is most likely freezing cold because it's surrounded on all sides by very high (for the area) pine trees and doesn't get more than an hour or two of direct sunlight per day. The depth of the lake around the edges is about a foot, but suddenly drops off in a steep shelf on all sides (consistent with the meteorite theory), which would explain the mysterious whirlpool currents. Swimmers are probably paralyzed by the sudden shock of the cold water (which gets MUCH colder at the shelf) and find themselves unable to fight the rip currents that pull them towards the center of the lake and under water.

I am at a loss, however, to explain why the water is crystal clear and blue when all the water in the surrounding area is murky and brackish -- if you've ever been in or lived in the Pine Barrens or the wetlands of South Jersey, you know what I'm talking about.

Not much study of this lake has been conducted, if for no other reason than the fact that it's notoriously hard to get to. While it's only a half-mile hike from the nearest road, you have to cross terrain with some very thick underbrush, prolonged strips of quicksand-like mud, and a very fast-moving river either by wading or over a precarious downed tree bridge. It can take a half-hour to forty-five minutes even for an experienced outdoorsman, and most people just throw up their hands and give

up when the deer flies, hot sun, and briar patches eventually dim their spirits. Undeterred by this, however, I decided that I would attempt this excursion.



The trail begins right off of Piney Hollow Road in Winslow. It's clear at the beginning, but that doesn't last long. When you begin the trip, you immediately begin to notice the sounds of constant gunfire very close by. Yes, my friends, this trail is directly adjacent to an archery and shotgun range. Hope no one's had too much to drink today...



Soon you have to veer off of the trail and cross this river. It doesn't look like it from the picture, but this current is moving fairly fast around the center, as the river suddenly drops to a trench depth of three feet, and the bottom is loosely packed silt, so it's not safe for amateurs to simply wade across. You can lose footing and be swept away very easily.



There used to be a bridge spanning the river, but it was washed out in the 1930s.



The very precarious log bridge that most people use to cross the river. I had a feeling that this thing stood no chance of supporting my weight.



Strangely enough, upon closer inspection, someone had left their T-shirt here. Bad move, pal. The one thing you do NOT want on this trip is any exposed skin. The briar patches will slice you to ribbons.

Maybe this wasn't on purpose. Maybe the Jersey Devil got him! Oooooooooohhh...

Deciding that I was not going to escape this trip without a little dirt and grime to show for it, I held my camera and GPS device up above my head and waded across the river. It was really unpleasant, to say the least. Not that I had any trouble with the current, but the bottom was like quicksand. I just could not get a footing for more than a few feet for the life of me. Getting to the other side also meant leaving the well-traveled areas of the forest, and moving into the serious briar patch and mud section of the journey. Fortunately, I was only 1000 feet from my destination. It took 5 minutes to cross those 1000 feet, but considering I was now a half-hour into my journey anyway, that was a proverbial blip on the radar.

Before long, I had reached my destination: The Blue Hole.



The water is beautifully crystal clear, and you can see the bottom all the way to the point where the drop shelf starts.



Wading into the water a few feet, it really was ice cold. My legs went numb within a minute.



The view from the other side of the lake. YOU can see the almost perfectly circular shape carved out, and the raised edges, both of which are consistent with the impact crater of a meteorite. The green patches in the center are not algae, by the way, just a refraction of the light reflected from the trees. There is no plant or animal life of any kind in this lake, which I guess lends some semblance of credence to the "evil spirit" theory of the Blue Hole.

All in all, a difficult but rewarding journey. The lake is truly a marvel to behold, especially since it's smack dab in the middle of an area not known for clear water. Now that I have its location on my GPS device, I can take anyone who'd like to see it for themselves. Be warned though, it's a very strenuous and unpleasant journey to get there, and I will tolerate no complaints about the heat, the mud, or the nonstop insect bites. =)