

Saratoga Trestle



by Diver Z

www.marinedivingservice.com

Last item to pack up. Big black box with an underwater robotic camera. My underwater eyes whenever I cannot, or do not want to dive.

150 miles ahead, is my final destination for today. Not so cold here so I packed up lightly and off I go.

It is a nice February morning with a little over 2-hour ride ahead of me. Almost 50 degrees –I’m happy with that.

Going to scout out some unique project but for now all I know I’m heading to beautiful Saratoga Lake.

The goal is to survey the last portion of 100-year-old train trestle across the lake, for its removal.

This is how it all started.

Taking a swim into the nice clear crisp, waters of Lake Saratoga. All is going well. My finning is different since I cut about half the length of my fins to accommodate the needs of this project.

In this type of work-necessity is always the mother of invention.

Adjusting my buoyancy I descend deeper to my 30 ft. deep mark. “Loud and clear-going down”, sounds through my communication system to all the top support team up above. “Ok loud and clear” is the last thing I hear from up there.

Up there,-There is a lot going on A pickup truck with towing slings, chains, and 3 strong loggers. Right above me is my top support



diver.

He is floating on a large platform surrounded by many pressurized air tanks connected together, my wireless underwater communication system, loudspeaker to carry my underwater voice to all personnel-(later my friends) and one loud machine.

“We Work Under Pressure!” is my company slogan, and today is one of the days to be truthful to this statement.

Everything here is under high pressure

All air supply hoses carrying pressurized air down to keep me going, a hydraulic machine up top pumping other hoses with high pressured hydraulic fluid to feed the beast down there and all top side crew is under my high pressure to finish this project in a timely manner.

The only element seemingly not being under pressure is my dear friend/diver floating up there on the platform right above me and connecting all





those pressure boosted links, (machinery, friends loggers, and all of it) together in nice smooth operation. Although I sometimes disturb this flow with my deep water demands.

I depend on my top support, entirely!!! It seems that every breath, every bodys movement is well anticipated by one another and this machinery of underwater logging operation goes hand in hand with all top support in good harmony.

I'm almost at my mark. This descent is a slow process. My communications go loud again to confirm my progress. The air supply hose follows me effortlessly, and with my right hand I'm dragging 2 other hoses filled with pressurized hydraulic fluid. Carefully moving my hand as to not strike a blade against myself.

Last pull to drag all those hoses and I'm there.



Diver Z on dry land.
Photo: Maria Bele



Finally standing. The computer says 27 ft. deep. "At the bottom, over". "Roger" – it is good to hear my buddy from above.

I'm finally still, not swimming, not pulling, and not carrying anything -all is at rest now.

Starting to look around, I feel like a little Lego man landed on another planet, surrounded by green-lighted skies, with humongous pilings standing all around me.

I've never seen anything like this, never thought I will ever walk into a dead forest underwater. I never thought that I would be the one facing craftsmanship of this kind, witnessing a piece of history just like that, in those settings. Standing right in front of the maze of tall pilings, feels like being lost in the woods. Once upon a time, those pilings had to be all resonating under the weight of the railroad as the trains were carrying supplies across Saratoga Lake. All is quiet now. Amazing view, listening to the atmosphere, looking around through greenish water. Serenity. As far as I can see these pilings are creating a wall, right in front of me. Further out there are just visible shadows of those who want to stay as a memory of the old times.

Perfectly straight. Every single one. I never thought I would be the one to cut them all down.

Back in February –packed light, my sneakers sink into the snow and my underwater robot is getting ready to endure the cold so I do not

have to be the one ice diving.

Watching the display on a control panel right after the little guy left my sight, I'm seeing images only a few people have ever seen.

I'm looking at underwater pilings from an old railroad across Lake Saratoga. Some are visible above the water line until now when I can see those beneath the surface. In this case, underwater pilings are appearing right at my hands on a display, of the robot controller.

I enjoy the fact that I'm here and the robot is down there. It did not take long for the ice to break, and my foot went into the ice-cold water right at the shore. Quick reminder of how it is down there. The survey is up and now I'm trying to get my investment back to shore. Minutes pass, like hours through my frozen fingers slowly navigating little controls to bring the robot back. And here it is. Going back in the box, just like a little pet and I'm traveling back with millions of questions. How many pilings are there altogether? What is needed for this project? Underwater chainsaw? How to get a team of good people, what is the retrieval technique for pilings, set up material base, gather all equipment and so on. A few weeks later an agreement is made. Project price is set, but I'm far from being all set. Racing to gather all necessary information needed for this project. It is set to begin in the next 2 weeks, when the

trestle across Lake Saratoga is scheduled to be removed.

Demolition and removal of the 100-year-old railroad across Lake Saratoga begins.

Here we go –underwater hydraulic chainsaw and all necessary equipment took 2 loads on my pick up, 2 days of transporting all that machinery, hotel is reserved, crew is ready, a detailed plan is set, and we all meet and tackle the project as if we tackle these projects every day. Only I know –there is a first time for everything. This is it!!!

It is real now! I'm razor focused, and preparing for action.

All connections are made well and the hydraulic liquid is where it is supposed to be. The last piece of connection is right in my hands as I hold the underwater hydraulic chainsaw. And there is a trigger on it..... I did not even dare to think about what it will unleash.

Sticking with all my paper planned strategy. The first step -lift bag gets tied up right above the anticipated cut. The air hose goes inside it, and in a few seconds the bag is filled with air. I gain 100 lbs. of extra upward force, just like having an extra hand here.

There will be a time when it comes handy.

"Comms check, comms check, over." "Loud and clear, 3000 psi over," "Copy that". My air supply is full, it is Go Time!

Lifting up a chainsaw making horizontal aim, getting a good grip, stable footing, right before I push the trigger.

Headlamps are aimed, my finger squeezes the trigger and high pitch noise answers. The first chunks of the wood fill the waters around me just like confetti.

No one has been here for a hundred years and no one has touched this structure.

I'm inside a cloud of wood chips, and as the resistance of the well-selected hardwood presents itself, my chainsaw answers with a deeper growl and keeps biting in. The struggle of the cutting chain just proves the dedication and craftsmanship of those builders back then. It is an unfair battle, I'm going through it and it feels like an eternity. The saw is screaming (I'm not its friend) just to make it through.

All of a sudden I say:

"Get ready, get ready!!!" – for loggers topside to be ready with the line to pull the log to the shore.

"Just cut through!!!"

"Whooom", 100-pound force of the lift bag took the log right up to the surface!!! Taking my

paper planned system, now as practical routine to another piling, and another, and another... Helping arm takes them all up, one by one, as I cut. Riggers have their hands full, pickup truck drags the logs out, making one run after another to the parking lot and back. Another log is pulled to the surface to be retrieved and attached to the truck. All is moving very fast-Working Under Pressure. Nothing slows down at all. I'm having a good adrenaline rush, through all the action and not tired at all.

The first day of the operation, the most feared day, is finished and I see log after the log on the parking lot. The ground is scarred with deep grooves from pulling logs across it with the truck, and deep tracks dug in after the wheels struggled in the mud. At least steering is not required anymore as the truck moves just like a train on the tracks. A surreal sight, once underwater, pilings are now all over the parking lot. It does not look right, but at the same time, it is a good sight and feeling of accomplishment.

My guess was 200 pilings. In three and a half days, 160 pilings are out and the job is done!

Good feeling now, my fears are all gone. Stepped over them with action, pushed forward with more fear, and good planning proved itself in reality to be the best tool to smash all the fear away!!!

This was a unique project, presented me with great challenges into the unknown. Battling all the mechanical aspects, skill elements, logistics, and some calculated risk-taking. Most of all, I'm very thankful to every person working on our Saratoga underwater logging project! A lot to learn from old-timers.

100 years old wood seemed brand new, making very solid construction. Today, there is a beautiful marina welcoming people to enjoy. Once upon a time, here the busy railway was shaking under the rumble of passing trains.

Life is better with a boat....

Now I know next time will not be the first time...

Where my eyes always see the pilings, others will enjoy the sight of a beautiful marina.

A week later my arms don't hurt anymore. I miss the atmosphere of this project where the solid man-power was a great combination of friendship, and unique skills, just like the old times.

We worked together, and did all of it well!!!

Everyone finished with great pride.

Ride over the bridge overlooking the waterfront will never be the same for me.



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