

The Zoo Hole

St. George's Island is a long narrow island in the middle of the Bow River that houses the Calgary Zoo. The dive is on the south side of the island near the Zoo's south parking lot. As the river bends around the island, it widens and deepens allowing the current to slow and a viable dive site to be created.

The hole is an oval depression with a maximum depth of about 10 m (33 ft) running south and east of the parking lot toward the 12 Street Bridge. Immediately east of the lot the river forms a small back eddy that enables easier entry and exit.

The river bank is quite muddy at the point of entry as a result of deposits formed by the back eddy. Out in the channel the finer particles are swept away, and the river bottom is predominantly rock and gravel, but some silt does settle in the bowl.

The current keeps suspended particles in the river moving, so silt stirred up by the dive is usually quickly washed away. The visibility frequently ranges from 2 to 8 m (6

to 25 ft.) Water temperature usually ranges between 3° and 7° C (37° and 45° F).

Divers come to the Zoo Hole either to watch the large trout and burbot that collect and feed here or to look for interesting junk that may have collected in the basin. Divers have found articles ranging from tossed beer cans to lost fishing gear and even bicycles.

Experience Level

This site is recommended for advanced divers with strong current or river diving experience.

Directions to the Site

Travel east on Memorial Drive from downtown Calgary. Turn right at the St. Georges Drive / Zoo exit and cross over the bridge. The road bends to the left and the parking lot is on the right. Park your vehicle at the east end of the lot as close to the water as possible.

Elevations, Depths, GPS

Elevation: 1048 m, 3440 ft.

Depth: 9 m, 30 ft.

Latitude: 51° 02.704' N

Longitude: 114° 02.097' W

Entry, Exit and Dive Tips

The entry and exit here are much easier than at Prince's Island. The river widens abruptly east of the parking lot and forms a small back eddy that is protected by the bank and out of the main current. Put your gear on in the parking lot and walk down the bank to the muddy shore line. Wade into waist deep water and put on your fins.

Swim out toward the main channel of the river. As you come out from the protection of the bank, the current will start to pick up. Submerge and continue to swim towards the middle of the river close to the bottom. The current will carry you into the Zoo Hole.

At the end of the dive, exit the hole by swimming toward the north bank of the river. As you come up out of the hole and surface, the back eddy will return you to your point of entry. When you arrive in waist deep water, simply stand up and walk back to the muddy river bank that was your point of entry.

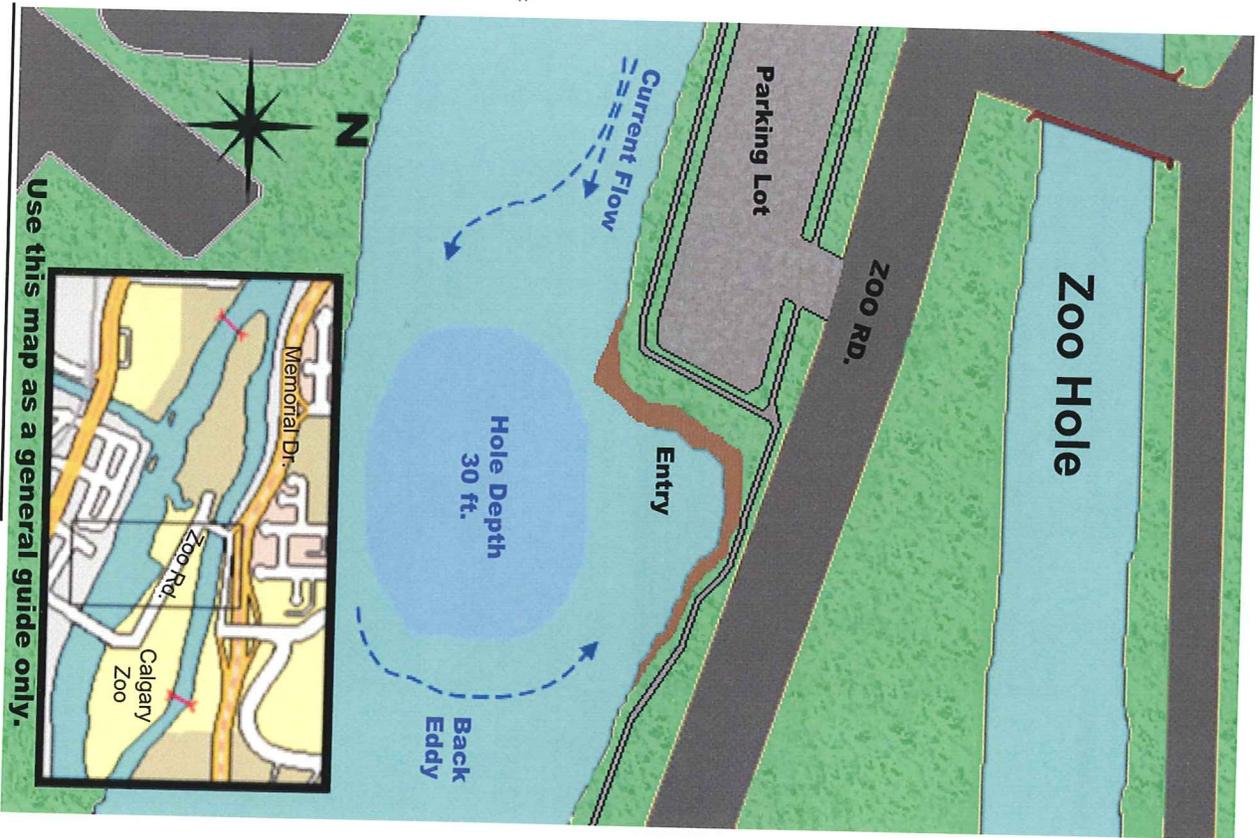
The Dive

In the hole the current is weak enough to easily hold your position or move about. Set a course to circumnavigate the perimeter of the hole. The visibility will

likely be 2 to 5 m (5 to 16 ft.). The river bed is covered with round stones ranging from pebble to boulders. In amongst the rubble are beer cans, fishing lures and other small articles thrown or lost in the river.

As you approach the edges of the depression or rise slightly, you will feel the current begin to pick up so stay close to the bottom and below the wall. During the tour you will come across many large burbot sitting on the bottom. Some are well over 60 cm (2 ft.) in length. If you settle on the bottom to watch them you will likely stir the sediment, but this will be soon swept away by the mild current. You may also see solitary trout or small schools darting overhead.

At the end of your dive, take a compass bearing toward the north river bank. As you reach the edge of the hole and enter shallow water, you will feel the mild current of the back eddy. Allow it to carry you back toward your point of entry. In waist deep water stand up and walk back to shore.



Use this map as a general guide only.

Be Aware

Hazards include river current, fishing line and floating or submerged objects. On occasion, there may be boats on the river. The best time to dive in the river is when the water level is low. High water levels bring strong currents, poor visibility, tree branches or other floating hazards and reduced water quality.