

Glory Hole: Awesome, Frightening, But Dangerous?

by Peter Kilkus (1/19/22)

There was a lot of news coverage of Lake Berryessa in 2017 (47.6 inches of rain) and then again in 2019 (40.5 inches of rain) when Glory Hole spilled for the second time in three years. The photos and drone videos taken by the Lake Berryessa News have amazed, and frightened, people who have never seen the Glory Hole in action before.

As a counterpoint, the rainfall total in 2020 was 10.9 inches, and in 2021 was only a measly 9.2 inches, the lowest in 24 years. Inevitably the question is raised about the danger of Glory Hole itself.

Fact: There has never been anyone "sucked" into Glory Hole since it was constructed!

It's difficult to get close to the Glory Hole at any time due to the barriers in place. And only a fool would cross the buoy line to get close to it when it's flowing strongly four feet over the edge, as it did in 2017 (3.6 feet over) and 2019 (4.1 feet over). The Glory Hole has only spilled 25 times in 60 years.

But back in 1997 a woman did die when she "fell" in to the spillway. In the story from SFGATE below you can see that the water was not very high if she were able to grip the top for so long. There was speculation at the time that she had purposely pushed herself over the edge, committing suicide, not been "sucked" in.

Witnesses had tried to talk to the lady for many minutes to convince her to swim to shore, but she refused. Data shows that the lake level was only a few inches above the lip of the spillway. She was never "sucked" into the spillway. Her body was found several hours later in Lower Putah Creek.

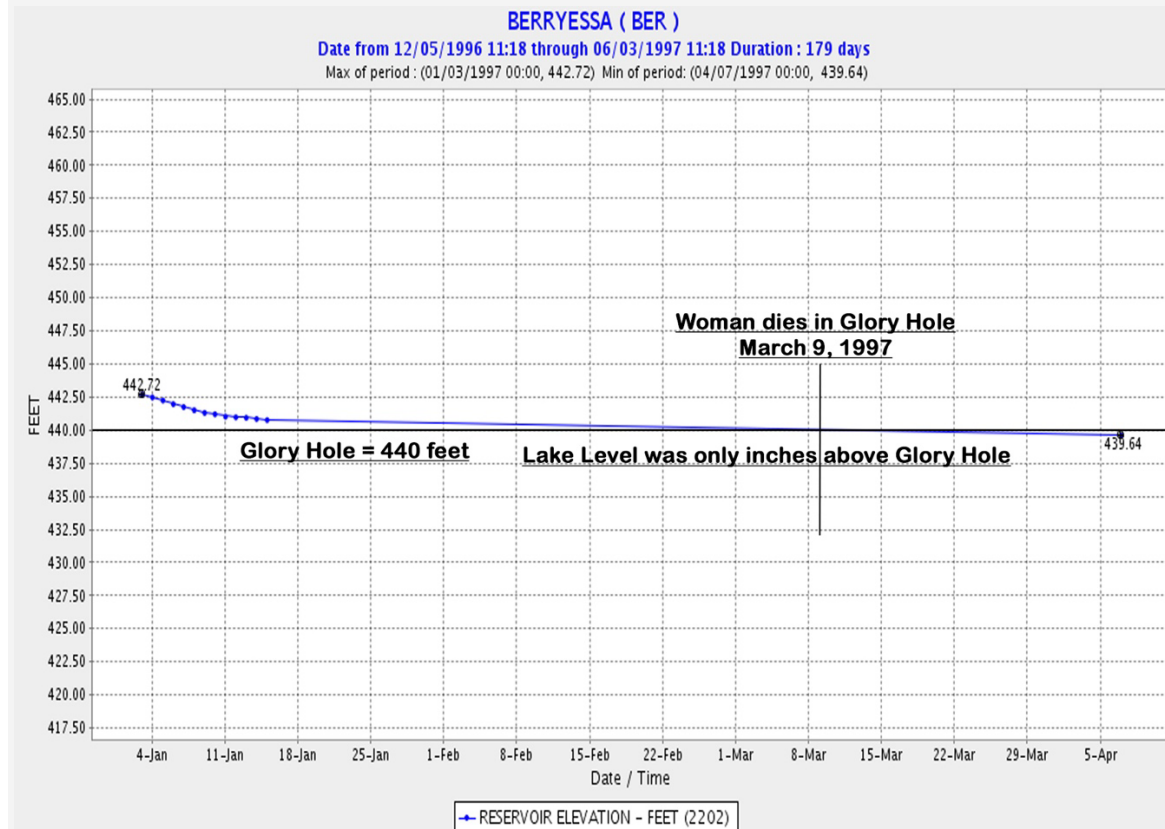
The story from 1997 resurfaced at other news sites due to the coverage of the Glory Hole spilling over in February 2017 and 2019.

SFGate Editor's Note - 2017 Update: Woman Sucked Into Lake Berryessa Spillway (Wednesday, March 12, 1997)

Napa -- Emily Schwalek, 41, of Davis was killed Sunday when she was "sucked" down a spillway at the Monticello Dam at Lake Berryessa. The spillway, which drops straight down more than 200 feet, is known as the Glory Hole. It routes excess water from the lake into a 72 foot diameter entrance structure known as the Glory Hole down to a 28-foot-wide exit pipe. Authorities said witnesses reported seeing Schwalek swimming toward the spillway at about 6:30 p.m. Sunday. The woman dropped out of sight after gripping the edge of the hole for about 20 minutes, witnesses said. There has never been a documented case of anyone else falling through the Glory Hole, said Don Burbey of the Solano Irrigation District.

This event was recently updated by a relative who knew the victim. He believes that it was at least an attempted suicide. She swam from the shore after going around the fence and then pulled

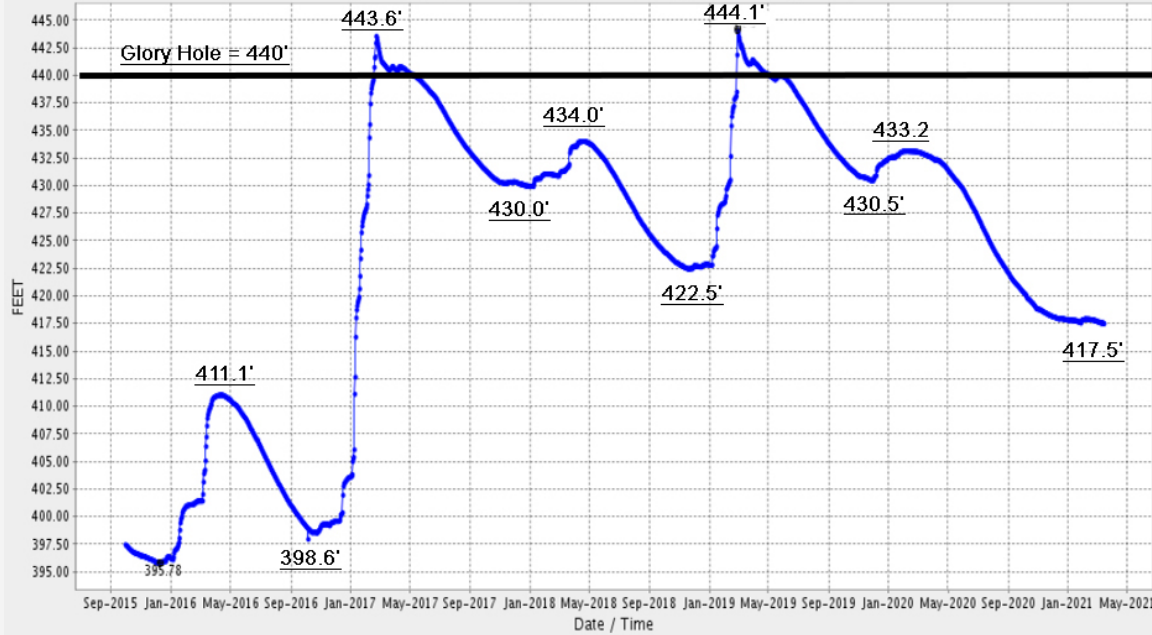
herself over the lip of the hole. At this point she may have changed her mind because she hung on for about 20 minutes before letting go. During that time there were numerous people watching and yelling for her to come back, as well as those who were yelling at her to let loose - always sick ones around. He said that it was definitely a suicide attempt as Emily had tried other methods in the past.



BERRYESSA (BER)

Date from 09/28/2015 08:55 through 03/20/2021 08:55 Duration : 2000 days

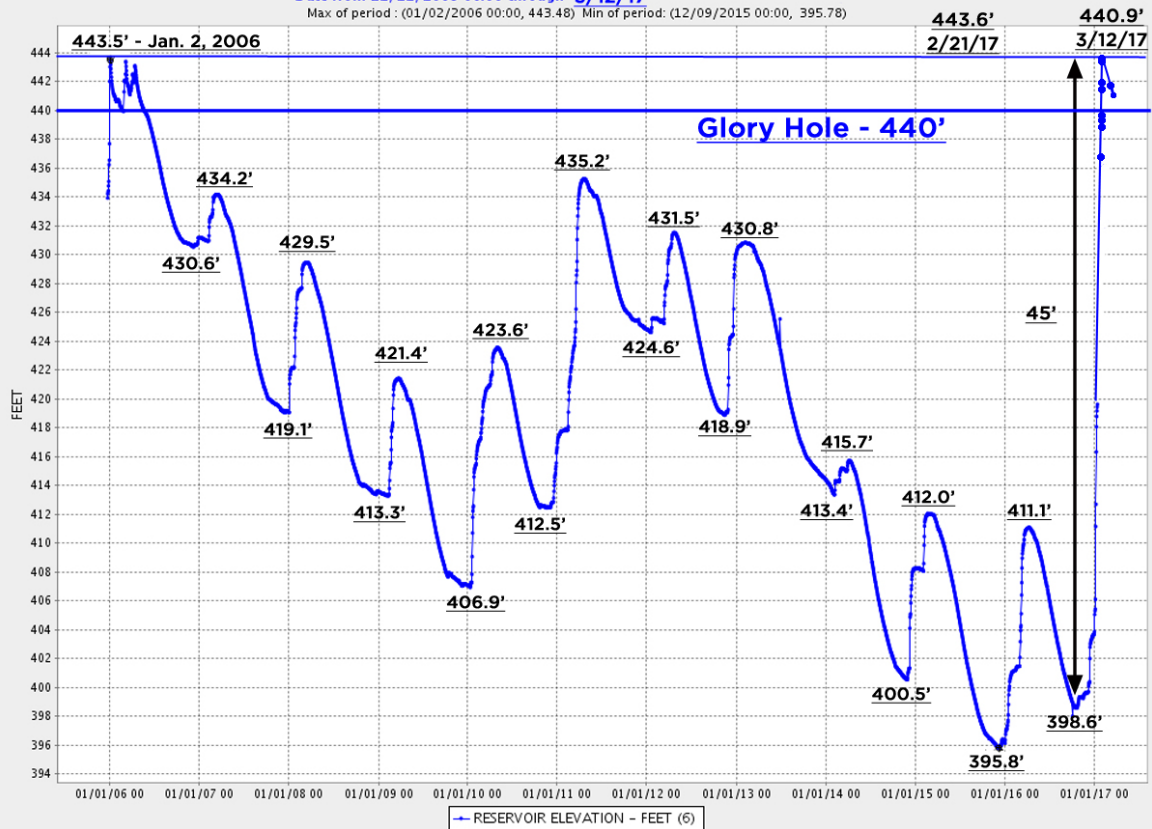
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BERRYESSA (BER)

Date from 12/22/2005 00:00 through 3/12/17

Max of period : (01/02/2006 00:00, 443.48) Min of period: (12/09/2015 00:00, 395.78)



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