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Hidden treasures in Lake Travis

Divers fish out lake refuse

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A television set, a tire, a miniature clock with two gold rings tucked inside, a portable toilet and a kite were among the thousands of items collected by more than 700 scuba divers during the 14th Annual Lake Travis Underwater Cleanup Sunday morning.

In addition to the eight dive sites around the lake, during the events, another 300 shoreline volunteers gathered trash in nine parks that surround the lake.

Colorado River Foundation spokeswoman Erin Franz said the group will not know the exact amount of trash that was collected until it is weighed Monday. The group organized the event with Keep Austin Beautiful. Last year, volunteers brought in 1,500 pounds of recyclable materials and five tons of garbage, she said.

"There were probably some spots deeper down that we got to this year because the water level is down 20 feet," Franz said.

Organizers said they expect the amount of trash might be slightly smaller this year.

"It's going down a little each year," said Brian Block, executive director of Keep Austin Beautiful. "That's because we're making a bigger impact. Hopefully, we're getting more of the stuff that's been down there a while."

Now the biggest scuba diving and shoreline cleanup in Texas, the event began in 1994 as an informal gathering of local dive shops. The Lower Colorado River Authority, local marinas, boat rental operations and 12 Austin-area dive organizations participated this year, including the University Scuba Club.

"Anytime we go diving, we pull up trash. The only difference here is we're going to areas we don't typically dive and picking up trash," said Aaron Vyvial, a diver with Clearwater Divers who has participated in the past eight years. "This is just a more concentrated effort."

He and fellow diver Corby Baxter pulled in about 50 pounds of waste at Windy Point, including a cell phone, several full bottles of Gatorade and a clock.

Among the sites cleaned, above and below water, were Windy Point, Hippie Hollow and Mansfield Dam. Divers also took boats out to Big and Little Devil's Cove and Starnes Island.

"We know during all the partying going on in Little Devil's Cove during the summertime, people lose a lot of stuff, and people throw a lot of stuff overboard unfortunately, specifically beer cans," said Nik Popov, a diver with Oak Hill Scuba.

He said their shop has consistently brought out 50 to 75 divers each year since the program began. In his 11 years participating, he said he's seen a video recorder, vacuum cleaners and a saddle recovered from the lake bottom.

Following the morning cleanup, another several dozen volunteers helped man the post-celebration at Carlos 'N Charlie's, where raffle prizes and awards for the most unique items were given out.

The item that claimed most unique found along the shoreline was a broken Ganesh Hindu statue. And, for the irony of the find, the item awarded most unique found during a dive was the lid of a recycling bin.



Drew Pope shows off the kite he found underwater.