

Jesse Bruen
Internship Report
Summer 2013

My summer internship allowed me the opportunity to form a visual narrative of a particularly unique underground spring, located in Jasper, TN, known as the “Blue Hole.” I became involved in the project through the help of Jasper resident and Sewanee professor of Environmental Studies, Daniel Carter. Professor Carter’s close relation with the town of Jasper allowed me swift access to Jasper’s Water Treatment Plant and the adjacent natural spring.

The homes and businesses in the town of Jasper, along with other surrounding towns, rely on the spring as an important source of water. As the spring meets the earth’s surface it forms a pool of water a couple hundred feet in length. The pool is fed with water through a large underwater cave. Town folk lore has long described the cave as being bottomless until recent exploration of the cave provided an understanding of its actual depth.

The project’s objective was to develop a short place-based video documentary about the Blue Hole spring in Jasper, TN. The documentary could eventually be used to provide local schools and museums a film that tells a story of the many unique aspects of the natural spring. A visual and verbal narrative of the previously unexplored cave was formed through video interviews of scuba diver Jason Richards who was the first to explore the underwater world. As of March 16, 2013, Richards has discovered more than 10,800 feet of underwater passage, making it the longest underwater cave in the United States outside of Florida. In the video, Richards describes the never-before-seen underwater cave and details the experiences of his

dives. To accompany the interview footage I gathered, Richards has provided me with footage shot inside the cave during his dives.

In addition to the narrative formed by Richards, the short documentary includes interviews of the water treatment plant employees. The plant forms the connection between the unique natural spring and the people utilizing the water. Interviews of employees like Sam Sharpe help form a verbal understanding of the plant and its daily activities.

As a senior art major at Sewanee, this internship gave me the chance to apply what I had learned in the classroom, to real life documentary work. Having worked closely with the time based media among my more abstract art work, the documentary offered me an opportunity to exit the classroom and work closely with various professionals in forming a visual narrative of the Blue Hole. The process of filming and editing the short documentary together helped me learn many new lessons as a videographer, in particular the technique of combing several verbal narratives into a single unified story.

Getting the opportunity to shoot and edit a film in a real world environment has helped me in developing the necessary skills to pursue a career in videography after Sewanee, yet I know I have much to still learn about the visual media and its power in telling a story. I am excited to apply what I have learned from the documentary to my senior thesis work this year.