

Episode 38: Henry was attacked by an alligator

Henry is an educator in the field of marine science. And as you'll hear when we're talking, it's not just his job. It's his life work. It's as much a passion for him as it is a career.

When he goes diving in a river and kind of rummaging around the bottom, he never really knows what he'll find. What he expects to find mostly are rocks and sand. What he HOPES to find are ancient shark teeth, or even the skeletal remains of prehistoric creatures.

What he did NOT expect to find was a live alligator. But one day he did, and he was lucky enough to live through it and be able to tell us the story today.

And I want to say a big thank you to the patrons of this show. If you'd like to join them and support the show, you can do that at [WhatWasThatLike.com/support](https://www.whatwasthatlike.com/support). And if you hang around after today's episode, I'll tell you about the podcast that I support through Patreon.

But first, let's hear about what happened to Henry.

Scott

How many years have you been diving?

Henry

It has probably been about 13 years.

Scott

So you're pretty experienced...

Henry

Yeah. I've got a little bit of experience now.

Scott

Can you tell me what is a typical dive like? I mean, are you going from a boat? How is it set up?

Henry

Well, it really depends on what kind of diving it is. That's kind of the great thing about this hobby - there are so many different kinds. You can really, really do all sorts of different things. I've got friends of mine who are cave divers. I have friends of mine who go spearfishing, and I've done some of these things as well. I'm a scuba instructor. I was at the Keys this past weekend, diving on reefs, teaching my students how to dive, and having a great time. Fossil diving is a different, different ballgame.

Scott

How is it different?

Henry

Well, for starters, where we dive is someplace where most people wouldn't even get into the water. We like to call it 'black water river' because the water is black - you can't really see too much. In Florida, there are quite a few creatures that inhabit that river as well.

Scott

Which we're about to find out, right?

Henry

Yes, exactly. We do use a boat sometimes. Most of the time, we use something called a mud boat with, basically, a little fiberglass or metal hull with a long extended motor off the back so that we can go in shallow and deeper waters because the river is not maintained or anything by any boating authority - there are stumps, trees, and all sorts of things floating around in there. So, we were on a boat...

Scott

So, this is what you would call a blackwater river. When diving, obviously, you need to bring light with you to see whatever is down there.

Henry

Exactly. We were looking for fossils. One of the amazing things about Florida is the sheer amount of history, geology, and biology that we have. Florida has been above water and underwater several times over the last several thousand and millions of years. So, we have a huge collection of natural history that can be found just underneath our feet. It's pretty cool. The reason we're in rivers specifically is that they cut through those layers of sediment all the way down, tumbling together and exposing these fossils. So, that's what we were really looking for. It could be things from a 20 million-year-old megalodon shark teeth. I don't know if you've ever seen that recent movie with Jason Statham in it - it's not accurate, but it did have a megalodon in it. That was a giant 60-foot shark. So, we're looking for teeth from those guys. We're looking for Mako teeth - another kind of shark. There are different kinds of sharks. There are also vertebrate fossils and things like that. Most people don't really know how much history is found in Florida, but we actually had Columbian mammoths, which are actually bigger than Woolly mammoths running around in Florida about 20,000 years ago.

Scott

So you could theoretically find a mammoth skeleton in the river...

Henry

Yup. And I have.

Scott

You're a teacher of marine sciences. Do you use the stuff that you find in your classrooms?

Henry

Yup. They are fantastic learning tools. I actually take my kids to an area where they can collect their own fossils and go sifting for sharp teeth, obviously, in a safe area. They get to explore and put their hands on the natural world around them and feel so lucky to live there.

Scott

That's more exciting than any field trip I went on when I was a kid, I think. Yeah. So when you're in the river, you're not snorkeling, you're actually in full scuba gear.

Henry

We are in full scuba gear. I have a helmet, lights, tanks, etc. A lot of stuff going on. A lot of equipment. It's very equipment-intensive.

Scott

Now, we're going to talk about what happened on Saturday, March 23, 2019, just earlier this year. You were on the Peace River in Florida - that's a long river. Roughly, where were you? What was the nearest town?

Henry

There's a little town called Arcadia - some people are familiar with that. If you're in the Tampa area, it would be about 2 hours south and a little bit east - more towards the middle of the state.

Scott

Let's give people a picture of the size of this river. How deep is it? How far across was it?

Henry

That really depends on location. Where the Peace River dumps out into the Gulf is quite wide. In some of these narrow areas and bends where I was hunting for shark teeth and other fossils, it may only be 10 or 20 feet across. Again, the depth hugely varied. There are a few spots that we would go to - literally, at that time of year - that may only be 3 or 4 inches of water. Then, it goes down to 10, 20, and 30 feet. So, it's quite a range.

Scott

Yeah, that's a big range.

Henry

Then, this river actually changes based on rainfall quite radically. It'll go up and down a good - depending on the season - 5, 10, or 20 feet, especially when there's a hurricane running around.

Scott

Yeah, that's drastic.

Henry

Yeah, exactly. There's actually - we call it - fossil growing season and fossil hunting season. When there's lots of rain in August and over the summer, we call that fossil growing season because the water raises quite a bit. It's not really possible to dive - I did try one time. It's not really possible because the water's just too fast and too deep. It's great because it starts to erode more of the bottom and the banks and expose more formations. So, that's the fossil growing season. Then, there's what we call a mini-season. At about this time of year, actually, there's about - again, depending on how dry it is - a few weeks where you can go out again. Then, it's not so great until February or March. It's a little bit more complicated.

Scott

When you say 'this time of year', just so people know, we're recording this in, like, mid-October. So, that's the mini-season you're talking about...

Henry

Exactly. Last year, I was able to dive into the river. Actually, I dove it again 2 weeks ago. That's actually the earliest I've really been able to dive it in a while just because it's been so dry. So normally, the mini-season wouldn't start until about late October or the beginning of November.

Scott

Had you dived at the section of the river where you were at that day?

Henry

Well, that exact section, no. I've done different spots along that several miles stretch. We were actually trying to look for a new area because of the people that I was with. I was doing some exploration. So, I hadn't dived at that exact spot where the incident happened.

Scott

Who was with you that day?

Henry

I had a good friend of mine, Justin. We've been diving together - hunting for fossils, arrowheads, and things like that - for a while now. I had Justin and this YouTuber named Jake or DallMYD. This was my second time meeting Jake. He came down to dive with us to, kind of, see what we're all about. He found us through Instagram.

Scott

So he must be local here in Florida as well then?

Henry

No, he's actually not. He's based in Georgia, but he does come down to Florida a lot to do adventures and things like that. His thing is looking in rivers for what he calls a river treasure. He's found iPhones, rings, gold, and a few firearms actually as well.

Scott

That's kind of fun. You never know what you're gonna find in there.

Henry

Yeah, exactly. I have found some weird things and man-made things.

Scott

Do you usually see alligators in this river?

Henry

Again, it's year-dependent, but yes, we see gators on the sides of the banks all the time. It's one of the dangers that are, kind of, ever-present. We see water moccasins pretty commonly as well. Most of the time, the gators weren't too big there. There were maybe 3 or 4 floaters sitting on the sides. They usually disappear when they see our boat coming by. Of course, I have seen a few here and there - the 10-11 footers. It is something that we've always been nervous about. I've been diving this river for— I think this will be my 5th year in this river. I've been very nervous about gators for the longest time in the beginning and I think that I probably got a little bit complacent.

Scott

Yeah, because if you didn't have any problem with them in 5 years, it's probably fine.

Henry

Yeah. I've known a friend of mine who has actually, kind of, started me into this hobby. He has been diving it for about 25 years and never had any incident.

Scott

He started you in this hobby. Does he feel guilty now?

Henry

Well, we joked around about it a lot.

Scott

Just take us through what happened that day and how it all played out.

Henry

Jake had been diving the day before with another friend of mine and they hadn't found too much. Jake was down here to make a YouTube video and to try and get into fossil diving. At that time, he had never found a megalodon tooth - a giant shark tooth - before. He knew that Justin, my friend, Rick, and I had been finding quite a few of these and posting them on social media, so he contacted us and was, basically, trying to see how it would all work and try it out for himself. He went on a Friday with some friends and they found a few things, but nothing spectacular. So, I guess, they called out the big guns - they called me and Justin - because we like to call ourselves usually pretty lucky. So, we planned this trip together - just the three of us - on my friend's little mud boat that I was talking about. We were gearing up the boat. As I said earlier, it's equipment-intensive. We have to bring a lot of stuff. We got 2 air tanks for each of us. We like to dive with steel tanks because we can put a little bit more air inside them. So, there were 6 tanks. Each tank is probably 30 or 40 pounds - pretty heavy. There's also all the buckets, BCDs, which are the jackets that we wear, regulators, coolers, and all these stuff that we crammed in this boat. It's not a huge boat.

We were doing a lot of work putting wetsuits on and hoods because it can be a little chilly. It was March so I was wearing 2 wetsuits because I get cold pretty easily, so I was double-layering myself, which actually turned out to be a pretty good idea. I was putting on my wetsuit and Jake was putting on his - he classically goes out with a - camo wetsuit and, kind of, a military-style vest, I would say, for sticking odds and ends in - tools, screwdrivers, things to find and pry under the water. His wetsuit was actually camo, so he was joking about how alligators wouldn't be able to see him, so they will go straight for me because I was wearing an all-black wetsuit with an all-black hood, kind of an all-black helmet, and an all-black fin. Actually, no, my fins were green but everything else was all black. I remember him saying something about me being a seal and a tasty snack. That was actually how we started the day off, so it was a little bit fortuitous there.

Scott

Yeah, if this is a novel, that would be a foreshadowing.

Henry

Yes, exactly. So we were joking around and that didn't actually stop there. We may have been asking for this to happen because, in the water - again, I said this was my second time meeting Jake - we were, kind of, messing with each other, grabbing each other's legs and pulling on them whenever we saw each other under the water. Again, remember, it's a blackwater river, so you can't see anything - it's pitch black - other than the small bubble of light that you have with your flashlights. So, any bump or pull or squeeze, kind of, freaks you out a little bit. We had been messing around doing that, that day, as well - it was kind of funny there, I'd say we probably went a good 2 or 3 hours of time under the water without really finding too much Jake had found a small Megalodon tooth. I found a small couple of random fossils, bones, and things like that. As you start to get into the hobby, you start recognizing a lot of different things. I would assume that most of your listeners don't know what a tape player is, or any of that stuff. We found a few small odds and ends but nothing crazy - not the big YouTube video-making item that we really wanted. Jake has seen pictures of my friend and me coming up with Columbian

mammoth legs, tusks, jaws, and really crazy stuff, so that's obviously what he was hoping. He doesn't really know about the hours and days of work leading up to those, but he wanted something big, right?

Scott

Right. So he's thinking of finding great stuff and also, hopefully, making a viral video.

Henry

Exactly. So, I wanted to live up to my end. I wanted to show him something awesome. I want to be part of that process, so I made a suggestion - it turned out to be not one I'll be making again - that would be the method of discovery for trying to find different spots. We took them to a few spots that we knew but those just didn't pan out, and that happens sometimes. I've gotten to a spot where I pulled out a ton of really cool stuff one year and then, the next year, it's covered in sand. The river bottom changes every year, so it's kind of tough. We took them to some well-known spots that we hadn't touched in a while but none of those really panned out, so I suggested drifting backward with the current. One person would kind of stay with the boat to move it every time - doing, kind of, a leapfrog action, if you can kind of imagine that. I would get in the water and drift backward and they would be with the boat. I'd pop up and they'd bring the boat to me. Then, the next person would drift backward. We actually had 2 people drifting and 1 person, kind of, with the boat. Basically, we were just trying to scan the bottom for gravel beds - areas where there's obviously a lot of fossil material.

We were looking for anywhere where there's gravel, I would say, that is bigger than a quarter. That's a good sign of, maybe, other things in that area because a lot of the river is just silt and sand. You're trying to avoid that because you're never gonna find anything there. So I said, "Alright, let's leapfrog down this river and just scan the bottom." Whenever we hit some gravel, we can anchor up the boat and take a further exploration and further look at that area. So, that was working for a little bit. I was drifting backward and found a spot. We'd explore the area. We found a few more cool things but, again, nothing crazy. I'd say that it was about one o'clock in the afternoon.

I was drifting backward and trying to find a new spot. At first, I sincerely thought that it was Jake messing with me again. I didn't realize at that time that I was the furthest one down the line. There was no one behind me. I felt a really, really strong squeeze on my leg and on my foot. For a split second, I was like, "Oh man, it's Jake again." Then, it got stronger and stronger and stronger. That's when I realized I had something I did not ever want to experience attached to the end of my leg.

It happened really fast at that time, but it's strange. Time seemed to have sped up and slowed down my memory, so those first few seconds of just the crushing and squeezing feeling are really slow. I was thinking "Oh, is that my friend? No, this is way too strong." Then, it sped up. I remember grabbing and inflating my BC - the jacket that allows divers to go up and stay at the top with a lot of air. I remember grabbing my controller for that and inflating it. It's black. We were, probably, maybe, in 7 feet of water at that time, I'd say. I remember grabbing my jacket under my BC, pressing that controller, inflating, and just kind of flailing around in the darkness. I started getting spun around in the river - it was more of a constriction in the river because it really wasn't that wide at that point. I was spinning, tumbling, and inflating my jacket. I just felt this twisting motion on my leg and I just knew that I had to go with it - go with the flow and don't resist it. At the same time, I was just kicking, kicking, kicking, kicking with my right leg and trying to pull my left leg out from whatever it was - it ended up being an alligator.

We got to the top. That's when time slows down for a second again, at least, in my memory. I looked at the end of my leg. Attached to it was this huge alligator head on my leg and I was kicking and kicking. If you've ever seen an alligator feed - if you've been to one of the alligators' shows or the Everglades or anything like that - whenever they're thrown food or whenever they're attaching themselves and trying to bite on the food, sometimes they do something called a readjustment bite. They'll shake their head back and forth, open their jaws, and clamp down to try to get a better grip. I was fighting, kicking, and pushing with my free leg and that alligator did the adjustment bite. It opened his mouth just a little bit - not a ton - and I'm able to pull my foot a little bit further out. Then, it clamped down again - luckily for me, it was on my fin. I was able to rip my foot out of the fin. I honestly don't remember getting out of the water. All of the sudden, I was just free from that alligator and, then, I was on shore. I don't remember anything in between there. I must have walked on water.

Scott

What would have been the gator's plan of attack? How do they kill you?

Henry

They do something called a death roll. It's an apex predator. Crocodiles and alligators have been around for millions and millions of years. They were around when the dinosaurs were here. So, they've got a system and it works. Usually, they go for prey that they can overpower. Then, they twist pieces off and do something called a death roll. They latch onto a limb or onto a piece of whatever their whole meal is and, then, they start spinning and ripping it off. They don't have sharp teeth like sharks. They don't slice and cut. They crunch, rip and pull. I knew that I could not allow that to happen. I had to make myself too much trouble to be worth it. That's what I did. I was kicking and pushing and pulling and fighting every second.

Scott

Was it a factor that you had scuba gear on and you could breathe more easily? If somebody was just out swimming, they would have a limited time under the water before they would start to drown.

Henry

I think part of what saved me is my training even though it's not meant for something like this necessarily. As a scuba instructor, I'm always telling people, "The number one killer of divers is panic. It's not running out of air. It's not getting trapped in a shipwreck or underneath a log. It's doing those things and then panicking." So, yes, I was fighting. I was scared but the fear didn't really catch up to me until I was on shore. I knew that I had to fight. I knew I couldn't let go of that regulator. I knew that air was my life. If it had twisted off my foot or stuffed me underneath the log somewhere, I can still breathe if I had my regulator. That was the most important thing. That's what I teach my students - hold on to your regulator, if something happens - if you get pulled into a current, if you get caught up in a line - you need to keep your air source with you at all times. That's what I did. So, that part of my gear and training definitely had an impact on how I was able to survive this ordeal.

Also, remember when I said that I was wearing 2 wetsuits because it was cold and I'm, kind of, a big baby with that? I was wearing about 8 millimeters of neoprene on me at that time. I was wearing 2 wetsuits - one was a 5-millimeter and one was a 3-millimeter. So it's almost like having blubber on my leg. It wasn't able to penetrate as deeply into my leg and get that great of a purchase. I honestly don't think he was really trying to hunt me down. He probably didn't know that I was even in the water until I shoved my foot into his mouth. As I said, it was in a narrow restriction of the river - only about seven feet deep.

Scott

So you may have just drifted...

Henry

I may have just drifted. That's what I am thinking. Every part of me was black. I was wearing a black wetsuit, black helmet, and black hood. Everything was black - even my gloves were black - except for my fins. My fins were, like, bright neon yellow. So, maybe, as he saw that fin fly past him with the current, maybe he thought that was a fish or something that he could take down because he didn't see the rest of me because I was all kind of camouflage there. That's what I'm thinking. So, it jumped onto it and, then, may have done that readjustment when it realized that I was a bit more than what it was hoping for.

Scott

How would it have been different if he had grabbed your arm instead of your leg?

Henry

Oh, man. I don't even want to imagine.

Scott

You can still kick with both legs but--

Henry

I could kick but what would I be kicking? If he grabbed my arm, I'd be kicking his legs or his tail. Maybe, I wouldn't have done anything. The fact that he grabbed my leg meant I knew exactly where to kick to try and get its face.

Scott

And even better, the lower part of your leg.

Henry

Exactly. The bite was actually right across my heel. You can actually see tooth marks on my foot and, I guess, my calf area. So, it was right across that heel joint right where the fin meets the foot, basically.

Scott

So you got away from him. At that point, your main goal is just to get out of the water. Did he pursue you at all?

Henry

Nope. I remember seeing his face on my foot. I remember kicking and kicking him, his whole readjustment bite, and then pulling free. After I pulled free, again, I blanked out for a second there. I just teleported from being out of his mouth to be on the shore. Then, I don't see him at all until, maybe, 2 minutes later when I was still waiting for my friends - they haven't realized this yet. Two minutes later, I saw his head pop up on the other side of the river - that was the last time I saw him. A few minutes after that, Jake finally realized what was happening. He came over and the alligator disappeared. It actually took several minutes for anyone to notice. God forbid, if my foot had been taken off and I was bleeding out, it would have taken quite some time for someone to realize because it took maybe 5 minutes for Jake to pop his head up the first time. I was, kind of, shocked at that time, obviously. So I kind of calmly said to him, "Hey, I've been bitten by an alligator." He was pretty far away from me, so he didn't really understand what

I was saying. He just saw me sitting on the bank. He actually went back down. He went back down and started diving for another 5 minutes. Then, he popped back up and saw that I was in the exact same spot on the bank. I said it a little bit louder the second time. If you watched his video, at that point, he realized, "Oh, I need to get over there now." And my friend, Justin, was also underwater somewhere else further up the river.

Scott

So what were your injuries? I mean, how bad was the bite?

Henry

I got so lucky. I probably got the best-case scenario. I got a great story out of it. I didn't really get too much damage on my leg. I had tooth marks going across my foot. One was a little deep where it actually tore further through both my fin and my booties and two smaller holes - very small scars - on my calf area. I think that's because I was wearing so much wetsuit up there but I was only wearing a very thin thin boot. I still use those boots. I get to tell that story to my students. I can show them the holes in my boots and it's pretty funny. I have some nerve damage in my foot. I can't feel too much on the right side of my left foot all around that scar from the crushing damage. As I said, they don't tear and cut like sharks do, for example - they crush. So, when I went to the hospital, their biggest thing was trying to figure out if I had broken any bones. I didn't get to the hospital for hours, actually.

Scott

Because you were not really near a hospital...

Henry

I was several miles upriver from the nearest boat ramp. So, Jake had to get me and my friend, Justin. Justin and Jake pulled the boat over to me. We had to load up all our gear and then drive me all the way to the boat ramp.

Scott

Yeah, you obviously can't leave everything out there.

Henry

Right, exactly. I wasn't bleeding. It was cold. So, my foot was already kind of blue because the water is pretty cold. I didn't bleed out too much for a while. I just remember that I was sitting at the bow of the boat. Justin and Jake were driving me back and we passed a group of, maybe, 15 sifters - those are people who go out with something that's almost like grates - chicken wire and wooden frames. They were digging with shovels in the river and trying to look for teeth and other things as well. So, we passed this group of sifters. I was sitting on the bow holding my foot with blood, kind of, welling up between my fingers. We were, kind of, shouting about what happened to them. I remember one woman saying "Oh, hell no. I'm out of here." and she immediately got out of the river onto the bank, and pulled her younger son with her. I got a decent laugh out of that.

Scott

If I'm a parent and out there with my kid and there's a rogue gator going around attacking people, I'd get out of there too.

Henry

Yeah. Obviously, a gator would never have anything to do with a group of 15 people walking, standing around, and making a lot of noise. It took probably an hour for us to get back from the

dive spot. Then, we still had to load our cars. We all drove separately - all three of us - so I wasn't about to just leave my car. I had no way to get out of there without driving myself. Luckily, it was my left foot, so I was able to use my right foot and drove for 2 hours back-to-back to St. Pete. That's kind of when I decided, well, you know, I should probably get this. Because gators have Alligators have notoriously dirty mouths. You know, that's what I was wondering

Scott

Just the fact that it was in a black river... what was the concern for bacteria infection?

Henry

Big concern. I went to a hospital in St. Petersburg. Again, this is actually pretty humorous after the fact. I walked in with no shoes because I didn't even know where they ended up. I had flip-flops at some point, but I lost those. So, I walked in with no shoes, in my bathing suit soaking wet, with blackwater river dirt smeared all over my face. I walked in there telling the front desk that I got bit by an alligator. This was a hospital that is nowhere near where you would probably get bitten by an alligator.

Scott

So, you don't get too many of those.

Henry

No. I remember, when I finally got into a room - it didn't take long - the nurse came up to me and she was like, "You got bit by what?!" "An alligator." Then, as I was waiting for the doctor, I heard across the hallway from behind the curtain, "We have a gator bite. Yeah, a real gator bite!" So, I heard all the staff of the hospital talking to each other. Apparently, I was their one and only ever gator bite. They've been in operation for quite a few years, so it really doesn't happen that much. There's only been, maybe, 400 In the last 50 years - something like that. It doesn't happen very often.

Scott

Yeah, I was surprised at the numbers on that. You would think that it must happen all the time, especially here in Florida where people would see them on the golf course or whatever. I mean, I have friends who have a lake behind their house and they would have trappers come and take gators away because they're just crawling around in their regular neighborhood. In spite of all that, Gator attacks really aren't that common.

Henry

I was also very surprised when I looked at the numbers on this. I did the same exact thing. I went on Google, typed in 'alligators', found all the reports, and found that it doesn't really happen that much - at least someone messing around and trying to grab the gators,

Scott

Right. Trying to provoke something.

Henry

Exactly.

Scott

So did you have an infection or any problem so far?

Henry

When I got to the hospital, they immediately flushed out the wound and cleaned it out. Luckily for me, I guess, because of the nerve damage, I didn't really feel them probing around my biggest wound because they were flushing it out, sticking tubes and other things inside the wound, and cleaning it out. They put me on a round of antibiotics for about 2 weeks, but they couldn't stitch it up, unfortunately. With bites like that, they're really nervous about stitching in bacteria, closing up the wound, and then having an infection set in because it can't naturally flush itself out. So, it's kind of raised and bumpy because they couldn't stitch it up.

Scott

That's kind of cool, though. You can show people your scar and say, "Hey, this is proof that this happened."

Henry

Yeah, exactly.

Scott

It was kind of fortunate that, when this happened, you had Jake there. How many subscribers does he have on his YouTube channel?

Henry

I think he actually just broke 8 million the other week.

Scott

That is pretty incredible. He must be regretting not getting the actual attack.

Henry

I had a GoPro on, but I just didn't turn it on at that time. I could have had it all from my point of view.

Scott

If that would have been on, you could have had 8 million subscribers on your own. He did film you calling out from the bank of the river and him saying that he's on his way. I'll probably just put that video on the website in the show notes for this episode so that people can watch that.

Henry

Yeah, Jake would love to, of course. I think the video got, at least, a million views already.

Scott

There was something with the flipper. Did you lose a flipper or what?

Henry

Oh, yes, I forgot to mention that. The alligator that took my fin disappeared off with it. Of course, I thought I'd never see that again. I've lost things in that river before too. I've actually lost a whole set of fins before when I left on the side of the bank and an airboat came by and flushed the fins right into the water and they got taken by the current and disappeared. So, I never expected to see that fin again, but I got contacted on my Instagram account. I have an account on Instagram for posting all these things, @thinkseek - think about what I want to seek and what I want to hunt for. I had someone private message me on that profile with a picture of a fin saying, "Hey, I saw Jake's video. Is this your fin?" He had actually gone out snorkeling looking for shark teeth the next day and the video didn't come out until about a week later. He had gone snorkeling the next day, found that fin, picked it up, threw it in his truck, and forgot about it until

he saw the video and recognized me, the story, and the film because I think, in the video, I've lived my shit, stood up, and talked about something like that. So, he messaged me and said, "Hey, is this your fin?" It was a picture of my exact fin. It even got holes in the side of it from where the teeth marks entered it. I was talking with him and we were gonna meet up but we, kind of, never really got around. Summer was happening so, as a teacher, I had my summer break. I was doing a lot of teaching classes and some other things. We just never really got around to it.

About 2 weeks ago, I was out on a friend's property digging for arrowheads - that's another thing that I do. Aside from looking for fossils, I look for Native American artifacts on private property. I was out there on my friend's property looking for arrowheads, and he invited another one of his mutual friends and their friends. It turned out that friend's friend of a friend was the guy who found my fin. We were 20 feet apart - we didn't even realize that for a while. We were 20 feet apart, digging our own holes and looking for artifacts. We just start chatting about what other things we do and blah, blah, blah. Somehow, we got on the topic of looking for fossils. Naturally, I pulled out my alligator story because it's a great story. He was like, "Wait a minute, are you 'so-and-so'? I have your fin in my truck!"

Scott

That's incredible!

Henry

Yeah, exactly. It's a small world.

Scott

Yeah. It sounds like the fossil geek community is small.

Henry

yeah, pretty small.

Scott

Exactly. What could you have done to avoid this other than not going in the river?

Henry

A few months after the incident, I can kind of laugh and talk about it. To be honest, I was pretty freaked out in the first week or two. I knew that this was something that I still wanted to keep doing. I didn't want to get so psyched out and let so much time go by to never get back in the water. I kind of knew that I had to get back on the horse. I think, maybe, three weeks later after that incident, my friend said, "Hey, I know all this happened, but are you interested in diving again?" I said, "Yes, let's go. Let's do it right now. I need to get back in the water." So, I was back in there and moving a little bit more cautiously - I still do. I was in the water again two weeks ago from now. I just knew how to get back in there.

Scott

You were just drifting and you probably just, kind of, drifted into him. He couldn't see you coming and you couldn't see him. So, it's just something that might happen, right?

Henry

Yeah, exactly. It's a risk. I can minimize the risk by not covering as much area in such a way. I was in the water drifting backward. We would go a quarter-mile or a half-mile stretches at a time as we were leapfrogging. That would cover a huge amount of distance, so you will 100% see an

alligator somewhere in that region, hopefully, on the side - and maybe behind you. Historically, we would bang on the boat, throw rocks in the water, and try and make a lot of noise. Then, we would move up current and give whatever was near us plenty of time to get out of the way. That's what I've done since. I don't think I'll ever do the drifting backward thing again.

It is inherently a risk and I was stupid enough to take it. I love collecting. I love the history. I've found some amazing things. Actually a friend of mine - his name is Rick - we donated a Columbian mammoth signed to the Florida Museum of Natural History last year. They're using it to write a paper. I had it in my classroom for a while - not the whole thing, obviously. I had a leg bone, some vertebrae, one of its tusks, and all these things. So, it's something that I personally love as a hobby. I think it can also contribute a little bit to others in terms of education on Florida's natural history.

Scott

It's something you're passionate about, so you obviously want to keep doing it for sure.

Henry

Exactly.

Scott

Something just occurred to me, though. When you're out in the river and you find these things that, obviously, have historical or geographical value. Whose property is that?

Henry

That's a great question. Due to the sheer number of shark teeth that are found in Florida and other places - at least in Florida law - you don't have to have any special license or anything like that to have shark teeth and collect those. For vertebrate fossils like the mammoth - I found the ancient giant sloth teeth, claws, and things like that - you need to have a fossil license. You can get that through the University of Florida, and the Gainesville museum. It's not expensive - it's about \$5 a year for that license. Every time I find something that's vertebrate - anything that I find that is not shark or fish - we document and then we inform. You're supposed to - not everybody does - document and inform the university. If they want one of our finds as part of having that license, they can take that and utilize it for scientific purposes. They didn't ask for the mammoth, but they kind of hinted that they would appreciate it - they could have taken it. Dr. Hallberg is the guy who runs the entire state program. I met up with him a few times now. They requested the Mammoth, so my friend and I donated it to them.

Scott

Yeah, being good stewards of these kinds of items, it's pretty obvious that that's what you'd want to do, I'm sure.

Henry

Exactly. Of course, there is some knowledge to be gained from the fossils and from what is found. Unfortunately, with river finds, often, location is kind of not as useful because the river tumbles and then pushes things together. We have a 10 million-year-old shark's teeth next to a 10,000-year-old mammoth, so it's necessary to record, like, the exact location and the general areas, but you can't get too specific with that.

Scott

Right.

Henry

There are microfossils and things. So, when I gave the leg bone to Dr. Hallberg, he was able to examine that and look for things like ancient pollen spores that were embedded all the way up inside the bone. So, there are things that you can do to help date in relation to other things.

Scott

So people like that must be pretty happy that stupid people are going out in the river with alligators to find these things and bring them back. Then, they would say, "That's great!"

Henry

We've talked about that before. He said, "Yep, you guys go ahead. I will not be in that river. Let me know what you find."

Scott

It is a great story. For this episode, we'll have Jake's video and your Instagram link on there. If people want to follow you and see what you're up to, the Instagram handle is @thinkseek. We'll look forward to seeing what great things you find in the future. Hopefully, no more alligators.

Henry

Hopefully.

Scott

All right, hope you enjoyed that. Treasure hunting and fossil hunting does sound fun, but personally I think I prefer hobbies that don't involve potential alligator attacks.

Now before we wrap up this episode, I wanted to tell you about a podcast that I listen to and support. It's called Darknet Diaries and it's hosted by a guy named Jack Rysider. The tagline for this show is "True stories from the dark side of the internet". For me, it's a great show because of two factors:

First, it's all true stories. Jack confirms the facts for his show, just like I make sure the stories here on my podcast are true. And you know I do love some crazy true stories!

And second, for me anyway, it deals with some subject matter that interest me – computers, the internet, technology, hacking – all that stuff. A recent episode was about a guy who put credit card skimmers on gas pumps, and how that scam usually works. But even more scary – now there are credit card skimmers on e-commerce websites, and there's really no way for you to know it. Darknet Diaries is over 50 episodes dealing with all kinds of cool stuff like that, which you won't find on other shows.

Jack started this podcast as just a one-man show, doing all the work himself. I can tell you from first-hand experience, it's a lot of work. And in the beginning it's difficult because you don't really have an audience. You have to just keep at it, keep promoting, and keep putting out good, quality content and eventually the masses will find the show. That's what has happened to Jack and Darknet Diaries, and I see a lot of similarities with my podcast, What Was That Like. It just keeps growing as more and more people discover it. Now, Jack has a team of people and he's able to do the podcast full time.

And Darknet Diaries has a Patreon account, and I support that show every month because I really like the content and I think it's worth paying for, to make sure it keeps going. So I would encourage you to check it out – you can get it on any podcast player, or at DarknetDiaries.com.

And if you like THIS show, I invite you to become a supporter at [WhatWasThatLike.com/support](https://www.whatwasthatlike.com/support). I really appreciate it! And I'll see you in two weeks.