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Divers Arrested and Charged with Removing Artifacts from River

Posted by: Cindy on Oct 23, 2003 AD - 03:33 AM

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Two divers who removed a pre-Civil War-era rifle from the bottom of the Alabama River were arrested and charged with breaking an Alabama law protecting antiquities. Selma police charged the owner of Birmingham's Southern Skin Diving Supply dive shop Stephen David Phillips and Perry Thomas Massie, the head of a California-based cable television outdoors channel. The men were charged with taking or possessing cultural artifacts without a permit, a felony offense.

The divers were arrested Monday near the Edmund Pettus Bridge. Both were later released on \$1,000 bond. Their boat and vehicle were confiscated. Police noticed the diving most of the day Monday.

"We're not criminals. I don't sell any relics," Phillips told the news. Phillips explained that he believes that the 1999 state law is intended to protect Indian burial grounds or shipwrecks not the Alabama River.

Investigator Mark Rouleau, assistant district supervisor for the Department of Conservation, told the press that the law passed in 1999 prohibits the removal, distributing or collecting of artifacts found underground. Rouleau said the two were dredging the river bottom looking for artifacts. However, Phillips described it as a "salvage" operation.

Four 5-gallon buckets of material taken from the river were taken from the two men. The most valuable item appeared to be a pre-Civil War-era rifle. Rouleau said it is not illegal for someone to take artifacts, such as arrowheads, found above ground, but any digging for them requires a special permit. Phillip meanwhile explains that he was unaware that a permit was required to dive in the river which he has done for 30 years.

For more details visit the full story at: <http://www.tuscaloosaneews.com/>

Source: Tuscaloosa News



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