

Woman disappears in the surf at Long Beach

Drowning assumed after extensive search

By NATALIE ST. JOHN
EO Media Group

LONG BEACH, Wash. — A 25-year-old woman from Seattle who went out for a swim with her boyfriend Wednesday night disappeared in the surf and is presumed dead.

The victim has not been publicly identified. She was the second person to drown on the peninsula this summer.

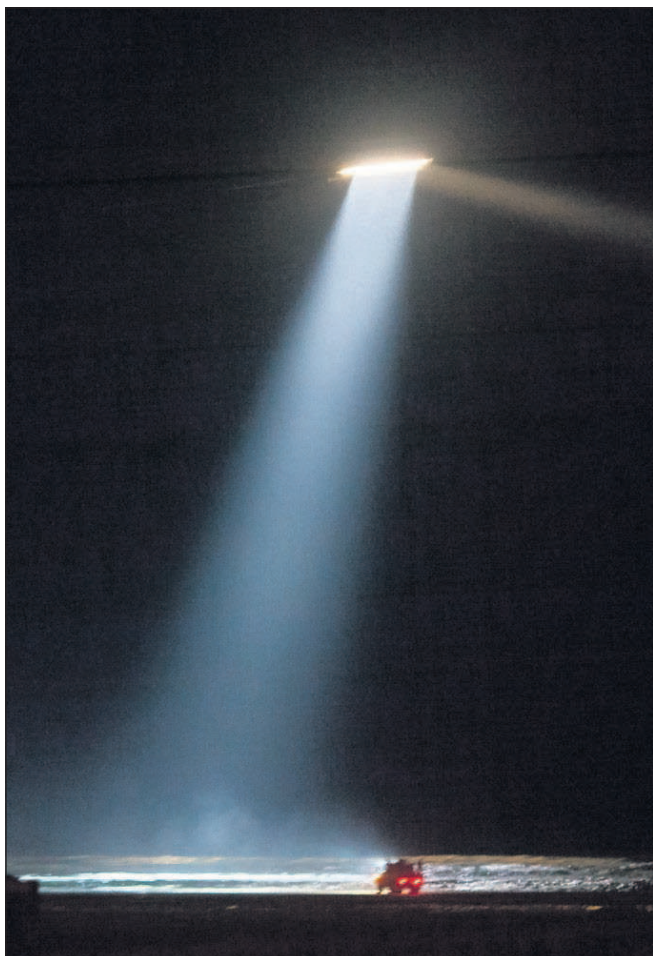
Police, fire, medical and surf rescue responders were first called to the beach at about 10:30 p.m. Wednesday night, after a male friend, who was with the woman when she disappeared, called 911.

According to emergency responders, the man and woman were staying at the Adrift Hotel and decided to go down to the beach sometime after dark. The man told responders that he and the woman decided to go for a dip in the ocean, probably at about 9:45 p.m. Within about 10 minutes of entering the water, the two became separated. The man searched for the woman in the waves and called for her for about five to 10 minutes. However, the night was dark and overcast, and even if it had been clear, the sliver of crescent moon would have provided very little light, so visibility was extremely low. Responders say the man realized he needed to call 911, but had left his cellphone back in his hotel room. He ran back to the hotel, called 911, then returned to the beach, where he worked with responders.

Invisible hazards

The incident started roughly 1½ hours before a fairly low tide. At the time, the air temperature and water temperature were both between about 55 and 60 degrees. According to various internet sources, a healthy person who is in 50 to 60-degree water typically reaches the point of exhaustion or unconsciousness in one to two hours, but can sometimes survive for as long as six hours. However, with many hazards underwater, including rolling logs and “crab holes,” as well as a powerful, but invisible rip current, most of the Peninsula’s dozens of drowning victims have succumbed to the water within an hour or so.

While the small waves Wednesday night likely appeared fairly harmless from shore, the low tide may have made it easier for the pair of friends to unwittingly venture near some hazards that



Damian Mulinix/For EO Media Group

A U.S. Coast Guard helicopter circles over the shoreline near the Sid Snyder approach early Thursday morning during the search for a woman who disappeared in the surf earlier in the night.

are usually covered by much deeper water.

Around 10:45 p.m., a rescuer asked the U.S. Coast Guard to dispatch a search helicopter. The Coast Guard quickly sent an MH-60 Jayhawk helicopter from Sector Columbia River in Warrenton, which arrived at about 11 p.m. The helicopter continued to sweep back and forth over the water in widening circles for the remainder of the search effort. As the evening wore on, the helicopter began venturing farther north and south, a possible indication that responders were shifting from a rescue effort to a recovery effort.

Suspending the search

With little chance of finding the woman amid the worsening weather conditions, rescuers suspended the ground search at about 12:40 a.m., and a convoy of emergency vehicles left the beach.

The Coast Guard helicopter continued searching until about 2 a.m., and a Coast Guard boat continued until about 3 a.m., when the fog made it impossible to continue. According to a statement from Coast Guard officials, a boat crew returned to the area at about sunrise Thursday, and stayed until about 9:30 a.m., when they made the difficult decision to suspend the search.

“Our thoughts go out to the family and friends of the missing woman,” said Capt. David

Berliner, deputy commander at Coast Guard Sector Columbia River. “The decision to suspend a search and rescue case is the hardest decision I make as a leader and Coast Guardsman, but I also know our crews did everything they could have done to have a better outcome.”

Responders said that it can take anywhere from days to weeks to recover the body of a drowning victim, and some never return to shore. Pacific County Coroner Mark McClain said officials will likely wait to see if the woman can be recovered before declaring her dead. In the meantime, the Pacific County Sheriff’s Office is handling the investigation of the incident.

Long Beach Volunteer Fire Department Chief Matt Bonney, a longtime fire volunteer who grew up on the Peninsula, said the incident had deeply affected many of the responders who helped out. He noted that some of the same people also responded to an early summer incident in which a middle school girl from Oregon drowned, and a summer 2014 incident in which a 10-year-old girl drowned and her younger brother narrowly survived.

“We feel it when we can’t recover someone. It’s always hard. It doesn’t matter how old they are. It sticks with you,” Bonney said. “... we feel for the family. We just want them to know they’re not alone in the loss.”

Miss Washington third runner up in Miss America pageant

Associated Press

ATLANTIC CITY, N.J. — Alicia Cooper, a 22-year-old from Clark County, Washington, was third runner-up Sunday night in the Miss America pageant.

“It was a pretty great feeling,” she told The Columbian by phone after the show. “I was very calm because I knew that everything was in God’s plan. ... I was just so blessed to be there. I am very happy with the outcome.”

Alexis Mather of Astoria, who represented Oregon, was not among the top 15 finalists.

Savvy Shields, Miss Arkansas, won the crown. She already had a clear vision of what she hopes America will look like at the end of her term next year.

“I hope that at the end of my year, we’re starting to reward politicians for compromise,” she said.

Shields was asked during her onstage interview what she thought of Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton; she answered that while both Clinton and Republican Donald Trump have done a good job thus far, “they also need to watch what they’re doing.”



Miss Washington Scholarship Fund
Alicia Cooper of Clark County, Wash., was third runner-up for Miss America.

Meeting reporters after the pageant, Shields elaborated.

“What I want both candidates to focus on is compromise,” she said. “Our country was founded on compromise. We’re in a state now where both parties just seem to be yelling at one another.”

She topped a field of 52 contestants to win the crown and the title of Miss America 2017, succeeding the outgoing Miss America Betty Cantrell.

Sunday’s finale was held on the 15th anniversary of the 9/11 terror attacks. Many of the contestants noted the solemn anniversary, professed strong support for America’s armed forces and struck patriotic themes.



Miss Oregon Scholarship Programs
Alexis Mather of Astoria is Miss Oregon.

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