

Second body found in Apple Creek

By JENNY MICHAEL Bismarck Tribune

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TOM STROMME/Tribune Burleigh County sheriff Pat Heinert, left, and Sgt. Trent Wangen stand on a walking bridge above the coffer dam on Apple Creek on 5-16 afternoon as dive teams search the creek for two missing men.

By TOM STROMME, Bismarck Tribune

By JENNY MICHAEL Bismarck Tribune

A second body has been located in Apple Creek near where dive teams had been searching for two men believed to have drowned more than a week ago.

Cory Berger and James Hellman, both of Bismarck, drowned in Apple Creek on May 6 after their canoe capsized at the Apple Creek Country Club. Officials with the Burleigh County Sheriff's Department believed their bodies were lodged in the water at a low-head dam over which the creek is flooding. High water on the creek delayed searches as various agencies looked for a way to slow the current enough to get dive teams in the water.

One body was found about 100 yards from the dam on Monday morning. Monday afternoon and evening, workers with the Burleigh County Highway Department were able to slow the water enough so divers could enter the creek in search of the second body. However, nothing was found in those searches.

Burleigh County Sheriff's Major Kelly Leben said the second body was located in approximately the same spot as the first at about 7 a.m. Tuesday. He said employees at Apple Creek Country Club alerted him to what they believed was the second body when he and another deputy went to the course to evaluate the situation and continue searching.

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Leben said it is possible the second body dislodged from one of the areas where divers were unable to go due to safety concerns Monday night, then floated down the creek. However, he said it is hard to say exactly what happened. The area where the body

was found Tuesday morning was thoroughly searched on Monday.

"You search the best you can and make sure the area you're searching is thoroughly covered," he said.

Autopsies will be performed on both bodies.

Leben was not sure yet what the searches, which began May 6 with reports of the capsized canoe, cost the county. The sheriff's department and other county agencies are in the business of helping people, and throughout the operation, the goal was to do everything they could to find the two men, he said.

"I think it's always important for the families of the victims so they can have closure," Leben said.

He said the operation was "probably one of the best collaborative efforts I've ever seen." The sheriff's department worked with Bismarck Rural Fire Department, Burleigh County Emergency Management, Burleigh County Highway Department and engineer, Burleigh County Water Resource District, Mike Gunsch of Houston Engineering, the North Dakota State Water Commission, Weisz & Sons Inc. and the Apple Creek Country Club on the recovery efforts. The North Dakota National Guard and the Civil Air Patrol also flew over the creek to provide imagery.

Leben said the sheriff's department's Dive Rescue Team worked with Bismarck Rural Fire Department's Swift Water Team Monday night to enter the water. The Swift Water Team had more knowledge in knots and ropes to hold divers together in the fast-moving water than the Dive Rescue Team, so they were able to rely on each other's skills, he said.

He also applauded the efforts of the Highway Department, who continued working under lights after the sun went down to dam the water using interlocking metal plates and plywood.

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