

Search on for man washed over dam

Victim's identity not yet known

By Ken Garland

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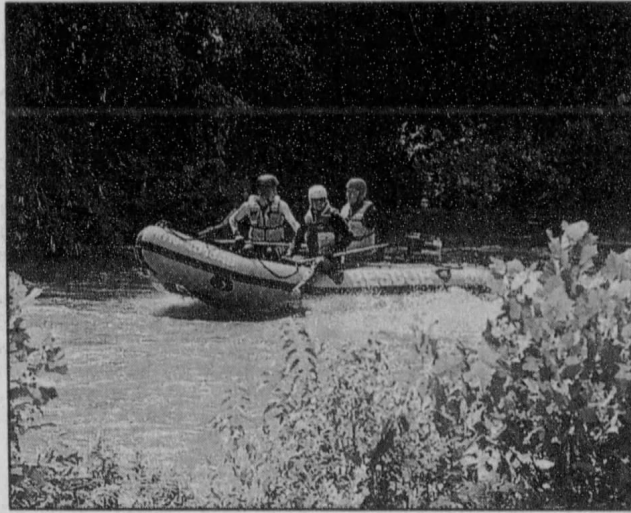
WALLAND — Rescue crews were searching Little River near Peery's Mill for a man whom witnesses said was swept over a mill dam Thursday afternoon and disappeared.

The man, whose identity was not known, was last seen holding onto a tree branch, said Blount County Sheriff's deputy Donnie Debuty. The man's face was covered in blood, according to accounts by four teenaged boys who witnessed the incident.

"They said he just turned loose of the branch," Debuty said. "They never saw him any more after he let go."

James Hale, 16, of Seymour, was swimming above the mill dam, which is a popular swimming place, and witnessed what happened. Hale said the man was with another man and two women who drove up in a vehicle and got out to swim.

"We told him the current



Ken Garland/News-Sentinel staff

Knoxville Volunteer Emergency Rescue Squad members search Thursday for a man who was swept over the dam near Peery's Mill on Little River.

was strong," Hale said. He said the man cursed and started swimming.

"He went over the dam," Hale said. "We came up to the dam and looked over. He was hanging onto a tree about 15 feet below the dam. We ran

down a trail on the bank . . . but he was gone when we got there."

Debuty said witnesses told him the victim appeared "to be extremely intoxicated." He said witnesses said the man appeared to have been thrown

head first into a concrete pillar when he was washed over the dam.

"The two women got back into their vehicle and went to call 911," Debuty said. "The man who was with them stayed and began calling 'Bo.' In a few minutes, the women came back and the man jumped in the vehicle with them, and they all drove off."

He said authorities have not yet found the three.

Searchers from the Blount County Rescue Squad and the Knoxville Volunteer Emergency Rescue Squad were called to the scene and launched boats to begin searching the river. Searchers from the Knoxville squad walked the river bank and the edges of the river below the dam.

Officials said the river was running higher than usual because of recent heavy rains. The river was not in full flood but was running just over its banks in places, officers said.

Debuty described the victim as a white male between 20 and 30 years of age. He had long brown hair and "numerous tattoos."