

Cause of S. Tahoe woman's death remains unknown

By Barbara LaBoe, Daily News

Skamania County authorities say they may never be able determine what killed the California woman who disappeared during the Rainbow Family gathering this summer east of Mount St. Helens.

An autopsy conducted by the Clark County Coroner's Office on the mostly skeletal remains failed to determine a cause of death for Marie Hanson, 54. Officials still are awaiting some toxicology reports, but Undersheriff Dave Cox said Thursday that it's possible they'll never know for sure how Hanson died. And that will severely hamper the rest of the investigation into what happened to Hanson, who disappeared during July in the Skookum Meadow area of the Gifford Pinchot National Forest.

"There's not a whole lot you can do if you don't have the evidence to work with," Cox said. "And with just the skeletal remains we don't have the ability to say it was an accident or that she died from exposure or something else."

Cox said officials don't like leaving a case unresolved, adding he knows there have been rumors and questions about what happened to Hanson. "But without forensic evidence those answers are probably hard to come by," he said.

Hanson, from South Lake Tahoe, attended the gathering on whim and never returned to her family.

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