

S. Tahoe skydiver dies landing in Lake Tahoe, 2 survive

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By Kathryn Reed

CAMP RICHARDSON – One skydiver is dead and two others survived their jump near Camp Richardson on Tuesday morning.

Robert Ranieri, 29, of South Lake Tahoe was found in 12 to 15 feet of water by El Dorado County sheriff's divers.

Lt. Pete Van Arnum said Ranieri used to be a search and rescue volunteer for his department.

The coroner is likely to perform an autopsy Wednesday. The FAA will be part of the investigation.

The plan was for the three to jump from the helicopter that had taken off from Lake Tahoe Airport and land on Pope Beach like they had done last week. Instead, two of the jumpers landed in the icy waters of Lake Tahoe, while the third landed on the sand.



Helmets, parachutes and other gear from the skydivers. Photos/Kathryn Reed

According to the National Weather Service in Reno, the wind speed at the airport at 8:53am was 17 mph, with gusts of 24 mph. The accident occurred moments earlier.

Van Arnum said sky diving is rare in the Lake Tahoe Basin.

“There are not that many good landing areas in the basin because you don’t want to land in the water or in the trees,” Van Arnum told *Lake Tahoe News*. “These guys chartered a helicopter ride from airport. Supposedly they were experienced.”

Chris McKean, who owns a barge that is docked at Camp Rich, said he and some of his crew at about 8:45am raced to the jumpers who were in the water. He said the man they pulled to safety was about 250 yards from shore and about three-quarters of a mile down Pope Beach.

McKean said the person was treading water without a life jacket and yelling for help.

“He was shivering and cold and worried,” McKean said.

Hypothermia can set in quickly and people cannot survive for long in Lake Tahoe because of the temperature. The water temperature last week at Camp Rich tested at a depth of 10 feet was 48 degrees, while the surface temp at Timber Cove was 52 degrees.

“We went for the other guy. We found his chute and helmet floating, but not him,” McKean told *Lake Tahoe News*.

At 10:42am a yell from one of the searchers on one of the nearly dozen vessels helping with locating the missing parachutist could be heard on Pope Beach. The victim’s body had been found several hundred yards off shore.

Law enforcement and private boaters had been using a grid system to locate the victim. A CalStar helicopter had helped early on, with a CHP and Coast Guard chopper called off once the body was located.

The surviving skydivers and their friends waited out the search at Pope Beach, but declined to speak with *Lake Tahoe News*. Gear from two of the parachutists was in a heap at the edge of the beach parking lot.

“I don’t mean to be rude, but I have no comments at this time,” Claudio Belloto, who runs the helicopter tour operation out of Lake Tahoe Airport wrote in an email to *Lake Tahoe News*.



About 12 boats, some

private, help locate the skydiving victim on May 22.



It was a long wait for friends at Pope Beach.