

Charred remains found

Police believe body is missing Gilroy woman

Murder
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BOULDER CREEK — Charred remains believed to be the body of a missing Gilroy woman were uncovered by Santa Cruz police Monday in the muddy, wooded hills near Kings Creek Road.

The coroner has not identified the body, but Santa Cruz police Lt. Joe Haebe said investigators believe it is that of 64-year-old Elvira Burnson, who has been missing since Jan. 7.

Following a tip from nearby residents, police began combing the heavily wooded, rocky hillsides near Kings Creek on Monday morning. The remains were found around noon in a shallow hole dug into the muddy hillside not far from

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a small, rustic house. Haebe said it appears the body was dumped in the hole, covered with wood and set on fire.

The burial site, not visible from the narrow dirt road, is on a hillside on the banks of a creek in an area dotted with cabins and covered by dense second-growth redwoods.

Rain and mist turned the steep, mile-long stretch of road where the body was found into a quagmire as crime scene and coroner's searched through overhanging redwoods and splashed through a shallow, rocky creek covered with moss and slime.

Little light penetrated the thick canopy to the creek banks where police covered the remains with a tarp. Detectives clad in camouflage and caked in mud blocked the dri-

veway leading to the grave.

What happened to Burnson and who took her there remains under investigation, Haebe said.

Burnson was last seen leaving her home in Gilroy, headed for Santa Cruz to take her 30-year-old daughter, Paula Helene Burnson, to a drug-rehabilitation program, Haebe said.

Paula Burnson and her boyfriend, 43-year-old Robert Charles Beckwith, are in County Jail, booked on murder charges.

Burnson is scheduled for arraignment today. Beckwith is to be arraigned Jan. 31.

Haebe said police received numerous calls last week from residents who said they saw Beckwith and Paula Burnson driving Elvira Burnson's 2001 Toyota Corolla with a large, brown trash can attached to the back.

Mike Hammah, who lives on Kings Creek Road near where the body was found, said he saw the Corolla drive by his house the

week before. Hammah, who works for Boy Scout Camp Lindblad nearby, said he called the police tip line last week to report seeing the car with the trash can inside the vehicle.

Santa Cruz detectives searched the same area last week, but found nothing. They went back Monday after getting another, more detailed tip.

During the weekend, Bill Dunning, who owns a house near where the body was found, said Hammah told him about seeing the car and calling the police. Dunning searched his 12-acre canyon property for burn piles, holes or other places a body could be buried. He found nothing.

The remains of the body were discovered across the creek from his property.

"We got the right call at the right time," Haebe said.

Police plan to remove the remains today and conduct an autopsy.

Meanwhile, Haebe said no motive has been determined and neither suspect has cooperated with police.

"To be sitting in a jail cell with all your needs being met and leaving another family member twisting in the wind. That is the lowest of the low," he said. "We have told them, 'Look, we know she is dead. Don't you want to give the other family members some closure?'"

Haebe said detectives working the case feel some sense of closure having found the body. After spending weeks searching, Haebe said they feel a bond to Elvira and her family.

Elvira Burnson, aware of her daughter's heroin addiction, had been trying to help her daughter, giving her money and support, Haebe said.

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