



Associated Press

Crime scene investigators John Strimaitis and Robert Gidding of the Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Department head Wednesday to the area where three bodies were found Tuesday on a cliff (left) overlooking Bonny Doon Beach north of Santa Cruz. Investigators tried to determine Wednesday whether the shotgun deaths of the three people were the result of a suicide pact or a homicide.

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Murder or suicide? Police unsure

Identities of three bodies found at Bonny Doon Beach released

ASSOCIATED PRESS

SANTA CRUZ — Investigators released the identities Wednesday of three people found shot to death on a seaside cliff.

David Bachman, 26, Melinda Leippe, 19, and Brenda White, 19, all of Littleton, Colo., all died instantly from their wounds, authorities said. The gunshot deaths of could be the result of a double homicide and suicide, according to Santa Cruz County Coroner Steve Plaskett.

The bodies were discovered around 6:30 p.m. Tuesday on a bluff above secluded Bonny Doon Beach just north of Santa Cruz.

A sleeping bag and a shotgun lay near the bodies, which were in a circle. There were no signs of struggle.

Investigators believe the Bachman was in control of the shotgun, Plaskett

said.

Investigators originally thought the deaths could be the result of a suicide pact but the history of the relationship between the three people does not support that theory, Plaskett said. Police did not find a suicide note by the bodies.

The families of both women, who lived in Colorado but had family in California, had been contacted Wednesday evening.

The public has free access to the roughly 6-mile-long privately owned beach, which is known for nude sunbathing and rave parties.

"It's not a cool thing when you come to see the sunset and you see this," Cesar Pacheco, one of the passers-by who found the bodies, told the Santa Cruz Sentinel.

Investigators remained at the scene overnight and removed the bodies using a pickup truck around noon Wednesday. They also towed from the beach's parking lot a white car with Colorado license plates that may have belonged to one of the victims.

The horseshoe-shaped beach, about 7 miles north of Santa Cruz, sits below two rocky bluffs. Authorities are called there periodically on reports of drug use, sexual assaults and violence.

"In the past we've had homicides there, but not very many," said Kim Allyn, a spokesman for the Santa Cruz County sheriff's department. One unsolved case from the 1980s involved a shotgun slaying in the same parking lot near where the bodies were found Tuesday, he said.

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Most reports involve "parties and just some real dangerous drifters," Allyn said.

The property is owned by Coast Dairies and Land Company, a nonprofit corporation.

A company spokesman said the beach is not subject to regular patrols, but isn't a haven for law breakers.

"It is not like it is a dangerous place," said Coast Dairies land manager Bern Smith. "I see this as an isolated incident, which could have just as easily happened on another property."

Though they live a half-mile away, the closest neighbors said the beach is a constant problem.

"People are always drinking and there are weird things going on," said Debora Rivers, an artichoke farmer who lives north of the beach along Highway 1. "We stay away."