

Two bodies recovered, 14 and 16 years later in Fallen Leaf Lake, California

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Fallen Leaf Recovery-

On Monday, August 28, 2017, after our Dan Pham recovery in Lake Tahoe, we had lunch and discussion with Detective D. Frisby and Deputy G. Almos, both of El Dorado County Sheriff's Department. At that point, we had a couple of days before another search. Frisby and Almos had a cold case, only a mile away, on Fallen Leaf Lake. The case was regarding a drowning victim as a result of a canoe accident from 1996 AND a possible suicide in the same lake by this victim's mother, in 2001. Beth and I, and the 2 officers, wasted no time and went there directly- only minutes away.

The access road was about 4 miles long, a one lane narrow road. The lake and its surrounding area was beautiful with steep mountain sides, large cedars and beautiful shoreline. Our first day, the search started in the late afternoon. We did some ROV work checking the bottom and the depth, as there are no underwater depth/topo maps for that particular lake.

The following day we had access to the Police Report information and began to run Klein 3900 sonar. Officer Frisby and another Detective, Jake, accompanied us. We located a good target with our sonar and then proceeded to use our ROV. We confirmed what appeared to be a female body. At the request of the Sheriff's Department, we recovered a portion the remains for possible proper identification.

The next day, Wednesday, we recovered the rest of her remains for the Sheriff's Department. John and Daniella, accompanied us, as volunteers from Search and Rescue, for El Dorado County. After the recovery, we continued our search that day, on a quest to locate her son. We were cut short because of the Labor Day holiday weekend and headed back to WI.

The body was later to be confirmed that of Cynthia Ellis, the mother previously noted in this story, from 2001. She had been missing for 16 years! This search was before our Randy Box recovery from our blog, but we were unable to release these details until now.

Our third trip this year was with the success of bringing Randy Box of Fresno CA. back to his family. We then returned to Fallen Leaf Lake on our mission to locate Cynthia Ellis's son, David Ward, on October 26, 2017. David Ward was 21 at the time of his drowning in 1996. He and a friend were in a canoe and the weather caused the canoe to overturn. Ward's friend was picked up by another boater, but Ward had already gone under. Witnesses saw him trying to make the swim back, but the rough water did not allow it.

From previously recorded data from our previous search here, I had an interesting image I wanted to check. After passing over it with sonar we sent down the Outland Technology ROV and confirmed it to be a body. It did not match the situation of David Ward. However, when circling the body with our ROV, we found he had anchor securely tied to him. We could tell this body had also been underwater for several years. We brought the remains up the following day with the help of the El Dorado Sheriffs County Search and Rescue Fallen Leaf Fire Department and the Eldorado County Sheriff's Department. His wallet was still in his pocket and it was likely this had nothing to do with our intended case. This opened an entirely new investigation, as it was not known that there was another body in this Lake. The body was taken for intense investigation. After many weeks, we were to learn it was the body of Michael Whalen from Florida, estimated around 60 years old at the time of drowning. The body may have been under for approximately 14 years. His van, however, was reported to have been found at Fallen Leaf Lake in 2004. A forensic autopsy was unable to confirm a cause of death.