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Hiker's body found close to destination

Sarah Bishop, 27, had left Saturday for a four-day trip on the 42-mile Timberline Trail circling Mount Hood

By Stuart Tomlinson, The Oregonian

ZIGZAG -- The body of a 27-year-old Northeast Portland woman who attempted to hike around Mount Hood last week was found Thursday afternoon by searchers on the flood-ravaged flanks of the mountain.

The body of Sarah Bishop, a social worker who counseled runaway teens, was found at 2:26 p.m. near the confluence of the Sandy River and Rushing Water Creek near the Pacific Crest Trail, said Deputy Joel Manley, a spokesman for the Clackamas County Sheriff's Office.

There were no indications of foul play, but the Clackamas County medical examiner will determine the time and cause of Bishop's death.

Bishop set out alone Saturday for a four-day backpacking trip on the Timberline Trail, a 42-mile loop that crosses numerous hazardous creeks and glacier outflows on its way around the mountain.

Sgt. Nick Watt, coordinator for the sheriff's search-and-rescue team, said Bishop was an experienced hiker who had the proper rations and gear to complete the trip. However, she did not take a cellular phone with her.

Bishop parked her gray 1984 Toyota pickup at the Ramona Falls trailhead at an elevation of about 3,200 feet on Saturday, presumably to make a clockwise trip around the mountain, Watt said. She told family, friends and co-workers that she would return Tuesday.

"She was planning to attend a wedding in California on Wednesday," Watt said.

Deputies contacted Wednesday

Deputies were contacted Wednesday and launched a full-fledged search early Thursday, sending teams of about 20 searchers from Portland Mountain Rescue, Pacific Northwest Search & Rescue and other volunteers on horseback. Low clouds and rain did not allow a search from the air, Watt said.

Although temperatures remained relatively mild from Saturday through Thursday -- dipping only into the mid-50s at night -- the mountain was inundated with as much as 10 inches of rain that turned sedate creeks and rivers into roaring torrents, tearing away parts of the trail and seasonal bridges.

Thursday, a sign near the trailhead where Bishop's truck was found warned hikers that heavy rains had taken out the bridge across the Sandy River about a mile up the trail.

Bishop's body was found about 1.5 miles up the trail, and officials think that she had made it around the mountain and was returning to her truck when she either fell or was swept into the raging waters.

"My wife hiked the trail last year during normal conditions, and she said there were numerous spooky crossings of the creeks and glacier outflows," said Steve Rollins of Portland Mountain Rescue. "There are also numerous steep sections."

Boss praises work with youth

Bishop's boss, Stephen Olsen, program director for Harry's Mother, a center for runaway youth in Multnomah County, said he hired her four years ago because of "her intelligence, her calm demeanor, her kindness."

"She just struck me as a person that really wanted to help," he said. "She just seemed a very competent, together, whole person."

Olsen said that for the past two years Bishop worked part time as a crisis intervention specialist, answering calls from runaway youth on Monday and Tuesday nights.

"She's the person that a scared teenager will call at 3 in the morning, someone who's run away because Dad beat Mom up, and they don't know what to do," Olsen said.

Olsen described Bishop as an avid hiker and lover of the outdoors who took a leave of absence two years ago to trek through Mexico and learn Spanish.

"She loved being out there," he said. "Who would have figured that we'd have this kind of weather in August?"

Friends and family members, including her father, Bruce Bishop of Southwest Portland, waited anxiously for hours at the search command post at the U.S. Forest Service maintenance shops on Lolo Pass Road for any news of her.

At 3 p.m., it became clear that their worst fears had been realized when Dennis Simons, a chaplain for the Sandy Fire Department, walked briskly into the command post trailer.

Manley said a helicopter from the 1042nd Air Ambulance Company of the Oregon Army National Guard brought Bishop's body out Thursday evening.

Tracy Jan of The Oregonian contributed to this report