



THE CAPITAL AND VANCOUVER ISLAND

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Search called off for man whose rented motorhome was found abandoned

Times Colonist

The search for a missing Quebec man whose rented motorhome was discovered in a parking lot at China Beach has been called off and police said Monday there are no new leads.

Vickie Weber of Juan de Fuca Search and Rescue said efforts to locate 70-year-old Jean-Michel Cabanes were unsuccessful over the weekend.

The motorhome rented by Cabanes was found Friday at China Beach, west of Jordan River, one of the starting points of the rugged Juan de Fuca Marine Trail.

"We did not locate him [after] another very hard day for the search crews," Weber said in an email.

"We are very disappointed that we could not locate him and help to bring closure to his family."

Saanich police said Monday there have been no developments in the case. They believe the motorhome was at China Beach at least a week before it was discovered.

Cabanes was last seen on Oct. 14 in Saanich. The Montreal man was reported missing by family after he failed to return the rented motorhome on Oct. 26 and did not board his flight home Oct. 28.

Crews began their search Friday afternoon, with teams coming from Cowichan, Salt Spring Island, Metchosin, the Saanich Peninsula, Ladysmith and Nanaimo to assist Juan de Fuca searches.

Weber said the area has "treacherous terrain" with cliffs and ravines, and a storm packing rain and strong winds the previous week felled trees and branches and made ocean waves dangerous.

"It's an area where people can easily get turned around. Search and rescue has been called to this area many, many times," Weber said in a message over the weekend.

It wasn't immediately clear when searches in the area would continue.

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Jean-Michel Cabanes picked up a rental motorhome in Saanich that was due to be returned Oct. 26, with plans to travel around the island, but failed to return it or to board his flight home to Montreal.

VIA SAANICH POLICE



The Saanich Fire Department responded to a blaze at an apartment on Cook Street on Sunday. One resident of the building died in the fire. ALYSSA TEMPER

Smoking believed to have sparked fatal Saanich fire

PEDRO ARRAIS
Times Colonist

Residents of a Saanich apartment building near the Cedar Hill Golf Course are grieving after the death of one of the building's residents, who died in a fire on Sunday night.

Saanich Fire Department was alerted to the fire at the Maplewood Green Apartments at the intersection of Cook Street and Maplewood Road at 9:30 p.m. and responded with 18 firefighters and three engines, as well as a ladder and a rescue truck.

Firefighters were able to extinguish the blaze in about 15 minutes, containing it to a single suite. When they entered the one-bedroom suite they discovered the body of a middle-aged woman, who lived alone with her Pomernian, which survived the fire.

On Monday, fire investigators said they believe the fire was accidental and likely caused by smoking. The building adopted a no-smoking policy in February 2017, but tenants who were smoking in their suites before that time were allowed to continue.

All of the units in the 122-unit apartment building, which has three wings, were equipped with individual smoke detectors, with a central alarm that alerted residents to Sunday night's fire. The building, which first opened to rentals in 1972, does not have a sprinkler system.

The fire was discovered by one of the building's residents, who was on her way to look after a neighbour's cat. As she was walking down the hall, she heard a whimpering sound behind the door of the apartment. When she opened the door to investigate, the Pomernian rushed out, along with a wall of smoke.



Julie Kines in front of the Maplewood Green apartment complex. Kines, who lives two doors from the suite affected by Sunday night's fire, credits the Saanich Fire Department for its quick response, which she believes prevented the fire from spreading to adjoining units. TIMES COLONIST

"We are a close-knit community here. Everybody watches out for each other and last night we saw that as well, with people knocking on doors and helping people, including those with mobility issues, out of the building," said Julie Kines, who has lived in the building for about 10 years.

She credits the Saanich Fire Department for its quick response, which she believes prevented the fire from spreading to adjoining units. Water damage may be less of an issue, as the apartment at the centre of the fire is located directly above the building's indoor pool.

The building was evacuated temporarily and most of the residents returned to their suites later, with no residents displaced, according to Saanich Fire.

Kines, who lives two doors from the affected suite, chose to spend the rest of the night with a friend. A couple adjacent to the burnt-out apartment left Monday to stay with their son for a few days.

While there was no formal announcement of the fatality, some residents had a bad feeling.

"We were standing around the parking lot and her Pomernian was with us — but she was nowhere to be seen. We suspected at that time," said Kines, who knew the woman in the affected suite in passing.

The victim's body was wheeled out of the building about noon on Monday. She will be identified after next of kin is located and notified.

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Wireless connections to Port Renfrew delayed

DARRON KLOSTER
Times Colonist

The dead zone for cell phones between Sooke and Port Renfrew will stay that way at least until next year.

Rogers Communications, the company contracted to build cell towers along the remote section of Highway 14, said the project has faced challenges, including global shortages of key telecom equipment and steel.

The provincial government announced last spring the infrastructure would be in place by the end of October to provide the wireless service so desperately needed by residents, search-and-rescue operators and the thousands who use the trails and beaches along Juan de Fuca Marine Trail.

"Our crews are hard at work on building seven new cellular towers to expand wireless service for customers along Highway 14," a spokesman for Rogers said in an email Monday.

"We remain dedicated to the completion of this important project as we address the global equipment and steel shortage, complexities of obtaining building permits as well as the challenging terrain in the area."

The spokesman said the company is on track to have coverage in service in 2022, but did not narrow down the date.

At least two of the tower sites have been identified and one of the structures is up on a rock face. Each site has to be approved by governing bodies along the 70-kilometre route, including First Nations.

Mike Hicks, director of the Juan de Fuca Electoral Area, said cell service is essential for search and rescue teams and the thousands of hikers drawn to the area, as well as about 1,200 residents. "Nobody is going to be lying in a ditch with a broken leg wondering if help is going to come," Hicks said. "This is something that's desperately needed for safety."

The project will also bring cellular service to Port Renfrew, Shirley, Otter Point and Jordan River, as well as the Pacheena First Nation communities of Gordon River 2 and Pacheena 1.

A highway rest area near the entrance to Sombrio Beach, a popular surfing spot, will be upgraded to provide a Wi-Fi connection, improving safety and convenience for people passing through or coming to enjoy the trails, the province said.

The announcement is being welcomed by first responders. "Like so many emergency responders, I've had to come to rely upon cellular service for voice and data communications," said Vickie Weber, senior manager of Juan de Fuca Search and Rescue. "Many online resources enhance our capability and response to people who may be having a life-threatening emergency."

Funding for the project is from the province's Stronger B.C. Economic Recovery Plan, which included a one-time \$90-million grant to the Connecting British Columbia program to expand high-speed internet and cellular access in rural and Indigenous communities.

Rogers Communications was selected to receive up to \$4.9 million to build the cell tower infrastructure.

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