



FOR PUBLIC RELEASE: Coroner Judgement of Inquiry and Inquest Inquisition and Recommendations

Department of Justice, Legal Services
Yukon Coroners Service
206C Lowe Street
PO Box 2703 (J-10A)
Y1A 2C6
Whitehorse, YT
Tel.: 867-667-5317 Fax.: 867-456-6826

Yukon Coroners Service: Judgement of Inquiry into the death of: Claudia Huber

Coroner Investigative File No.: 4520201432

Name: Claudia Huber Date of Birth: 1972/22/04 Date of Death: 2014/10/18

YYYY/MM/DD

YYYY/MM/DD

Address: South Canol Highway

Street Address

Province/Territory

Postal Code

Ethnic Origin: Caucasian Location of Death: Teslin Health Centre

Cause of Death

Single Gun Shot Wound to Chest (due to) Defense of Life/Deflected Bullet (due to) Grizzly Bear Attack

Manner of Death

Homicide

(the term "homicide" does not impute fault or blame, as we might understand it in the criminal law sense. A death is classified homicide when a person has caused directly or indirectly, by any means, the death of another human)

Autopsy Findings

An autopsy was performed at Vancouver General Hospital on October 21, 2014 and October 22, 2014. Given the extensive trauma and injury sustained by Ms. Huber, radiographs were ordered as part of the forensic post-mortem examination.

Radiographs exposed that Ms. Huber had indeed sustained a gunshot wound to the chest. The wound was somewhat atypical, and suggested that the bullet passed through an intermediate target.

Examination of the clothing Ms. Huber was wearing at the time of the attack did not suggest a possible gunshot wound. External body examination was difficult due to the significant amount of tissue damage and injury features consistent with a bear mauling.

The pathologist noted that there were multiple surface grazes, lacerations, contusions, and puncture wounds. There was extensive trauma, with the majority being sustained by the head, neck and upper torso.

Toxicological Findings

Toxicology analysis was performed at the BC Provincial Toxicology Centre. Analysis revealed no alcohol, no prescribed medications or illicit drugs.

Circumstances of Death

Please see attached.

Significant Factors/Conclusions

The bear that attacked Ms. Huber was an old male bear, in poor physical condition. The bear was acting in an unusual manner not explained through the necropsy. The bear acted in a predatory manner, likely considering the family dog as potential prey. The window of the home failed under the weight of the bear, causing the bear to tumble into the home. When the dog took off into the woods, the bear likely switched his focus from the dog to Ms. Huber as she exited the vehicle. Ms. Huber "played dead", which is the incorrect response to a predatory attack by a bear. It became apparent during the investigation that there continues to be misinformation/lack of understanding of the correct/suggested response to different types of bear encounters. The bear had scavenged food from a nearby hunting camp sometime in the weeks before the attack on Ms. Huber. The hunting camp/cabins had significant amounts of human food which would have been an attractant to a hungry bear in fall. Food and attractants is a risk for bears and humans. A bullet meant for the bear struck a tree branch and deflected from the anticipated path and trajectory. The bullet struck Ms. Huber in the chest causing death.

Recommendations

To Environment Yukon, Government of Yukon:

1. More education is needed to inform the public about the different types of bear encounters and the appropriate responses for each type of encounter. There appears to be ongoing misinformation in the public, despite efforts to get this message out. The public, and perhaps even school children at a young age, need to be educated on what to do if a bear encounter occurs, how to tell the difference between the type of behavior, and what actions should be taken depending on the behavior of the bear and the nature of the encounter.
2. More education and information is required for hunting camps/cabin owners/rural property owners regarding leaving food and other bear attractants accessible. Education regarding closing camps up for the season and the importance of removing attractants both inside and outside cabins is needed.

M Macdonald
Signature, Chief Coroner

Whitehorse Yukon
Province/Territory

December 11/15
Date

Print

Save

Clear

FOR PUBLIC RELEASE: Coroner Judgement of Inquiry and Inquest Inquisition and Recommendations

Circumstances/Investigation:

THE SCENE

The location of the bear attack is a rural Yukon property which is used for residential purposes as well as a small wilderness company. The property was well-kept and properly bear proofed with no food or garbage around as attractants.

There was a large family dog that also lived in the home. The family dog barked and alerted the occupants as the bear came onto the property near the front lawn. The male occupant of the home went outside to investigate and observed the bear crossing the lawn. The male occupant called the dog into the home and alerted Ms. Huber that there was a bear outside.

The bear went around the home to a window. The bear then circled the house and placed his paws on another window. When the bear put his front paws on the window glass, the window gave way and the bear came crashing into the living space of the home.

The bear fell into the home and chased the dog around the living room. It is believed that the bear may have viewed the dog as potential prey. Ms. Huber and the witness ran outside of the house, and the dog ran away. Ms. Huber got into a Toyota Tundra parked outside the house. The witness got into another vehicle parked next to the Tundra.

The bear got onto the hood of the vehicle that Ms. Huber was in and repeatedly jumped on the hood. The bear then moved off that vehicle and tried to climb onto the other vehicle with the male occupant inside. The male occupant started to honk the horn of his vehicle, at which time the bear started to run away. It is believed that Ms. Huber may have seen the bear running away and took the opportunity to try to get into the vehicle with the witness because she had keys to that vehicle.

When Ms. Huber exited the vehicle, the bear attacked her. The witness ran back into the house to get ammunition for his rifle and fired off a warning shot into the air. When he returned, the bear had drug Ms. Huber approximately 20 meters across a creek and up onto the opposite bank. The bear was on top of Ms. Huber. The witness fired several rounds at the bear, but it was still alive. He ran back to the house to get more ammunition. He returned and fired more shots and the bear died.

During the attack, Ms. Huber "played dead." "Playing dead" is one of many suggested responses to a bear encounter. However, because the attack on Ms. Huber was predatory in nature, it unfortunately wasn't the correct response in this incident. A predatory attack requires the victim to fight back against the bear.

Ms. Huber was rushed to Teslin Community Health Centre and was declared dead at 12:10hrs on October 18, 2014.

THE BEAR

A necropsy of the bear was performed on October 21, 2014. The bear was determined to be a 38 year old male grizzly bear. The grizzly bear was in "poor" condition but was not emaciated (as evidenced by small fat stores) and weighed 170kg.

The bear had been shot twice - once from behind on the left side of the chest, and once from the right side into the neck.

The bear had some age-related changes such as wearing down of teeth. There was no evidence at the necropsy of underlying disease that would explain the unusual behavior exhibited by this grizzly bear.

A single poker chip was found stuck in the fur of the bear, the origin of which became of particular interest to investigators. Sometime in the three weeks prior to the attack on Ms. Huber the grizzly bear had ransacked a local hunting camp approximately 24kms from the home of Ms. Huber.

At the hunting camp, the grizzly bear was able to access a significant amount of human food. The bear ransacked the cabin, foraging on human food and small animals, and causing significant damage. The bear also broke a container of glue and poker chips were found spread about in the cabin. The poker chips in the hunting camp cabin matched the poker chip stuck to the bear that attacked Ms. Huber.

DEFLECTED BULLET

Given the information from the radiographs and forensic pathologist, investigators returned to the scene to search for bullet fragments or possible point(s) of deflection.

A tree branch was identified on the far side of the creek where the bear had dragged Ms. Huber during the attack. The poplar branch was somewhat Y-shaped and had obvious damage. The branch had a symmetrical, burrowing, arched path with both sides being equally frayed through the organic material. There was no bullet casing found entombed inside the branch, only a clean pathway through the branch with discernible entrance and exit points.

Based on the location of the witness, the bear, and Ms. Huber, it is believed that this was the point of deflection. When the bullet deflected off the branch it strayed from its intended path and fatally injured Ms. Huber.