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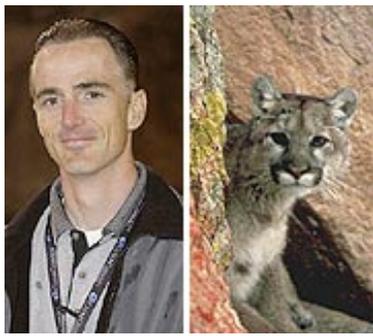
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Man killed by mountain lion; cyclists also attacked in California

MISSION VIEJO, Calif. (AP) — Initial tests conducted on a male mountain lion suspected of killing one biker and injuring another revealed human skin tissues found in its stomach, authorities said.



Mark Reynolds, in an undated photo, has been killed by a mountain lion, an animal found in the western U.S.

AP and Getty file photos

Footprints taken in Whiting Ranch Wilderness Park in Orange County had the same measurements and officials are fairly certain the cougar is responsible for both of Thursday's attacks. The 2-year-old mountain lion weighed about 110 pounds and was shot and killed Thursday night after it returned to the site where the body of a biker was found.

A second mountain lion was struck and killed by a vehicle Thursday night, about five miles south of the wilderness park, but the animal was not believed to be involved in the attacks. The female cat, which weighed about 80 pounds, also will undergo a necropsy.

Meanwhile, the bikers who helped rescue biker Anne Hjelle recounted the frightening scene.

Hjelle was bicycling along a wilderness trail when a mountain lion sprang from the brush, pounced on her back and dragged her off by the head as fellow bikers threw rocks at the animal and tried to pull her away.

The animal finally ran off, leaving Hjelle — a former Marine who works as a fitness instructor — bloody and near death.

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Early Sunday, CNN reported that Hjelle, 30, was in fair condition at a hospital.

"I just told her, 'I'm never letting go,'" said rescuer Debbie Nichols, who held on to her friend during a desperate tug-of-war with the cat.

Authorities suspect the same mountain lion also killed 35-year-old Mark Jeffrey Reynolds, whose body was found partially buried Thursday near his disabled bike. He apparently had been killed earlier in the day.

"The chains fell off and somehow broke, and while he was attempting to fix his bike is when the attack happened," said Jim Amormino, a spokesman for the Orange County Sheriff's Department.

The two attacks occurred just a few hundred yards from homes and served as a gruesome reminder of the danger that exists when suburban sprawl encroaches on the wilderness.

Reynolds was an account executive at a sports management firm. The amateur mountain bike racer had won championships in his age category.



Rod Veal, AP
Mike Castellano, left, and Diego Lopez helped scare away the animal that was mauling a cyclist.

Dona Reynolds said her son had helped donate free bikes to kids as Christmas gifts.

"My (consolation) is Mark Reynolds was doing what he loved the most, and that was riding his bicycle," she said.

Jacke Van Woerkom, a founder of the biking group Trail Angels, said she was riding about seven minutes behind Hjelle and Nichols and later spoke to Nichols at the hospital.

"She had some blood on her face. She definitely showed signs of a major struggle," Van Woerkom said.

The biking group often rides the trails to unwind. The attack won't prevent them from cycling again, Van Woerkom said.

"You can't let something like this take residence in your mind and stop you," she said.

Lynn Sadler, executive director of the Mountain Lion Foundation, a nonprofit group dedicated to saving America's lions, said the attack occurred in a wilderness area designated as a wildlife habitat.

"As long as mountain lions walk this earth, there is going to be some risk from them," she said. "It's not an amusement park — the shark doesn't pull back at the last second. The risks are real, even as they are part of the appeal."

The attacks, which were considered separate incidents, raised to 14 the total number of mountain lion attacks on humans in California over the past 114 years, six of them fatal, said Doug Updike, a biologist with the state Fish and Game Department.

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Updike estimates there are between 4,000 and 6,000 adult lions roaming California, with usually five to seven mountain lions per 100 square miles. State law prohibits hunting or killing them.

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