

DNA identifies student missing since 1998 in New River Gorge

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FAIRMONT, W.Va. (AP) — Human remains found below a West Virginia bridge belong to a Virginia Tech graduate student who vanished nearly two decades ago, state police said.

DNA evidence confirms the remains discovered near the New River Gorge Bridge are those of Robert Leroy Kovack, said West Virginia State Police Lt. M.T. Baylous said.

"We're relieved that we can finally put some of this to a close," Kovack's older brother, Fairmont pharmacist Michael Kovack, said Tuesday.

Robert Kovack, a 24-year-old native of Rivesville, West Virginia, disappeared on Sept. 18, 1998 while driving to a football game in Morgantown. His car was found days later, out of gas near the bridge.

A work crew discovered the remains last March in a heavily wooded area along with Kovack's driver's license, a college ID and car keys. Authorities say evidence suggested Kovack may have fallen after being hit by a car.

At 875 feet, it is the third-highest bridge in the United States, and the site of a popular "Bridge Day" jumping festival every October.

But the span also has a darker attraction: More than four dozen bodies have been recovered below the bridge since Kovack's disappearance, according to state police.