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Two-decade-old missing persons mystery solved when man's body found on Alberta glacier



SAMMY HUDES | August 4, 2014 | Last Updated: Jan 24 9:29 PM ET
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The Canadian flag flies over the Athabasca Glacier part of the Columbia Icefields in Jasper National Park, in May 2014.

Jeff McIntosh/The Canadian Press

A nearly two decade-long RCMP search for a missing New Brunswick man was resolved Friday when police recovered his remains on the Athabasca Glacier.

Donald Jean Belliveau was 28 years old when he went missing Jan. 31, 1995. He was last seen four days earlier, having left Calgary en route to Jasper to go hiking, according to an Alberta Missing Persons report.

His vehicle was found in the area at the Columbia Icefields.

But Mr. Belliveau was never seen again. The 19-year-old search ended last week when hikers found his body in Jasper National Park, and RCMP recovered his remains via a helicopter.

Police say the clothing last seen worn by Mr. Belliveau, including his glasses, matched their discovery. Mr. Belliveau was believed to have been wearing a purple anorak when he went missing, according to RCMP.

The Mounties say they have informed Mr. Belliveau's family who are grateful to finally have closure. Foul play is not suspected.

"These files are kept open for a reason," said Jasper RCMP Cpl. Ryan Gardiner. "As the glaciers melt the depth of the glacier changes. The glaciers are always moving and whatnot that eventually things that are lost in crevasses and whatnot will eventually surface."

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Andrew Fountain, a glaciology expert who is a professor of geography and geology at Portland State University, said these sorts of findings are “relatively common these days.”

He said there are two ways people can get caught in a glacier. Mr. Belliveau, he said, likely fell into a crevasse and was buried by snow, before gradually being forced to the bottom of the glacier through cycles of freezing and melting.

This process is relatively short, said Mr. Fountain, with bodies usually revealing themselves in 20-40 years.

“At the head of a glacier you get more snow accumulation than melting so things get buried. At the tow of a glacier, you get more melting than snow accumulation and that’s where things like rocks and bodies and whatever else become revealed,” he said. “It’s kind of like a river in that sense. They’re travelling in this river of ice.”



Donald Jean Belliveau RCMP

Other circumstances could trap people for thousands of years, said Mr. Fountain, referencing Ötzi the Iceman, a mummy discovered in 1991 on the border of Austria and Italy, who lived around 3,300 BCE.

He said the Iceman was entombed in the ice as the glacier grew because of the area where he was trapped.

“He wasn’t in the main part of the glacier, he was actually in this little hollow on the side of the glacier that when the glacier enlarged, it covered that part,” Mr. Fountain said. “But it never really excavated him out of that and left him there, and that’s why he and all his artifacts were in such good shape because the glacier never moved it.”

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