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ENQUIRER LOCAL NEWS COVERAGE

River yields debris, bodies

Spring floods, extra attention contribute

Monday, April 20, 1998

BY **JANE PRENDERGAST**
The Cincinnati Enquirer

COVINGTON -- The call came Thursday afternoon. A worker at a riverfront restaurant spotted what looked like a body in the Ohio River.

Firefighters jumped in their trucks and rushed to the river bank, ready to hop in their boat.

No need. The body? A bloated cow.

And it floated on by.

The same action took place two weeks before when somebody spotted what they thought was a body in a pink shirt and khaki pants. It turned out to be a piece of insulation -- pink on one side with tan backing.

Since [Covington Police Officer Mike Partin](#) fell into the river Jan. 4, much attention has been focused on the waterway that divides Ohio and Kentucky. Boats and helicopters have combed the area in highly publicized searches. Volunteers have come across a variety of debris, from cars to farm animals to shopping carts.

And at least three bodies have been discovered.

All this has put the Tristate on notice now more than ever that the mighty Ohio River is home to an unfathomable amount and variety of debris.

"Oh, we've had cows, deer, horses -- all kinds of livestock," said Capt. Alan Terry of the Covington Fire Department. "And there's really nothing that we can do. It's not safe to try to remove them. Bloated, you're talking something that weighs 500 to 1,000 pounds." Propane tanks and the like are



Debris that has washed into the Ohio River floats downstream a few miles west of Downtown Cincinnati.
 (Patrick Reddy photo)
[| ZOOM |](#)

another matter. Because of their potential hazards, they must be removed, he said.

Maleva Chamberlain, of the Division of Water in Kentucky's Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Cabinet, was not surprised at Thursday's bovine discovery.

"Things get in there because they wash in there," she said. "Storm water is how it happens."

Because farms line parts of the Ohio River shoreline, animals such as deer and cows often wander in and out of the water, get caught during a storm and wash away, said Jeanne Ison, spokeswoman for the Ohio River Valley Water Sanitation Commission, the region's water pollution control agency.

How the human bodies get into the water, of course, is different. On Jan. 11, authorities found two. Alana "Laney" Gwinner, 23, of Union Township in Butler County was found near Sugar Bay in Warsaw, Ky., where the Ohio River and Sugar Creek meet.

River sweep

The annual Ohio River Sweep is June 20. For information, call the Ohio River Valley Water Sanitation Commission at 231-7719 or (800) 359-3977. For information on the Kentucky River Watershed Watch, visit <http://water.nr.state.ky.us/watch/>.

Police think she was dumped into the Great Miami River, about 40 miles upstream from where she was found. Police have yet to learn how she died, but her death is considered a homicide, and there is a \$50,000 reward for tips leading to an arrest in the case.

On the same day, 52-year-old William Edward Benight of Price Hill turned up near Madison, Ind. -- more than 80 miles from Cincinnati. He had been missing since Dec. 8, when he is thought to have jumped from the Taylor-Southgate Bridge.

Boone County Water Rescue was looking for the body of Officer Partin on April 4 when rescuers found David B. Etter, 20, of Pleasant Ridge, west of North Bend Road. No cause of his death has been released. Authorities also have made gruesome discoveries on local tributaries -- the body of Kimberly Sipe, a Newport mother, Jan. 17 along the Licking River, and an unidentified torso along the Great Miami in Hamilton on April 13. Both are being investigated as homicides.

"You begin to wonder when you hear every other day that they've found another body in there and it's not the one they're looking for," Ms. Ison said. "It's pretty scary."

Her agency organizes the massive annual Ohio River Sweep,

a project that draws thousands of volunteers to pick up trash along more than 2,700 miles of shoreline from Pittsburgh to Cairo, Ill. This year will be the group's 10th sweep.

"One year, we found enough appliances and furniture to put in a house," Ms. Ison said. "People just were not aware of proper ways to dispose of trash. Now, some of the areas that we've cleaned up are staying clean."

The sweep seems to be the most concerted effort to clean up the Ohio, or at least its banks. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers commits to keeping a navigable channel only 9 feet deep in the water, and that's generally down the center, said Ken Crawford, public affairs officer for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Louisville.

Another group, the Kentucky River Watershed Watch, is preparing for its work now, too. Focused mostly on Ohio River tributaries in Kentucky, such as the Licking River, the group is looking for volunteers willing to learn how to collect water samples.

Volunteers found last year that contamination from coal mining damages the water quality in eastern Kentucky, while chemicals and fertilizers that run off central Kentucky farms cause more problems there. Results are shared at a conference and given to regulatory agencies.

The coming weeks may be the dirtiest time for the Ohio. Spring thunderstorms prompt flooding, which in turn can force into the water anything that's not tied down.

And warming temperatures make it more likely for bodies to surface. The warmer water promotes more gas buildup in a body, prompting it to float.

Officer Partin's wife, Lisa, sadly knows that science, too. She said she watches the river temperatures, knowing that warmer water might give up her husband's body.

The biggest chunks of unnatural debris in the river are likely pieces of the C&O Bridge, which was blown into the water in 1970 in preparation for construction of the Clay Wade Bailey. Much of that steel was dredged out of the water, but not all of it, Mr. Crawford said.

"The river is what it is," said Paul Wiesner, whose Aquarius Marine company in Ludlow spends a lot of time in the water building docks and recovering sunken barges. "It just depends on what the weather's like.

"When it's down and it's nice, everybody wants to go boating. When it's like this and dead cows are floating around, nobody wants to go near it."

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