Survivor helps find body of last avalanche victim

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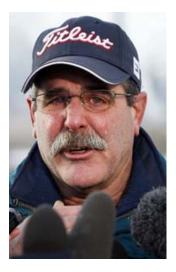- 〉

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FERNIE, B.C. — Less than 48 hours after a series of avalanches pounded down on a group of 11 snowmobilers, tossing them apart and ripping them from their equipment, one of the three survivors returned to the steep, rocky bowl he had only narrowly escaped.

With his help, the body of the eighth and final victim – one of the group of close-knit friends and relatives – was located and recovered about an hour after a search resumed on Tuesday.

Jeff Adams helped search crews pinpoint where the body of Daniel Bjarnason, 28, might lie after he and the others were swept under the snow on Sunday.

"The search was very quick," said RCMP Cpl. Chris Faulkner.

Randy Roberts, father-in-law of avalanche victim Danny Bjarnason, speaks to the media about eight dead snowmobilers in Fernie, B.C., Tuesday. *(The Canadian Press)*

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Eight B.C. snowmobilers trapped in avalanche

There are an unknown number of fatalities in connection with an slide that occurred near Fernie, B.C. Sunday night, according to the RCMP

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Search resumes for missing snowmobiliers

More than 15 avalanche technicians are being transported by helicopter to the scene

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One man still missing

CTV Newsnet: The search for the last man missing after two avalanches will resume Tuesday morning, ahead of another storm expected in the area

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RCMP on the six confirmed dead

The bodies of six people have been dug out from underneath an avalanche in Fernie, B.C. Two others are still missing.

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“I was told [Mr. Adams] went up and indicated what he thought was the likely position this person might have been. I'm not sure how accurate he was but given that the body was discovered about an hour later, he may have been fairly close to it.”

Mr. Adams and two friends had managed to dig themselves out after three avalanches swept over the group of 11 snowmobilers from nearby Sparwood, 300 kilometres southwest of Calgary.

He was very upset over losing his close friends, said Cpl. Faulkner, but was coping with support from the community.

“He has his family supporting him now, and he has a lot of friends of the other victims, as well as the other two lads that survived,” the officer said. “It's a tough time for

them, for everybody."

David Wilks, mayor of Sparwood, said Mr. Adams was determined to help "get his last buddy back."

Mr. Adams had indicated he might make a statement after Mr. Bjarnason's body was recovered, but as he approached reporters with his wife and father, he became visibly distraught and turned away.

The first seven bodies were recovered Monday from the treacherous backcountry area where the avalanches occurred: Kurt Kabel, 28; Warren Rothel, 33; Kane Rusnak, 30; Thomas Talarico, 32; Blayne Wilson, 26; Michael Stier, 20; and Michael's father, Leonard Stier, 45.

Mr. Adams, Jordan Drake and Jeremy Rusnak survived the avalanches. They tried to help their mates but decided to leave the area when they determined another avalanche might hit.

The men were snowmobiling in two groups in a steep, rocky, bowl-like area known as Harvey Valley when the first avalanche hit. Initial reports said there were two avalanches, but one of the survivors told Mr. Wilks there were four in total, with the last slab of snow crashing down shortly after the three men had rushed out of the area.

Mr. Bjarnason's father-in-law said the 11 snowmobilers knew what they were doing and were as prepared as they could have been for an emergency.

Randy Roberts struggled to maintain his composure as he explained the group's decision to go snowmobiling in what turned out to be perilous conditions.

Mr. Roberts said all members of the group were fully equipped with shovels, probes and "peeps" – transmitters designed to help locate them in the event of an avalanche.

"Safety meant lots to those guys," he said. "They're all experienced snowmobilers. It was an altercation that happens. You can never predict it.

"They were all geared up, they all had their peeps on, their shovels, their packs, their probes. Nobody ever questioned anything."

No one should be shouldering any blame, he added.

"Nobody, especially [the survivors] . . . nobody's at fault, don't blame yourself. It's an act that happens."

Mr. Roberts, whose daughter has lived with Mr. Bjarnason for 12 to 14 years in a common-law relationship, choked back tears as he described the room where 50 to 60 members of the victims' families had congregated.

"That room was totally awesome with the people in there, talking with each other, and talking about the good times we had with the men," he said. "We all watched these kids grow up and they're just, every one of them, super people."

Speaking before Mr. Bjarnason's body was recovered, Mr. Roberts acknowledged it was unlikely his son-in-law could have survived being buried in snow for so long, yet expressed hope he might still be found alive. Tears rolled down his face as he talked about how well Mr. Bjarnason had treated his daughter.

"Danny was just a super guy, he'd do anything for you. That's all I can say."

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