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Woodland trainer found dead next to elephant

By Tom Paulu and Jay McIntosh

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WOODLAND — World-famous animal trainer Morgan Berry was found dead today, possibly trampled by one of the elephants he raised.

Portland Zoo officials late this morning tranquilized and captured an elephant that escaped in brush north of Woodland, near Berry's wild animal park.

Gary Waddell, Cowlitz County chief criminal deputy sheriff, said Berry's body was found this morning lying in a field near his home on Lane Road, several miles north of Woodland. An elephant chained nearby was sitting by Berry's body, and deputies were unable to approach it.

Another elephant was running loose and acting wildly.

The search began Tuesday night, when a neighbor failed to get a customary 9 p.m. call from Berry. The neighbor, Charlie Wilson, and a friend, Joe Wodaege, went to Berry's property later Tuesday night, searching for him with flashlights. They did not find Berry, but they discovered an elephant was loose so they decided to resume the search at daylight, Wodaege said.

They contacted Berry's son, Kenneth, in Seattle, and he drove to Woodland.

Wodaege and Kenneth Berry found the body this morning. It was "badly mangled," Wodaege said.

Waddell said Kenneth Berry said his father had a history of heart problems and might have had a heart attack while leading the elephant.

Elephants sometimes will try to pick up a trainer who has fallen, Waddell added.

Late this morning, elephant handler Roger Henneous and veterinarian Mike Schmidt of the Washington Park Zoo in Portland were on Berry's farm to tranquilize the elephant near the body.

Deputies on the farm had a high-powered rifle to use if necessary.

This is mating season for elephants, Waddell said, which makes males dangerous, though the sex of the elephant near Berry's body was unknown. The elephant weighs from 10,000 to 12,000 pounds and is worth about $35,000.

About three-quarters of a mile off the farm, the zoo men and sheriff's deputies had tranquilized and chained another elephant that had escaped from the farm. The escaped elephant is not believed to have been involved with Berry's death, however.

Kenneth Berry or Wilson had checked with the elder Berry every night since May 1978. Then, Morgan Berry's partner was killed by an elephant in Canada, leaving Berry alone on the farm.

The partner, Eloise Berchtold, was trampled and gored during a circus performance in Rock Forest, Quebec. As she lay dying, the killer elephant reportedly nudged her, trying to wake her up.

Berry had raised that elephant, which Ms. Bertold *[sic]* used in her act with the Gatini Circus, which she ran. Ms. Berchtold and the killer elephant stayed on Berry's farm during winters.

After Ms. Berchtold was killed, Berry flew to Rock Forest to capture another elephant that escaped from the circus in confusion.

Morgan Berry had been in the business of training and raising wild animals for 30 years.

He trapped and sold elephants, camels, cheetahs, tigers, leopards, gorillas, chimpanzees, orangutans and monkeys and dealt in Arabian horses. He also had had a hippopotamus, Bactrian camels, llamas, and elands at his farm.

Currently, however, Berry had only nine elephants and two wolves at his farm.

In 1965, he moved to the 75-acre farm on Lane Road to be closer to an airport than he had been in his previous home, Bothell.

His most popular animal locally then was Thonglaw, the bull elephant at Portland's Washington Park Zoo.

Berry's daughter, Barbara, had been manager of the children's zoo at Woodland Park in Seattle. Kenneth Berry, who currently works at Woodland Park Zoo, brought many of the animals his father trained back from the Orient and Africa.

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