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**UK NEWS**

**EMERGENCY RESCUERS IN SEARCH FOR SCOTS GRAN NEARLY DIED IN JUNGLE**



**QUESTIONS:** Mystery surrounds why Mrs Howard's body was found in dense jungle, similar to that picture

Sunday July 26, 2009

**By Ben Borland**

**THE** Mexican jungle where a Scottish pensioner's body was found was so thick that even a police search party had to be rescued, it emerged yesterday.

Officials confirmed that the remains found in a mangrove forest near the holiday resort of Cancun belonged to grandmother-of-eight Julia Howard.

The area is so dense that a group of five state policemen and hotel security staff became lost during a search on Thursday evening, adding weight to the theory that the holidaymaker would not have walked willingly into the woodland.

Red Cross paramedics and Cancun firefighters were dispatched to hunt for the missing men, one of whom had collapsed with severe dehydration, high blood pressure and heat exhaustion.

The policeman, aged 32, was placed on a makeshift stretcher and carried over five miles of swampland to the nearest road, before being transferred to hospital.

The rescue took 17 hours and has raised further questions about how 78-year-old Mrs Howard, who had a prosthetic hip, had managed to wander so far into the jungle alone.

The three-week search effort involved police on horseback and dozens of officers on the ground, tracker dogs, helicopters, firefighters and hotel security staff.

Her family, who live in Edinburgh, are heading back to Mexico on Monday to formally identify her body and the items found with it, including a pair of flip flops, a gold ring, a silver watch and a hotel key card.

Mrs Howard was a frequent visitor to the Moon Palace Resort and had flown out last month with daughter Julia Brock, 50, son Henry Harvey, 56, and his wife Glynnis, 55.

She vanished on June 16 after saying she was going out for a walk. The family had criticised Mexican police for initially failing to bring in sniffer dogs and for the authorities raising suspicions of them killing her for life insurance.

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However, State Attorney Bello Melchor Carrillo Rodriguez yesterday said Mrs Howard's death was "entirely the responsibility of the family, who took no precautions to care for a person who was not in the best position to be alone".

He confirmed that his office believe the remains belong to Mrs Howard, because the clothes and possessions match descriptions given by the family.

Mexican officials added that if Mrs Howard's family want more conclusive confirmation, they can request a DNA test from the Attorney General in Mexico City.

No cause of death has been recorded yet but Mr Carrillo Rodriguez suggested that the Scot could have died quickly from the "severity of the heat" and starvation.

Meanwhile, a local radio station report stated: "It seems incredible that a single, elderly woman with a hip prosthesis managed to walk several miles in the muddy, swamp-like terrain when investigators had such difficulty in doing so."

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An Irish expat cafe owner in Cancun, Seamus O'Mangan, asked on his Internet blog: "Many questions appear unanswered regarding the disappearance and how Mrs Howard's remains ended up three miles away in an isolated jungle location, south of the Moon Palace Resort.

"The Moon Palace itself is located well off the popular Cancun Hotel Zone, known as Isla Cancun, in a large compound-like setting along the coast."

Yesterday Mr Harvey confirmed he had been informed by police that the body is that of his mother. He said: "All we've been told is that it is my mum and nothing else at all. We're flying to Cancun on Monday – myself, my wife, my brother and sister. We should be able to bring her home on Thursday."

A Foreign Office spokeswoman confirmed that a body had been found but could not give details.

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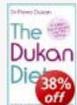
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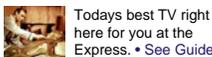
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