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The mystery continues

Police renew search for clues to disappearance of Audrey Groat nearly 16 years ago

By [Thatcher Moats](#) Times Argus Staff

MONTPELIER – After nearly 16 years, Audrey Groat's disappearance remains a mystery to police, her family and her friends. A rare search Tuesday in a wooded area in Montpelier near where her abandoned truck was found years ago turned up no new evidence or clues in her disappearance.

Groat was a 41-year-old mother of six and a Northfield resident when she went missing Aug. 21, 1993. She was reportedly last seen in Middlesex near the Wrightsville Reservoir and her truck was found at the park-and-ride in Montpelier.

Her six daughters took steps long ago to obtain a death certificate and erect a grave marker in Middleton, Conn., but the case is still unsolved, and the investigation continues.

Based on a tip received last fall, Vermont State Police and the Montpelier Police Department teamed up Tuesday with members of the New England K-9 search team to scour a wooded area between Interstate 89 and the National Life Group complex.

The team of six dogs and about 10 people found nothing of interest after roughly two hours, said Captain Edward Ledo, the Chief Criminal Investigator for the State Police.

The area is part of a larger section of woods that had previously been combed, said Ledo, but the search Tuesday focused on a specific area that police had not previously searched.

Police got the tip in November, but investigators decided to let the snow melt before bringing in the search team, said Ledo.

Ledo would not say what the tipster had seen in the woods, but "it was something that didn't look right to them and it was brought to our attention based on their knowledge of the case."

Jamesina Cote, Groat's youngest daughter, went to the park-and-ride in Montpelier on Tuesday after her mother's best friend told her of the search.

Cote, now 27 and a resident of Berlin, was 11 years old when her mom disappeared. She said the experience in the days following the disappearance was "surreal" and hasn't grown easier over time.

"It never fades," she said.

She said many of her loved ones have passed away over the years, but it is more difficult when a person vanishes.

"It's totally different, a death and a person missing," she said. "I'd take a death any day of the week. You know what happened, and with a missing person there's no ending. You're just waiting and waiting to have an answer, and there's no answer."

Cote was joined at the park and ride Tuesday by Lisa England and her daughter Kim England. Lisa England – who was Groat's close friend — is the one who told Cote about Tuesday's search, and is the one who reported Groat missing in 1993, she said. Cote was babysitting Kim England, and Groat never came to pick up her daughter.

"She never came back to get Jamie (Cote), so my husband and I are the ones who called it in," said England.

Vermont State Police Detective Sergeant Mike Henry, who works at the Middlesex Barracks, had the Groat case assigned to him about two years ago, said Ledo.

Henry could not be reached Tuesday, but Ledo said Henry is about the sixth investigator to be assigned the case over the years.

Cold cases are transferred between investigators, usually due to retirements and transfers, said Ledo. It's a beneficial process because it puts a "fresh set of eyes" on the evidence, he said.

Leads like the one police pursued yesterday are rare in Groat's case, said Ledo.

"It's been awhile" since the last tip, he said.

The last major search in the case was in 2001, when police drained the

Wrightsville Reservoir as they searched for Groat's remains, an effort that also revealed nothing.

Every Aug. 21, Groat's friends and family members gather at the park and ride where police found Groat's truck soon after she was reported missing, Cote said.

New developments in the investigation, like the recent search, dredge up old emotions for Cote, who works for Washington County Youth Service Bureau and is pursuing a master's degree in psychology.

"It always brings tears to my eyes every time there's a search, every time it's on the news," said Cote.

Closure for the family is what police ultimately want, said Ledo.

"The biggest thing is for the family who is out there suffering and wondering about their loved ones," he said. "That's one of the driving forces..."

"The problem is at this point, we don't know what happened," Ledo added. "We have theories, but we need to have more than that to move forward with a prosecutable case."

But Ledo believes the information to solve the mysterious disappearance exists.

"There's somebody out there who knows something and for whatever reason they haven't come forward," he said. "We're hoping that they do."

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