

# Mayhem rules at campsite

• 2 drown, 27 arrested during weekend of drunken rowdiness at private park in Nelson Township. Portage sheriff says enforcement will be stepped up

BY DENNIS MCEANENEY  
*Beacon Journal staff writer*

**RAVENNA:** Sheriff's deputies were called nine times to a private park and campgrounds in Nelson Township where the Fourth of July weekend was marked by two drownings, 27 arrests and an unruly crowd that set a car on fire and threw firecrackers and beer cans at deputies.

Sheriff Duane Kaley said Tuesday that although Nelson Ledge Quarry Park has not been a problem for the department in the past, "the owner has given us his blessing and we plan on doing some enforcement in there."

At 2:30 a.m. Sunday, the sheriff's dive team was called to the park to search for Gabriel Oates, 19, of Cleveland, who disappeared while swimming in the quarry at night while lifeguards are not on duty. Oates' body was found about 5:50 a.m.

When the dive team arrived, its vehicles were pelted with firecrackers and beer cans and rocked on their axles by drunken campers, Kaley said.

At 6:35 a.m., the Garrettsville fire department notified the sheriff's office that the body of Gary Gibson, 19, of Mentor, had been recovered by a companion. Gibson also had drowned while swimming

at night in the quarry.

At 10:15 a.m., deputies were called to the park to disperse a crowd hindering firefighters from extinguishing a burning car. The incident report says people in the crowd threw fuel on the car to keep it burning and threw firecrackers and beer cans at deputies.

Deputies helped firefighters reach the burning car, then arrested 11 people for underage drinking, having open containers of beer and possessing marijuana.

At 5:20 p.m., deputies returned to patrol the park and arrested 10 more people on the same charges.

Other calls to the park involved reports of fights, the arrest of a man who said he was going to get a gun to use against park security officers and a report from a Creston man who blew the skin off three fingers when a homemade firecracker went off in his hand.

Kaley said he went to the park Sunday to talk to the owner because "I didn't like the fact that these guys (on the dive team) went out to try to recover a body and while they're doing it, they're fooled with."

Kaley said he and the owner talked about shutting the park down, but the sheriff didn't order a closure because the park is pri-

## QUOTE

"I didn't like the fact that these guys (on the dive team) went out to try to recover a body and while they're doing it, they're fooled with."

**DUANE KALEY**  
*Portage County sheriff*

vate property and he had no court order.

"What you had was the Fourth of July," Kaley said. "The July Fourth holiday weekend typically has an increase in alcohol-related problems and domestic violence incidents and, of course, fireworks."

But a deputy who asked not to be named said Nelson Quarry Park "is known for wild, anything-goes weekends all summer long" involving young adults and older teen-agers.

He added: "These aren't hippies. These aren't peace-and-love flower children. These are head-bangers. Their attitude is, 'Crank up the (rock group) AC-DC and get out of my face or I'll puke all over you.'"

The deputy and Kaley noted that of the 27 people arrested at the park over the weekend, only one was a Portage County resident.

"I'm willing to give you an estimate that 90 percent of the people going in and out of there are out-of-county people," Kaley said.

Arrest reports showed that most of the 27 people arrested were from Cuyahoga County.

The park, adjacent to Nelson Ledges State Park on state Route 82, held an estimated 1,500 people over the July Fourth weekend, said Ravenna attorney Craig Stephens, who represents the owner.