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## **Seventh foot washed up as mystery deepens** **By Lorraine Mallinder**

POLICE in North America are still scratching their heads over a series of feet that have washed up on western shores over the past year in one of the most bizarre cases they have encountered.

This week's discovery of a seventh foot, shod in a New Balance trainer, in British Columbia, Canada, has prompted a fresh flurry of speculation over how the feet came to find themselves bobbing around in the ocean. Armchair theories include boat and ADVERTISEMENTplane crashes, murky underworld dealings, serial killings and even the 2004 tsunami.

Oceanographers are, however, beginning to shed more light on the mystery.

Richard Thomson, of the Institute of Ocean Sciences in Sidney, British Columbia, said that the feet probably belonged to local people who had committed suicide. Feet encased in hi-tech, lightweight running shoes, he said, would be the only body parts likely to rise to the surface and return to shore.

The "semi-closed" nature of the Strait of Georgia, the body of water separating Vancouver from the Canadian and United States mainlands, would have prevented the feet from being "flushed out" into the ocean, he said.

Chase Stoudt, a researcher at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in Washington, US, said that the cases were "definitely local". "We're thinking they (the feet) would have been floating around for a couple of weeks. We don't think they came from the ocean, but the land."

Stoudt has been carrying out research for the Clallam County Sheriff's Department in Washington State since the sixth foot was discovered south of the Canadian border in August. His and Thomson's findings discount the theory that the feet belonged to victims of the tsunami that hit Asian countries in 2004. The seventh foot was discovered on Tuesday on the shores of the Fraser River in a suburb of Vancouver.

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) are still trying to assess whether the foot, encased in a left-footed blue and white New Balance running shoe, could be a match for an earlier discovery. The latter, shod in a right-footed running shoe of the same brand, colour and size, was discovered in May.

The match, if confirmed, would be the second. The first match was between two feet found in February and June, again in British Columbia. Both were shod in blue and white Nike trainers.

Of all the feet, only the first, found in August 2007, has been linked conclusively through DNA tests to a body. It belonged to a depressed man who disappeared in the province of British Columbia months earlier.

Constable Annie Linteau of the RCMP said that foul play could not be discounted, although many tests had yet to be concluded. In the meantime, British Columbia police are still trudging through the province's missing person files. According to Ms Linteau, there are more than 2,000 files spanning 20 years.

Ms Linteau said the Canadian police had not reached any conclusions on how long the feet had spent in the water. She said they showed "no signs of having been severed. They were disarticulated through a natural process."

Detective Lyman Moores, of the Clallam County Sheriff's Department, said police on both sides of the border were working together. Police were "almost sure" that the sixth foot, found on US shores, came from Canada.

A popular theory linking the feet to passengers killed in a plane crash off Quadra Island, British Columbia, three years ago, gained substantial traction earlier this year, only to be disproved by DNA tests.

Canadian jokers have twice confused police investigations with hoax feet left on Vancouver beaches. In June, someone stuffed the bones of an animal's foot in a running shoe. In September, a plastic foot was discovered in a running shoe.