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Officials evaluating old bridge after teen killed

By Cynthia Fugate
Flyer Staff Writer

DANVILLE -- Orange plastic fencing and signs warning of danger encircle an old interurban bridge in Ellis Park where a 14-year-old girl fell to her death Sunday.

Laura Elizabeth Rudie died of massive head and neck injuries after falling 50 feet from a concrete ledge just east of PlayScape, beside White Lick Creek.

Danville Police Detective William Wright said Rudie was lowering herself to a ledge of the trestle when she slipped and fell head first onto large boulders below.

"She was attempting to descend to a lower ledge and fell," Wright said. "The terrain up there isn't safe for anyone. It's dangerous up there."

Town workers placed the signs and fencing Monday, but flowers and candles left for the Danville High School freshman at the foot of the ledge shows people are not heeding the warning. Across the creek, photos of Rudie are nailed to trees and momentos of the red-headed teen-ager lay as a memorial.

The site has been the scene of other accidents over the past several years, but none that resulted in death. In July 1997, Aja Rossman fell from the same spot and suffered numerous fractures to her face and legs, and broke her pelvis. In 2002, a 10-year-old boy fell from the same spot and broke his arm. At that time, town officials cordoned off the area with a fence and placed signs that prohibited entrance.

Town Manager Gary Eakin said the signs and the fence have since disappeared.



Cynthia Fugate/Flyer photo
Danville Police Detective William Wright and officer Bob Cole inspect the site from where Laura Rudie fell to her death.

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"In a park-type setting, signs and fencing don't always last," he said. "They disappeared over time."

Eakin said a risk loss assessor from Cincinnati-based EMC, the town's insurance company, will evaluate the defunct bridge trestle next week.

"We'll be working with their recommendations," he said.

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Because the trestle runs along a state waterway, the town will be required to work with the Indiana Department of Natural Resources.

"At this point, we just have to wait and evaluate," Eakin said. "We have to look at the trestle in its entirety in regard to activities in the park."

Rudie was an honor roll student at Danville High School and played the piano, clarinet, and guitar. She was active in 4-H and sang in the choir at St. Augustine Episcopal Church in Danville. She was a volunteer at Hendricks Regional Health where she was about to begin a job shadow program. She wanted to be a nurse. Her parents are Nevin and Jan Rudie. She has one sister, Melissa.

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