

FOX 13 SALT LAKE CITY

Gabby Petito case: Law enforcement experts don't believe Brian Laundrie is hiding out in Florida nature preserve

If he was ever there he may be long gone, 10 days after he was reported missing

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NORTH PORT, Fla. — Nearly a week into the search for Brian Laundrie, police on Friday were gearing up for another large-scale, daily search of the T. Mabry Carlton Jr. Memorial Reserve near his home, where they believe he may be hiding out.

"Our job right now is to continue to search in the Carlton," North Port Police spokesman Joshua Taylor told Fox News Thursday. "That's what we'll do."

But, veteran law enforcement experts told Fox News, it's a long shot that Laundrie is still hiding somewhere in the Florida nature preserve.

There's speculation that Laundrie may have originally fled to the reserve as cover, then traveled elsewhere. He could have taken advantage of the chaos at the southern border to slip into Mexico. Some internet sleuths think he's in Puerto Rico. Or he could have taken off in a number of other directions.

"I don't think he killed himself," Pat Diaz, a retired Miami-Dade homicide detective who has worked alongside state and federal investigators on missing persons cases told Fox News. "I think he's just going to disappear."

Dan Riemer, a Florida private investigator, agreed.

"That search in the swamp is leading everyone to believe Brian is in the swamp, and no civilians are paying attention to who is around them," he said. "[The] focus needs to be on people being aware, [and] someone will see something, just like the campers who saw then van."

Diaz said he believes that Laundrie may have returned to the West because the swampy preserve is too inhospitable and he probably doesn't have enough money to bribe authorities abroad.

"He's not going to go to Mexico, because in Mexico there's a lot of Americans there that would recognize him," he said. "I don't believe he'll go to Costa Rica because the only way you could survive in Costa Rica is if you have a lot of money. Otherwise, they'll give you up."

He also said that he doesn't believe the FBI expects to find Laundrie in the swamp and noted they already likely recovered location data from Laundrie's phone and are probably monitoring friends and relatives who could potentially aid him on the run.

"Who's in charge of the scene [at the nature preserve]? Why not have the bureau out there in charge of the scene?" he said. "Because the bureau doesn't believe he's in the swamp."

Police named Brian Laundrie a person of interest in Petito's disappearance last Wednesday. Officers arrived at the Laundrie family's home last Friday, when Laundrie's parents told them he slipped away the previous Tuesday and was missing. Petito's family alleged that he went into hiding.

Then on Sunday, authorities found Gabby Petito's body at a campsite north of Jackson Hole, Wyoming, where the couple stayed in late August.

In what may have been one of the last public sightings of Petito, eyewitnesses said they saw her apologizing for Laundrie's behavior after he berated female wait staff at Merry Piglets, a Tex-Mex restaurant in Jackson Hole.

Roughly two weeks before that, police in Moab, Utah, responded to a 911 caller who claimed he witnessed Laundrie "slapping" Petito. Police ultimately filed no charges and let the couple go.

The federal charges announced Thursday by the FBI against Laundrie are for allegedly using a debit card and PIN numbers without authorization — after Petito's death.

Diaz said the warrant for his arrest on those charges will allow authorities to hold him in custody as they continue to investigate the case.