

## SEARCH AND RESCUE IN DISTRICT 7

The Friday started smoothly enough. A group of teenagers were hiking up Little Cowhorn Mountain, a minor peak in the Cascade foothills in Lane County. This is a popular destination due to the fact that there is an old lookout cabin atop the summit, available to all on a first come, first serve basis, and the view from the top which includes the Three Sisters, Diamond Peak, and the Willamette National Forest and wilderness areas is spectacular.

That evening, twenty miles down the Big Fall Creek Valley, a church social was just getting underway, with soup and sandwiches on the menu. Then the call came. A boy was lost on Little Cowhorn Mountain. Who will join the searchers?

It seems that in youthful exuberance one of the teenage hikers had raced off the trail on the descent, and drifted out of earshot of the group. Now he had been gone for six hours, and darkness was approaching; black rain clouds and occasional lightning threatened; the youth was clad only in jeans and a tee-shirt. Time was of the essence.

“Already enroute to the mountain were volunteers of the Lane County Ground Search and Rescue, several deputy sheriffs, local volunteers familiar with the area, and a trained search canine. State Representative Cedric Hayden, who was visiting constituents that evening at the Soup Social, quickly volunteered the use of his aircraft and a pilot from his commercial aviation business, and joined the flight as one of two observers in addition to the pilot.

As the pilot, a veteran flyer for Oregon Fish and Wildlife surveys, skillfully maneuvered at nearly treetop levels around the search area in the gathering dusk, the observers could clearly see the search teams and vehicle below, but no lost boy. However the aerial search was able to eliminate the possibility of the lost person walking on a nearby logging road or signaling from an open space. Where was he? Had he been injured in the steep craggy area, or had he left the scene?

As darkness fell the aircraft was forced to return to base, but the ground crews turned on their headlamps and continued to work the search grid. About an hour after sunset the call came that the boy had been located alive and well, though wet. After losing the trail the youth had stumbled across a logging road and followed it north many miles to the McKenzie River. Seeing the light from a house across the stream, the young man had plunged into the chilly waters and swam across. Knocking at the door, he asked for the use of a phone, and called his mother.

A fortunate young man indeed. Great thanks to the searchers who give freely of their time to rescue us. It is good to know that they are there.