



PRIEST RIVER



TIMES

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Woman found after short search

Woman found on sand bar in remote Upper Priest River region, near U.S.-Canadian Border

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A 21-year-old woman was lost in the woods just south of the U.S.-Canadian Border for more than 12 hours on Wednesday night and Thursday morning before she was rescued by a cooperative Boundary and

Bonner County search and rescue effort.

Cathy Abbott, of Helena, Mont., was found in the morning on Aug. 4 about 1 1/2 miles away from the USFS contract trail maintenance crew she wandered away from the night before. She was on a sand bar tending a fire she had started with her cigarette lighter during the night.

Rescuers reported they spotted her easily.

"She was visible from the

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Priest Lake Search and Rescue were already at the site. By agreement with Boundary County Search and Rescue, Priest Lake takes charge of the scene until Boundary County rescuers arrive because Boundary County searchers must travel so far to get there.

"They're able to move so much faster than we can because they border Priest Lake," Stolley said.

The crew of 10 from Priest Lake and the U.S. Forest

Service started from the south end of the trail while three Boundary County rescuers started from the north. Both teams had search dogs with them.

The U.S. Border Patrol offered the use of an aircraft at 8:50 a.m. on Thursday morning, but before it arrived Priest Lake Search and Rescue had located the girl.

"We actually had them going from Spokane and had to cancel it right away," said

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trail. The trail ran along the river. It was real obvious," said Boundary County Search and Dive Rescue Commander Don Stolley.

The trail maintenance group was working on Trail 308 by Little Snowy Top Mountain and had camped about four miles up the trail in Boundary County.

Abbott disappeared at about

7:15 p.m., wandering off to go to the bathroom, Stolley said.

Her group looked for her for about three hours, then called the Priest Lake U.S. Forest Service Ranger District for assistance when they were unable to locate her.

The Boundary County Sheriff's Office was notified that Abbot was missing at 11:20 p.m., but rescuers had to drive all the way through Priest River and then north and arrived at 4 a.m., he said.

Priest Lake Search and Rescue team leader Bill Olmo.

The Forest Service was also helpful, providing a relay site at Hughes meadows, aerial maps and personnel to search, Olmo said.

It was the first joint mission between Priest Lake, Boundary County and Forest Service, said Priest Lake team Leader Mike Nielsen.

"The mission went great and I think it was great mutual aid," he said.

• If you get lost in the woods, Boundary County Search and Dive Rescue Commander Don Stolley advises staying put. Searchers look for someone starting at the point the person was last seen. The closer you stay to the starting point, the less area rescuers will have to search to find you, he said. Times News Editor Brent Clark contributed to this report.