

# 4-Wheeling Teens Get Lost in Woods

## Cell Phone Contact and Fireworks Lead to Rescue

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Bryan Hahn, 15, knew he and his best friend were in trouble Saturday when the trees blended into the black sky.

“It was around 4 o’clock,” Hahn said during a telephone interview Monday. “It started getting dark and we couldn’t see anything around us.”

Two and a half hours later, Hahn and his 16-year-old friend, whose mother did not want him identified, decided to stop their four-wheelers, pull out the cell phone they always carry, and call their parents for help.

They were lost in more than 1,000 acres of wooded lots that make up part of the undeveloped Lake Holiday gated community.

“Both of us were really scared,” Hahn said.

Winds gusted up to 45 mph around them.

“What we did is we parked the four-wheelers as close as we could get them and we laid in between them to keep the wind from hitting us,” the 16-year-old said.

The boys covered up with pine boughs and leaves to keep warm while they waited for help to arrive, Hahn said.

The battery on his four-wheeler had died.

But the battery on the cell phone held out. The boys called 9-1-1 and were routed to the Frederick County Sheriff’s Office after their parents instructed them to make the call.

Workers there were trying to locate the boys based on latitude and longitude signals broadcast by the phone while deputies and 25 members of the Gainesboro Volunteer Fire and Rescue Company assembled in the area.

Then a deputy called the Top of Virginia Search and Rescue Group to learn exactly where the minutes and seconds reported in the latitude and longitude numbers were, so they could narrow their search.

“Our captain did just that and reported that location was south of U.S. 50,” Top of Virginia Lt. Rick Christ said during a telephone interview Monday.

But they knew there was no way the boys were south of U.S. 50.

The neighbors that were combing the woods on four-wheelers, including Jerry Clarke, knew that.

As he combed the woods and the few miles of road that marked the start of development on the wooded lots, Clarke would run into his neighbors and deputies and get snippets of information that the boys were relaying through cell phone calls.

He learned they were on a bluff that dropped straight down to a lake and they could see just a couple lights from what they thought was a far off dock.

To Clarke, a former resident of Lake Holiday, he knew the boys were on the western end of the lake where he had taken hikes and fished.

He and a neighbor went off to a 300-acre area where Clarke thought the boys might be. But downed trees kept their four-wheelers out on two attempts.

“We hollered and screamed and whistled for them,” Clarke said.

Members of the sheriff’s office did a bit of whistling too — for help from the Top of Virginia Search and Rescue Group.

About a half hour after their first call, the search and rescue team was asked to assemble at Lake Holiday and help with the search.

The deputies were in luck.

Twenty-five searchers, most of them man trackers who had been attending training in Frederick County that day, assembled with their mobile command unit on the scene.

The deputies asked the parents of both boys to pull back the neighbors to the roadways so there were less tracks for the trackers to follow.

Clarke, defeated by fallen trees, had gone home. He didn't hear the call to vacate.

"I sat here for a few minutes and realized I couldn't go to bed with two lost kids (out there)," he said.

So he changed clothes, drove near where he thought the teenagers might be, parked his truck behind Ebenezer Church, and started following Isaac's Creek.

Around that time Hahn was on the cell phone with his mother Sue, when a deputy in a pickup truck across the lake let loose a couple purple firecrackers.

"Mom, I see fireworks across the water," Sue Hahn said her son told her.

She had him hang up, call 9-1-1 and tell the dispatcher. The boys were instructed to flash the lights on the four-wheeler, just as Clarke was edging up the bluff towards them.

The frantic flashing of a four-wheeler's headlights proved just as effective as air traffic controller's lighted wands in providing a clear approach for their rescuers.

"Hey, anybody got a cheeseburger? I am starving," Clarke remembers saying, to break the ice.

He then asked the boys if they were lost and they responded with a resounding, “Yeah, we are lost.”

The boys, like teenage boys do, wanted Clarke to help them haul out their four-wheelers. Instead he just hauled them out to Ebenezer Church where they were warmed and received a clean bill of health inside an ambulance.

The boys had been lost nearly six hours when they were taken to the ambulance to be checked.

The man trackers never checked into the woods, as Clarke checked out before them.

“I got lucky,” Clarke said. “I got real lucky. I think they did too.”