

Family member grateful for efforts to find hiker

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LINCOLN – A little more than an hour after a yellow Lab named Ziggy and his handler found the body of Daniel Merriman late yesterday morning, his brother, Ted Merriman, sorted through the ranging emotions of grief and gratitude.

In the parking lot of the Liberty Springs trail, dozens of volunteers were coming off the slopes of Mount Liberty, after spending more than two days searching for Daniel Merriman, 49, of Needham, Mass.

"They've been here for three whole days," said Ted Merriman. "Fish and Game was here leading these volunteers all night to find my brother. How do you say thanks for that?" A search for Dan Merriman began late Friday, after the despondent man sent an e-mail to his family, telling them that he was heading to the White Mountains, where he had often hiked, and that he would end his life.

While not disclosing his brother's troubles, Ted Merriman said his brother always thought of others and was close to his three sons and his family.

"This was the first thing he did for himself," he said. "This wasn't my brother making these decisions. It was preventable € if people are not more pro-active about getting help for someone, you find yourself here, and all we have now are questions." Merriman said he is grateful for what happened when the call went out about his brother's plight. The initial search began Friday and ended early Saturday morning, resuming at first light and continuing through wet weather that rolled in later that day.

He praised the volunteers who not only took to the trail, but those who stayed with the family, offering words of comfort and simple hand-holding.

"These are a special breed of people who care about their work and serving others," Ted Merriman said. "I could write a check and say thanks, but you can't buy this." Dan Merriman's body was found at 11 a.m. yesterday, several hundred yards off the Liberty Springs trail by Ziggy and his handler, Robyn Millan, of Grantham, who are volunteers with New England K-9 Search and Rescue.

"He did his job, and he did a good job," she said.

The discovery of Merriman's body capped a busy weekend in the White Mountains, stretching resources in a total of three search and rescue missions.

"We were tapped," said Fish and Game Lt. Todd Bogardus, who headed up the Merriman search, which involved more than 40 volunteers from Pemigewasset Valley Search and Rescue and Upper Valley Wilderness Response. "Volunteers made a huge difference." Some of those people taking part in the Merriman search were redirected mid-afternoon Saturday miles away, up to the height of land on the Kancamagus Highway, where a man who suffers from mental illness, ran out of the car he was traveling in when it had stopped at the Pemi Overlook.

The man, who was later brought to a Plymouth hospital for observation, spent several hours in dense wood and steep terrain until searchers found him just before 6 p.m. Saturday.

Earlier Saturday, searchers were mapping out plans to begin looking for a New Jersey man and his 8-year-old son who were overdue from a hike, according to Fish and Game conservation officer Mark Ober.

John Guterman, 40, of Maplewood, N.J., and his son, Erik, spent an unexpected night outside in the Great Gulf Wilderness after miscalculating their itinerary, Ober said..

"Mr. Guterman had planned to complete approximately 13 miles of the Appalachian Trail, beginning from the summit of Mount Washington and ending at the (Appalachian Mountain Club's Pinkham Notch base camp)," Ober said.

While Guterman has experience hiking the Appalachian Trail, he greatly underestimated the White Mountains and "just how challenging the terrain is," Ober said.

The father and son got caught in the Great Gulf Wilderness at sundown Friday and were prepared for the weather, Ober

said.

The pair began hiking out at about 5 a.m. Saturday and reached the AMC base at around 11:30 a.m., where conservation officers, AMC personnel and Androscoggin Valley Search and Rescue were organizing a search for them.

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