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A wilderness search for a 'despondent' man

By LORNA COLQUHOUN

New Hampshire Union Leader Correspondent

Saturday, Aug. 23, 2008

BETHLEHEM – About two dozen searchers fanned out from a popular White Mountains trailhead yesterday and into the Pemigewasset Wilderness searching for a Vermont man officials described as despondent.

"We're looking for the proverbial needle in a haystack," said Fish and Game Lt. Todd Bogardus.

Search teams were into their third day yesterday looking for Robert Hughes, 59, of Williamsville, a small town in south-central Vermont, more than 150 miles away from the Zealand Trail, where he was last seen earlier this week.

"He was reported missing by relatives on Tuesday," Bogardus said. "We are fairly confident he is despondent, based on the information provided by his family."



HUGHES

Hughes, he said, is not a hiker, and beyond having spent some time at the Mount Washington Hotel, is not familiar with the area.

Yesterday, conservation officers were joined by volunteers from Pemigewasset Search and Rescue and Upper Valley Wilderness Search and Rescue, the U.S. Forest Service and the Appalachian Mountain Club in the search for Hughes. Earlier in the week, a state police helicopter searched the area, as did dog teams from New England K9 Search and Rescue.

Officials believe Hughes had come to the area Monday. His car was found parked at the AMC's Highland Center, and he is believed to have taken the AMC shuttle bus to the Zealand trailhead, about 3 1/2 off Route 302 in Twin Mountain.

The AMC Zealand hut is about two miles from the trailhead, and search teams went out from another another five miles, in an area that takes in Thoreau Falls, Bond Cliff and Zealand Notch.

"They are in the heart of the wilderness," Bogardus said.

AMC teams also searched an area of the Pemi Wilderness from Lincoln Woods in Lincoln, off the Kancamagus Highway. That area of the White Mountain National Forest is one of the vastest wilderness areas in New England, according to hiking guidebooks. The distance between the Zealand trailhead and Lincoln Woods is nearly 20 miles.

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The search marks the second time in less than two months that teams have gone searching for despondent men in the White Mountains. In late June, searchers found the body of a Massachusetts man in the area of Liberty Spring in Lincoln, after he left messages with family about where he could be found.

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Several times a year, reports are received of despondent and suicidal people who head to the White Mountains to end their lives and while some are eventually discovered, there are cases when remains have not been found for over 20 years.

YOUR COMMENTS

The voices of UnionLeader.com readers: To join UnionLeader.com's discussion of the news, use the form below.

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George, Londonderry - What if this man is off his medication which resulted in his decision? You have no idea what the background is on this man's issues, I would hope in our "civilized" society we would have more compassion for those who is obvious distress that we would reach out to help them through rather than as you suggest....give up on them - May you never find yourself with a chemical imbalance or a life that has knocked you about repeatedly that you see no other resolution to your issues - rest assured if you are asking that you do end up in a sorry state of mind, we will check the list of those who do not want to be found and not send you help.

Mary - Good luck in the search, hoping for the best for you and your family
- Kim, Derry, NH

I am not sure how barbaric the comments are, to be honest. Crass? Yes. Inappropriate? Maybe. It is an interesting topic.

We waste tens of thousands of tax dollars a year looking for and bailing out the ill prepared or in this case, selfish people who make horrid choices.

On the other hand, no decent human being would not lend a hand if someone genuinely needed it.

At what point do we say "Enough. You got into it, if you want out, figure it out for yourself."

I am not sure.

- William Simpson, Lyman, NH

In response to George of Londonderry, the "fuss" over searching for those who choose to die on their own terms is not for them, but for the living. It is for the survivors who had no choice in the matter and will likely feel somehow responsible for the choice made. It is compassionate. Is the mark of an advanced civilization that it values the lives of all its members, even those who have lost the ability to see the value of their lives to society as a whole, as well as to those who love them. I am deeply grateful for all the efforts of those who search and those who pray for my family, even as hope fades. Thank you.

- Mary Hughes (Robert's sister), Tacoma, WA

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George - Your comments are barbaric and in poor taste to say the least. If it was your father, brother or uncle you would want him to be found.

- **Carole, Epping**

I'm not sure why any time is wasted searching for despondent people who choose to die in the mountains. Either the person will walk back out of the woods, or they won't. A suicidal person is not going to hide in the woods and wait three days for F&G to find them and talk them out of it. If it's a cry for help, they use more immediate options. Bushwhackers and hunters will eventually find the body, so what's all the fuss for? Leave the man to die on his own terms if that's what he wants.

- **George H, Londonderry**

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