

Prayers answered with rescue of Sunapee elderly woman lost in woods

Staff and Wire Reports

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An 89-year-old Sunapee woman survived a night alone in the woods after wandering away from her campground cabin in Vermont.

"She's an old Vermonter, and she's tough," said her granddaughter, Kim Cardona, 45, of Exeter. "I knew she'd pull through."

Mary Sweet, who suffers from dementia, was visiting Limehurst Lake Campground in Williamstown, Vt., with friends from her church Monday when she left their cabin to walk to a park bench next to the lake.

Sweet disappeared about 3:30 p.m. and was reported missing two hours later, according to Sgt. John Flannigan, a spokesman for the Vermont State Police. She was found yesterday at 12:35 p.m.



Mary Sweet of Sunapee, who disappeared while camping with family members, is helped out of the woods by Vermont State Police search and rescue team members.

"I imagine she did some resting, but we believe that she had been wandering throughout the night and the morning," Flannigan said.

Her disappearance launched a massive land and air search by rescue agencies as well as volunteers. Jeremy Hedges, 28, a resident at the park, found Sweet yesterday sitting on a slope on the backside of Limehurst Lake, approximately 265 feet west of the lake's edge, state police said.

"Prayers are answered, that's all I can say," said Maggie Dexter, co-owner of the campground.

The area had been searched before, according to Flannigan, who said Sweet was apparently wandering through part of the night and early morning.

Sweet was alert and unharmed, lying on the ground, propped on one elbow, picking ferns. She didn't know about the search, but quickly found out as Jeremy Hedges, 28, waved to a hovering search helicopter.

"It got to the point where I kept going out to a clearing and waving my shirt at the helicopter," Hedges said. "I'd come back and she kept telling me, 'I wish I had orange shoes, so you could put that on a stick and wave it, 'cause they could see you better.'"

She waved off medical attention in the woods and didn't want to get on a gurney brought in by an ambulance crew. She walked out, escorted by troopers. "Nice to see you," she said to a photographer, smiling.

"I lost my hearing aid," she said as she was led to the waiting ambulance. "I got one in, but this one, I lost," she said, motioning to her right ear.

"We'll get you a new one," granddaughter Susanne French told her, holding one arm.

"Well, it's \$1,000. I haven't got \$1,000," Sweet replied.

Emergency personnel from Barre, Vt., carried Sweet out of the woods and brought her to Central Vermont Hospital as a precaution.

"It's a happy ending," Flannigan said.

Sweet, formerly of Windsor, Vt., is a hiking buff who scaled Mount Ascutney last year. Described by one relative as "stubborn," she lived alone up until last December and was a gardener into her 80s who used to do her own roof repairs, according to Cardona.

She was wearing a turtleneck, two sweaters and corduroy pants when she was last seen, but ate nothing and endured temperatures that dipped into the mid-30s overnight.

"We do believe that if she did spend another night out here, it could have been a different story," Flannigan said.

Vermont State Police, Vermont Fish and Wildlife, Vermont Army National Guard, New England K-9, Orange County Sheriff's Department and the Upper Valley Wilderness Response Team assisted in the 19-hour search covering a 900-acre area. About 24 people were involved in the search, Flannigan said.

Union Leader Correspondent Kristen Senz and The Associated Press contributed to this report.

YOUR COMMENTS

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My great grandmother, who was 100 when she died, was a very independent & stubborn woman who did all her own gardening etc. up until her 90's. When a person gets up in years, the biggest thing that is the hardest to accept is giving up their independence. To compensate, you need to allow a certain amount of freedom. This woman reminds me how great this generation is!

- **JJS, Epsom**

How do you "lose" someone with dementia? It is unacceptable that these people didn't even escort her to the "bench". Independent or not there is a way to word it to Mrs. Sweet that for her "safety" someone will walk and sit with her wherever. They should be fined for neglect!

- **Lise, Manchester, NH**

To be 89 years old wish she had orange shoes so they could be seen better - makes me think she is far more aware than people think - haha I think she should keep hiking but with a hiking buddy. She apparently loves the outdoors.

- **Mandy Smith, Londonderry, NH**

WE ALL HERE IS GLAD TO HEAR MRS SWEET IS FINE.OUR PRAYS ARE WITH HER.GOD WILL WATCH OVER HER FOR EVERE.

- **sandra braveman, melrose mass**

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