

Mountain biker spends cold night in the woods

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A 21-year-old mountain biker spent a cold, wet night lost in a forest west of Mount Wells Regional Park on Saturday before being found by Metchosin Search and Rescue.

Russell Abraham got lost on Saturday while mountain biking in the Sooke Hills area, west of Humpback Road and north of Sooke Road. As dusk approached Abraham realized he was lost and called his stepmother with his cell phone at about 5:30 p.m. She told him to stay put and called the police. Langford Fire Rescue responded and called in the Metchosin Search and Rescue at about 7:45 p.m.

Metchosin Search and Rescue group leader Craig Barlow said members started searching on foot and with ATVs, and that a search dog was deployed. Because of the dark, members were told to stick to the trails and not "bushwhack."

Abraham's cell phone had died but he had told his stepmother some landmarks that he had seen that searchers used those as clues to find him.

Search and Rescue halted the search at about 4 a.m. Sunday morning, spent some time planning and then reconvened at about 6 a.m. to start searching again in the light. By that time Juan de Fuca Search and Rescue and Saanich Search and Rescue joined in with the effort.

At about 10 a.m. they found Abraham, cold and soaked but otherwise healthy. He walked out of the forest near Ragged Mountain without help and with his bike. Abraham's stepmother was there and Barlow said she was extremely grateful and thankful that he was OK.

"It's nice to have these kinds of outcomes, I must say," Barlow said. "It took a little bit of time for us to hit our stride as a search group but once we got operational and we had a game plan in mind it went pretty well. Almost textbook in that regard."

Barlow said that a lack of familiarity with an area that has a "spider web of trails" can lead to getting lost, especially at dusk.

"All you have to do is take one wrong trail," Barlow said, "and it connects you with another trail and that trail takes you to another trail and all of a sudden you have no idea where you are."

When heading out into the backwoods be sure to let people know where you are going and where you are starting from, Barlow said. Carry a fully charged cellphone, snacks, water, warm clothing and, ideally, a map and compass or GPS.