

Bitterroot River drowning: Boy was wearing street clothes, couldn't swim

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A Missoula boy who drowned Saturday in the Bitterroot River near Maclay Bridge didn't know [how to swim](#) and was wearing jeans when he slipped into the water, the Missoula County Sheriff's Office said Monday.

Alexander Pak, 14, was with a friend and was walking on a sandbar near the river's edge, but stepped off a steep drop-off early Saturday evening, said Detective Jason Johnson.

Contrary to initial reports provided by the sheriff's office, the boy's mother was not at the river, said Johnson. Pak was driven to the river by his friend's mother, said Johnson.

Based on interviews, investigators learned that the woman left the boys and went back to her car to retrieve something. By the time she got back, Pak had slipped into the river. It was 5:43 p.m. when she called for help.

He was found more than two hours later in the river downstream from the bridge, a popular recreation spot for teenagers.

Johnson said that Pak was not a swimmer, and that he was merely wading on the river bank when he stepped off the sandbar's steep edge, wearing jeans and a T-shirt.

"Once he couldn't touch bottom any more, the river took him downstream and he wasn't able to swim to safety," said Johnson.

Multiple agencies responded to the 9-1-1 call. Pak was found more than 100 yards downstream at 7:55 p.m.

Johnson said it's critical that people don't test their abilities in the water, whether they can swim or not, and to be aware of potential drop-offs even in shallow water.

"It's so important to know how to swim, and even if you're confident in your abilities, you should wear a lifejacket," he said.

Reporter Jamie Kelly can be reached at 523-5254 or at jkelly@missoulian.com.