



## BURKITTSTVILLE SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Deputy Dwight Weather:

Expedition was scheduled to begin at exactly 0900 hours on Sunday, beginning near the History Museum, where Liam Kent's possessions were discovered, and branching out into the Black Hills Forest, which borders the back end of the building. In total, 32 civilian volunteers arrived before we split off into groups. I led a group of 11 individuals into the Black Hills Forest. My group headed due north and stuck to that direction for the entirety of the day.

I ordered the volunteers to arrange themselves in a single row, leaving six-foot gaps between each individual for optimal coverage of the forest floor, and I urged each person to proceed with a clear head and their full attention. Less than 20 minutes into the search, several volunteers began to ask questions about the "Blair Witch." In accordance with Sheriff Lanning's orders, I forbade discussion of such incendiary topics.

We covered ground efficiently, discovering nothing but naturally occurring debris. At one point, one civilian insisted there was smoke visible in the distance, although I saw nothing of the sort when they attempted to point the smoke out to me.

Throughout this process, several volunteers sustained minor injuries, including one twisted ankle and several small scratches from nearby thorn bushes. By 1030, several of my assignees requested to return to town, citing fatigue, though I believe they were afraid to continue much deeper into the forest. At this point, we had reached a dense area where not much sunlight penetrated the canopy of trees above us, and the temperature dropped by at least 10 degrees to an uncomfortable chill. My efforts to dissuade the volunteers from leaving proved fruitless, and five members of my team ventured back, intending to use the markers we had been leaving throughout the forest as guides. The remaining seven of us soldiered on.

I allowed my volunteers to break for lunch in a small hollow at 1200 hours. At this point, I could sense morale was especially low, and while I blame the general lack of wilderness preparation (two of my volunteers wore dress shoes), I nevertheless did my level best to offer comfort.

It was during this break, at around 1215, that my group heard the sound of a woman screaming. It was difficult to determine the precise direction from which the scream had come, as the sound echoed through the clearing and seemed to emanate from all directions simultaneously. At the time, I attempted to radio my fellow officers to better triangulate the sound, but my device malfunctioned at that moment and would emit only a crackling static.

I directed my six volunteers to remain in the hollow while I attempted to track down the source of the scream, leaving markers to trace the path I took through the forest. Throughout this time, my radio continued to malfunction. After nearly 30 minutes of searching, I came to the conclusion that the best course of action would be to regroup and to pursue the noise only once I had adequate technology and backup. When I attempted to return, I failed to locate any of the trail markers that I had left behind me. I was later debriefed that a member of Officer Howard's volunteer team sustained a severe compound fracture, amongst other injuries. I assume that this noise must have carried to the clearing.

Deputy Dwight Weathers:

It took me almost three hours to find my way back to the hollow and my six volunteers, who were in the middle of a screaming fight with one another about how best to proceed, had I abandoned them or if some terrible fate had befallen me. I deescalated the situation, and directed us to head back south to our original meeting point.

The trail markers we had used to mark our northern journey appeared to be untouched. However, minutes into our trek south, at precisely 1558, we began to discover symbols carved into the trunks of the trees we had marked. While most of the symbols were inscrutable to me, some appeared to be humanoid in shape. I would have taken photographs of them, but I realized I did not have my camera with me, and that I must have left it at the hollow.

At this point, I lost control of my team. I attempted to regain control of the situation and instill an air of calm, but this effort was defeated by one volunteer, who began frantically claiming she saw someone watching us through the trees. Neither I nor the other five volunteers saw what she had seen, but nevertheless we proceeded south on high alert.

My party exited the woods just before nightfall, at 1722.



## BURKITTSVILLE SHERIFF'S OFFICE

### Officer Michelle Howard:

I connected with my 11 volunteers at 0900 on the dot and established our manner of approach: Should anyone come across any personal effect or sign of human activity in the forest, they were to immediately notify me. Several members of my group expressed concern with venturing into the Black Hills Forest, and I did my best to calm their nerves despite being slightly on edge myself. Deputy Weathers was already on site and did little to ease the tension.

I confirmed that each person was equipped with adequate supplies: whistles to get my attention, bottles of water, visibility vests, flashlights, evidence bags, and flags to mark any places of discovery or interest. We established the back of the History Museum as our starting point and headed east from there.

Our group progressed for about an hour, eventually coming to the creek that had already been the subject of several prior searches for Liam Kent. It was when we attempted to pass over this creek at approximately 1005 that an injury occurred. One volunteer slipped down a steep embankment, falling into the creek itself. I was able to recover her, but it was immediately clear that she had become gravely injured: several inches of the bone of her right forearm was exposed, and she was bleeding heavily from a long gash in her head.

I dressed the volunteer's injuries as best I could with the medical supplies I had on hand and attempted to radio for medical backup, but my radio began to malfunction. Several of my volunteers attempted to call medical services from their phones, but none of them were able to get a signal that far into the forest. As I was reluctant to split up my group for fear of individuals becoming lost, I felt there was no option but to attempt to escort the volunteer back to our meeting point on foot and contact medical services from the radio in my vehicle.

The injured volunteer became groggy and unfocused at this point, mumbling nonsensical phrases under her breath. Myself and another volunteer carried her, doing our best to help her maintain consciousness.

After walking back west for about a half hour, my group came across a small hollow. The injured volunteer expressed the desire to sit and rest for a time, and I obliged her. It was in this hollow that I discovered a camera, which I recognized as property of the Sheriff's Office. I realized that another group of volunteers must have left it behind accidentally. My group rested for about 20 minutes before pressing onward.

After another 20 minutes of walking back toward our meeting point, I realized the sun appeared to be near setting, even though it was not yet 1200 according to my clock. The injured volunteer began to groan and talk about becoming condemned to the forest. I urged my group to push onward.

After another 10 minutes, we emerged from the forest back at our original meeting point at the History Museum, running into Deputy Weathers's group. I was finally able to radio medical services. The display on my watch was 1724.



## BURKITTVILLE SHERIFF'S OFFICE

### Officer Gail Cooper:

My 10 volunteers and I embarked from our rendezvous point at 0900, heading due west.

About 45 minutes into our search, one volunteer shouted, drawing the group's attention to something he had discovered. It was a dead bird. At first glance, it appeared that the bird had perhaps fallen out of its nest and landed at the base of a tree. However, it soon became clear that someone had mutilated the animal. The bones of its wings had been removed and jammed into its own eye sockets. The volunteer claimed he followed the sound of a crying animal to that spot, but he must have been mistaken, because this bird had clearly been dead for a long time judging by its smell. I convinced him to move along. After that, I could tell that a number of my team members had a hard time focusing.

Hoping to calm down my group, I called for an early lunch break at 1100. Rosemary Kent, who was one of my group's members, had brought some sandwiches from the diner, and my team took a half hour to eat and regain some energy in a small hollow before pressing onward.

Still following my compass west, I led my group until we came upon a creek. This was strange, as I had been certain that the only creek in the immediate area was the one to the east of the History Museum, which we had searched many times before. Nevertheless, I directed my party to scan the creek and surrounding woods.

Minutes into our scan of the area, at approximately 1152, we found Liam Kent's belongings.

I asked my volunteers not to touch anything, and I took photos of the scene. I marked the location in case we need to come back for a more thorough search of the area. I then attempted to radio the news of my discovery out to the other groups, but found that my device was malfunctioning. Although Rosemary Kent urged me to press onward, I decided that it was more important to enter the items we had already found into evidence. Additionally, I could not in good conscience guide the group further into the woods without a reliable radio.

We began to follow our compass back east to our initial rendezvous point. Within minutes, we encountered five members of Deputy Weather's team, who informed us that they had decided to leave the search early but had become lost in the woods, taking almost three hours to make a trip that should have taken half as long, despite having followed the trail markers they initially set out due south. They must have wandered off course and found my group's trail markers instead.

We walked east for another hour until we reached the rendezvous point.

Despite the fact that we had spent at least four hours in the forest, the sun appeared not to have barely left its position at all. I checked my watch, and discovered that it was 0955, and that less than an hour appeared to have passed since we first embarked.

Once we process Liam's things, I highly recommend that we get them released to the mother of the missing boy as soon as possible. I think it would mean a lot to her.