

2 teens missing, feared dead

Area boys were
canoeing near Joplin

From Staff and Wire reports

NOEL, Mo. — A massive search was under way Saturday for two Kansas City area teen-agers after their canoe apparently overturned in a fierce current on the Elk River in southwest Missouri.

The Missouri Water Patrol said Joseph Bosley, 16, of Independence and Shane Holcombe, 15, of Blue Springs got caught in the current and washed over a dam Friday afternoon.

The two were camping with Joseph's family.

"A woman saw them go down, and they didn't come back up," said Daniel Thrasher, a marshal's deputy in Noel, a few miles from the Oklahoma and Arkansas borders.

The search will continue today, but one relative said the outlook may be grim.

"We pretty much feel that he's in heaven," said Shane's aunt, Debbie Holcombe of Oak Grove.

Holcombe said her nephew enjoys camping and "has a heart of gold." He respects his elders and takes care of his younger cousins, she said.

Anguish and frustration were common along the riverbanks Saturday as several teams of searchers scoured the river and family members waited for word on the boys' fate.

"You want to hear something,

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and then again you don't want to hear," said David Bosley of Blue Springs, Joseph's uncle.

McDonald County Sheriff Robert Evenson said witnesses told investigators the boys were both trying to swim upstream when the powerful current took them over the dam and into the roiling waters below.

Evenson estimated the water was about 12 to 15 feet deep at the base of the dam.

"You can't imagine how fast and powerful that current was yesterday," Evenson said.

On Saturday, dozens of men — some on foot, others in boats and one riding a mule — searched the area from the dam west to the Mis-

souri 43 bridge about nine miles downstream. Evenson estimated that as many as 200 people had been involved in the search during the day.

"We're working the river, hoping that if they have floated downstream, that we can find them," Evenson said. "Of course, we know that there is still a possibility that they are still under the spillway under the dam. That water is still tumbling there, and they could still be trapped there."

"But not knowing, we have to keep working the river," the sheriff said.

The search was called off late Saturday and is to resume at sunrise today.

Authorities have set up a command post downstream from where the boys disappeared.

Evenson said outside agencies

were providing more specialized equipment than was available in McDonald County.

Some searchers spent the overnight hours Friday and Saturday watching the dam through the glare of spotlights set up on the bank, said Bob Ewens, chaplain for the Noel Fire Department.

"There were about 11 guys who stayed and camped out along the dam," Ewens said. "They called off the search, but the guys said they couldn't go home and leave those boys in the water. For the family's sake if for no other reason, they stayed out to watch."

The sheriff said that unless the boys are found alive, this would be the first fatal incident on the dam at Noel in about six or seven years.

It would also be the first fatal incident of the 2002 canoeing season in the area.

"These incidents are not that common, but we usually have at least one drowning on the rivers each year," Evenson said. "These rivers are safe, but they can be hazardous, especially when the water is higher than normal like it is now."

"As long as it doesn't rain, the longer we wait the more the river goes down and the more the current slows down and the clearer the water gets," he said. "The clearer the water gets the better chance we'll have of finding them."

The Star's Rick Montgomery and James Hart, The Joplin Globe's John Hacker and The Associated Press contributed to this report.