

CAP Joins Ground Search

SCRANTON, Pa.—Members of the Scranton Comp. Sq. 201 (Pennsylvania Wing) were called out on a four-day search recently to look for a 78-year-old woman who became separated from her husband while the two were picking mushrooms.

Other volunteers and the local police had searched the area before the CAP was called.

In addition to the Scranton addition to the Scranton squadron, the Carbondale Comp. Sq. 204 and units from Group 80 in the Allentown area arrived to take part in the search. Approximately 90 CAP people were included.

The area involved in the search was heavily wooded, with strip mines, small creeks and a reservoir. This required that ground search teams do the actual searching.

A Pennsylvania State Police helicopter was used on the second day of the search, but was unsuccessful because of the nature of the terrain.

The woman had disappeared several days previously before an electrical storm that had high winds, rain and low temperatures that turned the rain to snow.

The search was also hampered by adverse weather conditions. In spite of pouring rain and unseasonably cold temperatures, the search continued.

Bloodhounds were brought in on two occasions and both times they tracked the missing woman to the edge of a bridge spanning the reservoir, but refused to cross it.

This led some to believe that the woman had fallen into the water and was carried down stream.

That seemed unlikely, however, because rescue workers felt her mushroom basket, her walking stick or even a few spilled mushrooms should have been found near the water's edge.

The State Police scuba dive team was called in to drag the reservoir, but turned up no trace of the missing woman.

On the third day of the search, the commander of Group 20 contacted from Scott AFB, Ill., to request assistance of air sniffer dogs of the American Rescue Dog Association.

These dogs are trained to trace human scent in the air, not on the ground like blood hounds or other tracking dogs. There are only 17 such dogs in the country.

Three dogs and seven handlers were flown in from the New York area that night. The dogs began searching the next morning.

A few hours later they found the body of the woman about one and a half miles from where she was last seen, in four feet of water in a runoff from one of the creeks. All that was visible was her hat and one shoulder.

Maj. William Mathias, mission coordinator, said she would not have been found if it wasn't for the help of the dogs because her clothing blended in perfectly with the surroundings.