

Missing Willits girl found safe after search near Brooktrails

By Adam Randall, udjar@ukiahdj.com, @theadamrandall on Twitter

UkiahDailyJournal.com



A missing 5-year-old Willits girl was found safe Friday evening, nearly six hours after she wandered off from her aunt's house east of Brooktrails.

Local Cal Fire Helicopter 101 out of Willits' Howard Forest Station located Raina Rinker's tracks in steep terrain in conjunction with Cal Fire foot crews about three-quarters of a mile from her aunt's residence in the 27000 block of Skyview Road just after 5 p.m. Friday, said Mendocino County sheriff's Capt. Greg Van Patten on the scene.

Rescuers were able to walk the girl out of the remote wooded area to a location where the helicopter could be landed safely.

The helicopter then transported the girl to an emergency command base that was established at the Sherwood Elementary School off Sherwood Road, landing in a nearby cow pasture, where she was met by sheriff's deputies, fire personnel and search and rescue volunteers.

Van Patten said Rinker wandered down steep terrain from the home, about 400 feet, where she was found with some minor abrasions and injuries as she wasn't wearing shoes.

After being checked out by emergency responders at the scene, Rinker's mother carried her daughter to a waiting ambulance, where she was transported to Frank R. Howard Memorial Hospital in Willits for precautionary observation.

"We're very fortunate she was found," Van Patten said, adding his concerns that it was getting dark, and that the temperature was dropping.

Rinker has a history of vanishing from her family's care as the Sheriff's Office has been involved in at least two prior disappearances with her, Van Patten said earlier in the day.

On this occasion, she was outside the front yard of the home when she suddenly disappeared around 11:15 a.m. Friday. The Sheriff's Office was notified shortly after at 11:29 a.m. that Rinker, standing 3-feet-5-inches tall, weighing approximately 40 pounds with brown hair and brown eyes, had gone missing.

The Sheriff's Office requested assistance from the Brooktrails Fire Department, Cal Fire and the MCSO Search and Rescue team to aid in the search. Numerous out-of-county requests were placed as well, including to nearby Lake County, and Marin Search and Rescue.

Besides sheriff and fire responders, close to 20 search and rescuers in orange were combing the area, along with dogs, during the search.

Friday's search for Rinker was exactly one month to the day when another Willits area child went missing. Brett Paul Bowman, also 5, walked away from his family's Brooktrails home in the 27000 block of Fox Road and wasn't found until the next day, the morning of Oct. 21 at least two miles away.