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RESCUE

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SINCE 1960



SEARCH AT MANN CREEK – NOVEMBER 28-29, 2000 --CHARLOTTE GUNN



Scene at base camp. [Photo by Sandy Ralston]

With additional information from F.A.A. radar records, combined with the location of the deer being tracked—and extensive aerial searching having failed to locate the missing aircraft (Story on page 8)—Idaho Power organized a massive ground search of some heavily-timbered slopes. IMSARU sent fifteen people and two search dogs up on Tuesday morning: Rick Cudd, Ed Emmel, Charlotte Gunn with Hobo, George Gunn (O.L.), Bob Kline, John Kuhn, June Lee, Jerry Newland, Steve Pack, Gene Ralston, Sandy Ralston, Leslie Robertson with

Mingo, Martha Vandivort, Tom Wheless and Everett Wood. (Craig Jones, also an IMSARU member, was functioning as an Idaho Power employee for this mission.) We found an extensive base camp and more ATV's and pickups than most of us see in a year, as about 120 people were involved in this day's work. The searchers included a large contingent from Idaho Power, friends and relatives of the missing men, and other volunteers.



No, your eyes aren't fuzzy. The snowstorm was starting.

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Deadline of the 20th of the month is required for material to be included in the next month's issue.

Washington County Sheriff Jim Nelson and Deputy Cy Armstrong provided the legal presence. Idaho Power's Frank Edelman organized the searchers into teams, each working under one of five area leaders. We sent an IMSARU member with each of the area leaders; others remained in base camp as medical standby under the leadership of paramedic Steve, and general gofers. Ed set up our radio system in the Cattlemen's Cabin and Gene rigged power across the creek from his generator. Needless to say, in that terrain a hundred searchers made a bare beginning. All returned safely from the field, refreshed themselves with chili and soup from the cook tent, and headed for wherever they would spend the night.



Gene is happy to have survived his first drive in 901.

Ed, John, Bob, June and Jerry had to return home; the rest of our team retired to the two campers or spread sleeping bags on the cabin floor, except for Martha who snagged the sofa.

On Wednesday morning, Winston Cheyney arrived to join the IMSARU group, and the total count for the day was about 77 people. Since the majority were returning to the same teams and areas as the previous day, organization was simpler and searchers were in the field earlier. We put chains on all four wheels and Gene Ralston

was conned into driving 901 as a shuttle for searchers. At one point, there were 13 people crammed into that poor old Suburban, moving between the Mann Creek Guard Station and the Cattlemen's Cabin. That, however, was the easy part of Gene's day. When the weather closed in, he was slipping and sliding on both sides of the summit as a major link in the effort to collect foot searchers and return them to camp. The "slipping and sliding" is not a criticism of Gene's driving but a description of 901's cranky ways and the treacherous condition of those mountain roads—ruts obscured by fast-accumulating snow and ice, with wind-driven snow severely limiting vision. Searchers on foot and those driving ATV's were not enjoying the change, either, and all were greatly relieved when the last person returned safely to base.

George, Gene and Sandy remained for the debriefing session and agreed to drive home on Thursday; the rest of us packed up a ton of slushy wet gear and headed back at around 7 p.m. We stopped to remove 901's chains when the road became more brown than white, and had our last adventure there—a half-grown black kitten mewling piteously by the side of the road in the middle of nowhere. Mingo moved up to share the back seat with Hobo and the cat rode in the kennel; in Weiser, Rick bought a can of cat food which was obviously appreciated. Our crew was delighted to see the welcoming committee of Rod Knopp, Ed Emmel and Sam Barker, who met the trucks at the Compound to unload all that snow-wet gear and spread it out in garage and meeting room to dry.

Those who are familiar with the hundreds of square miles of wild country in some of our western states can understand how daunting is the search for a small plane that disappears. Much of the terrain is inaccessible, and winter's arrival makes it more so. Aerial searchers cannot see down into the trees;

4-wheel-drives and ATV's cannot travel between the roads and trails; foot searchers are limited in how far and how fast they can move. We are all hoping for a miracle, but none of us knows when that plane will be found—days, weeks, or years from now. Idaho Power had to close down this portion of the search after December 1, due to weather, road conditions and searcher fatigue. We can only ache for the families and friends who are awaiting closure.

Thoughts on IMSARU's role in this search: We were essentially a backup in case something went wrong, as it so easily could have with so many people and such unforgiving terrain. I was amazed at the number and skills of our people who responded for a weekday search. (Being all volunteers, some of our members used vacation time from their employers; some switched work schedules in order to participate one or two days; several paid for care for children and animals.) For medical skills, Steve is a paramedic, Jerry and Tom are first responders, Winston is a nurse, and we also had at least one former wilderness first responder and two former EMT's. Ed is a highly experienced professional communications supervisor for the city of Boise (also the one who keeps our unit radios and pagers functioning) and he supervised the setup of our base camp radios and their J-pole antennas that, together with Gene in 901 up on top, were able to help communicate with scattered teams that needed extrication. The legendary B.K. and June, who haven't been around much since they moved to Crouch, brought wide experience; together with Everett and George, they contributed some 75 years worth of experience in search management. Our members who went out with the area leaders never knew whether they would be working on navigation and communications from the vehicles, busting through snow and timber on foot, or even driving an ATV. (There were bets as to whether Everett would turn in that brand new machine at the end of the day.)

The basic search organization, however, was Idaho Power's, and they had to deal with the million details that don't show up on the TV news—where to set up base along narrow back roads, where to park all those trucks and trailers while maintaining an open lane, search areas and keeping track of which parts had been covered, a cook tent that functioned from before daylight until after dark (have you ever had spaghetti with mooseburger sauce? yum!) portable toilets, warming areas for cold searchers, keeping track of radios and GPS units, how to get all those searchers into the field and back out again. When everyone was safely off the mountain, fed and headed toward rest, then Frank, his area coordinators, the sheriff and Cy (and George for the first two nights) met to go over what had been accomplished and what was the next step for tomorrow. The fact that no one was hurt or lost during the operation was a minor miracle. This kind of search is incredibly complex, and those who organized and coordinated it deserve the highest commendation.

LOST HUNTER IN WALLOWA COUNTY, OREGON—OCTOBER 30 --CHARLOTTE GUNN

A 73-year-old male was hunting with friends on the edge of the Wenaha-Tucannon Wilderness, in the Peerless Springs area, when he disappeared on October 24. He was reported to be an experienced outdoorsman, hunting this area for the second year in a row, but dressed for the lovely weather of the day he left camp, not for the nasty weather (heavy rain, snow, sleet, wind, more heavy rain) that followed. The Wallowa County Sheriff's Office asked us to meet in Enterprise at 7 a.m. and especially to bring our search dogs.



Teams prepare for the field. [Photo by Mathew Marmor]

Enterprise, OR is not terribly far in miles from our Compound, but there is no easy direct route. Rod reserved motel rooms for Sunday night and we drove over to get some sleep before our day of searching—George and Charlotte Gunn with Hobo, Paula McCollum with Jeb, Jerry Newland, Leslie Robertson with Mingo, Tony Rockwell, Chris Schneck and Everett Wood as O.L. Leslie had to stop en route to take a photo of the Mingo Motel, but most of us were disoriented enough by the time changes (from Daylight Savings as well as a different time zone) to hurry to bed.



Tony, Leslie and Mingo early in a long day.

On Monday morning we treated ourselves to a restaurant breakfast before continuing to the Sheriff's Office, where we met Matthew Marmor, who was coordinating the search. He supplied laminated maps and information before leading us some 2-1/2 hours into the hills. In the intervening days, bloodhounds had worked the track from the hunters' camp out to the rim of the breaks and many searchers (including members of the hunting party and from Union County and Wallowa County) had scoured likely areas. The only clue beyond where the dogs had lost the trail was a candy wrapper which matched what the subject was carrying.

We split into three teams, each including a dog and handler plus one or more other people, to search different areas, all working out from camp toward the breaks. Chris, George and I were lucky enough to have Tracy, a member of the hunting party who knows every inch of the terrain and could take us from any point A to any point B at any time. All of us appreciated not having the rain of previous days; the mud and wet surfaces were enough reminder. Our search areas included lots of woods with brush and deadfall, and scattered mushy meadows, all with varying degrees of steepness. Alan Nichols (Union County) also worked his bloodhound again on this day.



Jerry, Paula and Jeb head for the field.

It was late afternoon when word came over the radio that Leslie and Tony had found additional candy wrappers impaled on tree branches, in a manner consistent with the way the subject typically marked his trail; these would catch the eye of someone who had gone along the edge of the breaks to either east or west and wanted to be sure that, on returning, he could pick up the end of the trail back to camp. We felt fairly certain that the subject had placed these markers. Unfortunately, there were no clues as to whether the subject had gone east or west from that spot, nor of whether he had returned to it and started on the trail back. With daylight and energy fading, we converged on that spot and asked the dogs to check along the rim; reactions were indecisive. We trekked through the dark back

to base camp, where a treat awaited—beef stew, salad and pies, served in a heated wall tent. Thank you, Wallowa County!

After some debriefing and discussion of areas for possible continuing search, the IMSARU team headed home via Tollgate—still a long trip, but shorter and easier than the other route. The Gunn camper stopped at the first Forest Service campground after reaching the paved road, but all the others drove on, reaching home at around 2 a.m. for a very few hours' sleep before reporting for work.

On November 6, we received a call that subject's body had been found approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile east of our search area, where he had crossed a canyon and gone up another ridge. We send our sympathy to his family, who had waited almost two weeks for this closure.

Note: We were warned that compasses behaved strangely at some places in our search area, and it was true. So did GPS units. Any team that relied on just one GPS for the group could have had some interesting navigation challenges. We recommend that, as a general rule, *each* person carry a radio and a GPS for wilderness search. We also received a vivid reminder that a day search can turn into a night search and every pack should contain a light source.

P.S.—George, who didn't realize he was developing a respiratory infection until he woke up on Tuesday morning, sends special thanks to Jerry, Alan and all the other team members who shepherded him back to base camp.

SOME TRAINING NOTES

The last couple of months have been very busy (see mission reports in this issue and November's) but we have managed to squeeze in some training as well. Medical training included a refresher on hypothermia by Steve Pack—shortly before we dealt with a frostbitten subject and searched through winter weather for other missing people. Tom Wheless was a big hit when he brought his sewing machine to the Compound and demonstrated how easily one can make one's own fleece hats, mittens, etc. Dog handlers have cancelled some scheduled training times because of missions but, in addition to the usual mini-sessions arranged informally between handlers, we had a great time at Martha Vandivort's. (Not only is she across the street from lots of open land, she served a hot meal after our work.) Some of us have enjoyed the chance to work with people from other units—Dave and Rena Ferguson from Bonneville County, Kim Trust from Anchorage (temporarily in Pocatello), Janet Wilts from near Jackson, Wyoming. General unit SAR training included, in response to several requests, a session on radio use and etiquette.

IMSARU CHRISTMAS PARTY, DECEMBER 3, 2000

--CHARLOTTE GUNN

It was in a new place—the clubhouse at David Hay's apartment complex—but observed all the old traditions. About 45 of us had tons of great food, lots of stories and laughter and just enjoying each other's company, serious recognition of service and not-so-serious "awards" for funny and embarrassing moments during the year. We appreciate all the spouses and families and friends who came to share in the celebration of activities that they so often support by holding down the fort while their IMSARU members head off for new adventures.

There's not space in this issue to list all the silly awards, but the finale was the "Men of SAR" calendar compiled and printed by Deb Ralph and Pam Green. If you missed its debut, you can see a page each month of 2001 in the meeting room at the Compound. Rumor has it that you can even buy copies; talk to Deb or Pam.



Food, friends and fellowship—a good part of IMSARU.

Rockwell, Tom Wheless, Chris Karnes, Travis Mundell and Dave Brock.

Pam presented an "I'm the boss" T-shirt to Rod Knopp as a small token of our appreciation for his guidance through another year as IMSARU Coordinator and for the hundreds of hours he spends in organizing our missions.

The search dog handlers presented "I was found by a search dog" T-shirts (complete with muddy paw prints) to some of the people who have worked with us as subjects, navigators, boat drivers, etc. Recipients included Gene Ralston, Rod Knopp, Troy Green, Aimee Hastriter, Rick Cudd, Tony



Before....

Pam also presented unit patches to some members who have met their requirements in recent months: Adam Chitwood, David Hay, Chris Karnes, Steve Pack, Tony Rockwell and Martha Vandivort.

Rod then offered champagne toasts to all the families and friends who support the unit's work, to the members, and to the group as a whole and what we accomplish.

Gene and Sandy Ralston, who have worked with us many times over the past year and a half, and who have moved us to a whole new level in water search, received official

orange T-shirts and membership patches.

Rod presented elegant pocket knives with engraved wooden handles to: Tony Rockwell (webmaster as well as field searcher); Leslie Robertson (public relations director, fundraiser, active searcher, K9 handler); Pam Green (new



After.....

member coordinator, active searcher, K9 handler); Chuck Bricker (vehicle maintenance and repair); Aimee Hastriter (active searcher and inspiration in her desire to learn); Jeff Munn (property manager); Tom Wheless (past medical director, active searcher); Ed Emmel (communications maintenance plus); Charlotte Gunn (newsletter editor, active searcher, K9 handler); Tim Henning (equipment maintenance and field work).

Additional special awards included a clock to Rick Cudd as symbol of the hundreds of hours he spent on safety education this past year and will spend as president in 2001, and a canine statue to George Gunn in recognition of the multiple contributions he has made as president, O.L., searcher, K9 handler and in building the new “command center” in our office. Lest we get too serious, Rod finished off with a special reserved parking sign for IMSARU members who have retired from their professional lives—Bob Kline, June Lee, George Gunn, Charlotte Gunn and Everett Wood—and a suggestion that this retirement gives them more time to donate to IMSARU.



Aimee with her gold medal for freestyle sledding at the “winter Olympics.”

LOST HUNTER IN BEAR VALLEY AREA—OCTOBER 25 --LESLIE ROBERTSON AND TOM WHELESS

At 2:30 a.m., the pagers started beeping and vibrating. Coordinator Rod Knopp was putting together a response for a Boise County hunter who failed to return to his hunting camp at 5 p.m. the previous day. Our team members needed to respond to the Compound at 5:30 a.m.

Leslie and Mingo met Craig Jones at the Compound. A questioning glance at Craig’s “search attire” elicited the information that Craig left his bed that early just to help load the truck. That is dedication! Tom was able to respond at 6:30, so he and Leslie headed for the hunting camp “about 1-1/2 hours north of Lowman on the Bear Valley Road.” Sheriff Gary Brown had met members of the hunting party at 6 a.m. and continued to another location.

As usual, this search was on the boundaries of two counties and four topo maps. Valley County SAR members joined us at the hunters’ camp. We all moved out when the Sheriff asked us to join him at the subject’s vehicle, about 8 miles south of the camp. En route, we received another radio message that the Sheriff had “weak radio contact” with the missing hunter (presumably via Family Radio Service walkie-talkies) and asked us to hold up in case we needed to be re-directed to the hunter’s location.

In the meantime, Leslie and Tom watched Rick Cudd roar overhead in the search plane flown by Bill Miller of the Ada County Aerial Sheriffs. When we received the message that the lost hunter had been found, and that he did not need any medical assistance, we headed back to Boise. We did not count it a wasted day, as we had a nice drive through some very beautiful country.

Also, we think that was one lucky hunter to be rescued so quickly. With the cold, rainy weather we had in Boise the next day, remaining lost up in Bear Valley would not have been comfortable.

Note: With the increasing use of Family Radio Service walkie-talkies by hunters and campers, we need to be sure to take on missions the radio box that contains our own compatible units. Sam Barker tells us that, even though people may be using any of 14 channels and 38 privacy codes, turning the tone off or to zero (depending on the model we are using) and setting our receiver on scan will allow us to receive any transmissions in the area. We won't necessarily be able to talk to the user, but we should be able to devise a directional finder that will enable us to figure out where the transmission originates—much as an ELT finder hones in on downed aircraft or avalanche transceivers locate buried signal sources. If the people carrying their personal radios into the outdoors will also agree ahead of time on a procedure—"the lost person will transmit every hour on the hour; the searchers will transmit on every half-hour" or some such—this new technology might decrease the hours of misery.

MISSING PERSON IN IDAHO CITY, NOVEMBER 25, 2000 --CHARLOTTE GUNN

A 53-year-old male reportedly walked away from a party sometime during the night of November 25-26. He was not familiar with the town and was reported to have been drinking. He was said to be wearing tennis shoes and to have not taken his coat. Night temperature was well below freezing and there was snow on the ground.

The call came at the perfect time for a volunteer group—about 7 a.m. on Saturday morning. IMSARU responded with 14 people, leaving the Compound at about 8:30 a.m.: Richard Clements, Rick Cudd, Robert Gilley, Charlotte Gunn with Hobo, George Gunn (O.L.), Tim Henning, Bill Lindenau with his ATV, Paula McCollum with Jeb, Jerry Newland, Steve Pack, Leslie Robertson with Mingo, Suzanne Ventura, Tom Wheless and Everett Wood. On-scene, we learned that information was unclear on such details as when the subject was last seen; contrary to report, there was no scent article. And of course lots of people had been searching, and no one knew for sure what shoes he was wearing, so mantracking was problematical.

After visually ascertaining that the subject had not departed via the back of the house (no tracks leading to and over the fence), we deployed Mingo with Leslie and Rick along one side of the airport, south of the LKP, and Hobo with Charlotte, Jerry and Robert along the other side. Both teams were looking for the person but also for indications that he might have been in that area. There is a lovely fitness trail that circles the airport and provides good walking surface; however, the flankers got to negotiate piles of old mining tailings. Bill used his ATV to check alleys to the east. In response to a neighbor's report of someone having been in their yard very early in the morning, Tim, Tom, Richard, Suzanne and Steve spread out to the northwest to search structures and vehicles where a person could have sought shelter.

We had been in the field perhaps an hour and a quarter when the subject was picked up by a deputy at Highway 21—the south edge of the search area--where he was attempting to hitchhike. Steve and Suzanne went to the Sheriff's Office for immediate medical evaluation; the subject was mildly hypothermic (oral temp of 95 degrees F.) and had frostbitten feet. (In addition to the moisture from snow, he had waded through the creek south of the airport.) The subject and his family refused EMS transport, but Steve recommended that they seek medical attention.

The subject had spent part of the night in a school bus. He passed through the search area behind our dog teams, and was located just as Bill, Robert and Tim were beginning to check the bus lot. We debriefed at the Sheriff's Office, then team members who felt the need to hurry home packed up and headed down the highway. The rest of us treated ourselves to a hot restaurant lunch before following. We assume that Robert got his feet warmed up quickly. (He had forgotten his boots and so searched in less-than-adequate footwear.) And we'd like to hear a replay of his and Bill's discussion of the "unbreakable" water bottle.

“WHY DIDN'T YOU...?” – THOUGHTS ON HINDSIGHT --CHARLOTTE GUNN

You'd think by now I'd be immune to the outside critics who would have no idea how to do the mission themselves but, armed with 20-20 hindsight, tell us how we should have done it. Part of the vulnerability is that we need to critique ourselves and be alert for lessons we learned, mistakes we made, how we might do something differently next time. None of us has been in this business long enough to know everything. And I can absolutely guarantee that when we have not located a subject and later hear that he was found by someone else, the first question from every searcher is "Where?"—always with a tinge of fear that he was in my search area and I missed him.

There are so many handicaps in the SAR business (vicious weather, nasty terrain, incomplete information, wrong information, insufficient resources, equipment failures, human nature, to name just a few) that we should be surprised when we *are* successful. Yet we do take it personally when our mission does not succeed. We need to avoid beating ourselves over the head with "Maybe we should have searched a day longer" and "If only I'd been in better shape" and "If only we had extended the search area for so many miles in such-and-such a direction." But it still hurts when the outsiders blame us.

Most recently, this has bothered me about the search for the airline attendant murdered in Boise. "Why didn't the dogs locate her body?" --Because our search area was upstream of her location. [We do recognize that her body may or may not have been in the same place the whole time, but the Boise River is too much to cover thoroughly in just a shore search.] "Why didn't searchers find her clothes the first time they went along the Greenbelt?" --Maybe they did, but had no description at that time of what she had been wearing, and had no way of distinguishing her clothes from the hundreds of other pieces of clothing strewn along the way. A few years ago, it was local searchers for a drowning victim who were making meant-to-be-overheard comments about our sitting around with our dogs instead of working; they obviously knew nothing about the need to rest the dogs between sessions of intense concentration in the boats, but I still bristled.

Where is the fine line between sensitivity to one's weaknesses and mistakes in order to learn from them and avoid arrogance, and the negativism of listening too closely to the self-appointed experts who don't know what they are talking about? How do law enforcement and emergency services personnel, who must get this kind of thing all the time, keep their balance?

SEARCH FOR MISSING PLANE – NOVEMBER 20, 2000 --CHARLOTTE GUNN

As reported in the media, a small plane carrying a biologist to do a deer count along the Snake River disappeared on November 16. The company that had chartered the plane did aerial



IMSARU mission debrief in a warm restroom.

(An airplane, even if broken into pieces, would offer a much larger and more reflective target than a human body.) Gene also arranged for us to assist in the search with our ELT directional finders and personnel for a shoreline search from a boat.

Both Gene and Crayton can fill you in on the complexities of getting a 340-pound package from Seattle to Boise, but it arrived early Monday morning and Gene assembled the equipment before heading out with Tommy Korn. In the meantime, the following IMSARU crew left the valley at 6 a.m.: Rod Knopp with the big Boise County patrol boat, Adam Chitwood, Rick Cudd, Aaron Garrison, Charlotte Gunn, George Gunn, Craig Jones, Jerry Newland and Suzanne Ventura. It's a beautiful drive into Hell's Canyon, though one would prefer daylight and clear sunshine.

We met at the Oxbow power shop for briefing, then Jerry and Aaron took one directional locator along Oxbow while the rest of us went back upstream to Brownlee. (For those of you who don't know him, Jerry has wide experience with ELT locators, and we

searches, using both helicopters and fixed-wing craft, without finding any trace of the missing aircraft. At least one of the search craft reported a "very weak" electronic signal over one of the reservoirs. On November 18, the company asked Gene Ralston to bring his side-scan sonar to check whether the plane might be in Brownlee or Oxbow reservoirs. Gene contacted his friend Crayton Fenn in Seattle, and arranged to borrow a side-scan towfish that casts a wider pattern.



Suzanne and Rick use the ELT direction finder at Brownlee Reservoir.

were really glad to have him on the mission.) Rod launched his boat at Woodhead Park and Craig and Adam joined him for the shoreline search; an Idaho Power boat ran the same kind of search on the opposite shore. Both boats went beyond Sturgill Creek and then worked their way back up to the park. It was pleasant during the sunny early afternoon, and very cold as the sun dropped; the crew worked until dusk. The Gunns set up base camp on a high site in the park, monitored radios and kept hot water ready for chilled searchers. Rick and Suzanne used the other directional locator at several points along the Brownlee shore; they picked up DF signals but no REC. In our debriefing, Jerry explained the effect of power transmission lines and other electrical equipment on the ELT locators. [This debriefing was probably the first IMSARU has ever held in a restroom. Think about it: Would you stand around in a cold, dark, windswept parking lot? Or would you move the group into a clean, spacious, well-lighted, *warm* restroom?]

As so often happens, we did not find the missing people. We did, however, fulfill our mission. The electronic signals being received at ground level around the edge of the reservoirs on Monday were not coming from a plane's ELT. The shoreline search crew reported an 80-90% POD for any object larger than a golf ball, and they found no debris likely to be from a plane.

BUSINESS MEETING, DECEMBER 26

Yeah, that's the day after Christmas. But we have important decisions to make, including an offer to lease part of our property and at least one prospective buyer. We also need to talk about the coming year in terms of programs and training. Recent business meetings have been pre-empted by mission calls and the Thanksgiving holiday schedule, so things have piled up. Please make every effort to attend this one, and participate in discussions and decisions about our future.

P. S. - It's not too soon to pay your dues for 2001.

SIDE SCAN MISSION AT LAKE POWELL, OCTOBER 22-24 --GENE RALSTON

While assisting the Rich County SAR with the Bear Lake drowning search, we had the grand opportunity to become acquainted with Pat Horning, who works for the Glen Canyon National Recreation Area (GCNRA) which is administered by the National Park Service. Pat had used a remote operated vehicle (ROV) to unsuccessfully search for the drowning victim several weeks earlier and had returned to conduct the recovery effort.

Pat was impressed with the deep-water capability of the custom-made towfish. On October 7, he called to ask if we would be interested in coming to Lake Powell to help search for another drowning victim, a 54-year-old man who had been vacationing with friends on a houseboat and had fallen or jumped from the houseboat earlier in the day. Pat reported that the houseboat was equipped with a GPS unit and it had been set to record the track of the houseboat as it entered Rock Creek Bay! They were going to conduct the initial search using the ROV, but wanted us to be on standby if that was unsuccessful.



The ROV used for recovery at Bear Lake (article in Nov. issue) and at Lake Powell. [Photo by Sandy Ralston]

One week later, not having found the subject, Pat called, officially requesting our assistance. He indicated the water depth in the primary search area ranged from 200 to 250 feet and the bottom was very irregular with a 70-foot vertical wall running through the middle of the search area. A search dog had been deployed along the shoreline and had a very strong alert in an area downwind from the predicted PLS.

Wahweap Marina, Arizona, to begin search efforts there. A north/south search line was established, which appeared to parallel the underwater contours and, coincidentally, nearly paralleled the track of the houseboat. The lines were extended well past the north and south boundaries of the previously searched area to allow for turns and repositioning. The IC requested us to start searching as near shore as possible even though the houseboat had been travelling into the bay more than 500 feet offshore.



The mother ship for the ROV. [Photo by Sandy Ralston]

The irregular terrain and large boulders on the bottom required imaging each “lane” in opposite directions to see into the shadow areas behind boulders and pinnacles. By the end of the first day, we were near the houseboat’s trackline.

Following completion of a mission in Wyoming, we headed directly to

About 30 minutes into the second day’s search, we imaged the body lying in 286 feet of water in a relatively smooth area of the bottom. We placed the acoustic target nearby and the vessel with the ROV was brought into place and anchored. Just as the ROV made contact with and grasped

the body, a strong squall with 30 to 45 mph winds came into the mouth of the bay. The ROV deployment vessel is about 12 feet wide by 40 feet long and has a large cabin. Needless to say, the winds were sufficient to cause the large vessel to drag its twin anchors and the ROV on a wild ride! When the storm had subsided, it was discovered that the ROV had been severely tangled in the anchor lines as well as with the acoustic target, and had lost the victim.

The next few hours were spent untangling the ROV from the anchor lines and clearing the area to begin the side scan search for the again missing person. We concentrated the search effort in the area of the original find and the adjacent two lanes. We found drag marks made by the ROV and the acoustic target during the storm, but could not clearly see the victim. We reviewed the images from several passes over the same area and tried to determine the most likely path of the ROV during the storm.

Upon closer examination and evaluation of the images, an object of the right size and shape appeared to be lying in the trench made by the ROV as it was dragged on the bottom. The slightly out of shape acoustic target was again deployed just as dusk began to fall. The IC suspended the day’s activities, since we had a nearly hour-long trip back to the marina, most of which we made in the dark.

The following morning, the ROV mother ship was again anchored near the target and the ROV was sent to the bottom. Since the object was in the trench with only a small portion above the “ditch banks,” it was very difficult to find. Pat guided the ROV operator along the trench to the object, using a sector scanning sonar mounted on the ROV, much like an aircraft radar screen. Visual confirmation was made only after the ROV had grasped the object and used its thrusters to clear the turbidity from the area. The ROV and the body were then gently pulled by hand to the surface, escorted by scuba divers the last 80 feet or so.

The National Park Service conducted this mission in a very professional manner. They prepared daily Task Assignment Forms for each team. In addition to our side scan team, they provided the ROV team and two to three “picket” boats to control other boat traffic in the area. Missions began each day at 0500 and briefings were held at the end of each day. Safety officers placed medical oxygen on board the sonar vessel for use in treating potential CO poisoning from the boat and generator exhaust. Frequent radio contact was maintained among all boats for status checks as well as safety matters. We were very impressed, and look forward to working with them in the future.

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DO YOU HAVE A SHOP VACUUM THAT YOU WOULD BE WILLING TO DONATE TO IMSARU? We need one for many cleanup chores at the compound.

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IMSARU MEMBERS WHO ARE WEB READERS, BE SURE TO CHECK THE CALENDAR AND THE TRAINING SCHEDULE ELSEWHERE ON THIS SITE AND ADD THE INFORMATION TO YOUR PERSONAL CALENDAR.