

Lost Person Behavior

A look at the Generalities of lost person behavior.

The Profile

- Detailed Physical Description
- Point Last Seen (PLS)
- Activities most likely to engage in (hobbies, interests, etc.)
- Personality Traits (loner, despondent, outgoing, etc.)



General State of Health

- Recent illness, poor physical condition, COPD, poor nutrition and one's ability to cope with a strange or new environment can all lead to physical and mental stress.
- General Health may give insight to subject's capability.
- Fatigue may cause poor mental judgement.
- Exhaustion may prevent helping themselves.

Subject Profile & Info

- Info collected by Planning Section and is an ongoing process throughout the Search Mission.
- Debriefing Teams to compile what was found or "not" found helps develop strategy.



Children (1-3)

- Unaware of the concept of being lost.
- Little or no navigational skills and sense of direction
- They tend to wander aimlessly.
- They may seek out a convenient place to lay down and go to sleep:
 - Under thick brush or ferns
 - Inside a log, trailer, boat, automobile
 - Under an overhanging rock
 - Under a picnic table

Children (3 to 6 years)

- More mobile than 1-3 year olds
- They have a concept of being lost, and will generally attempt to return home or back to someplace they are familiar with.
- May be drawn away by animals, older children or exploration
- When tired they will seek out a sleeping spot
- May have been instructed to stay away from strangers.

Children (6-12 years)

- Navigational and direction skills more developed
- Become confused in strange environments
- Intentionally run away to gain attention, sulk or to avoid punishment
- Often will not respond when called to

Children (6-12 years) continued

- Darkness usually brings on a willingness to accept help and be found
- Same fears as an adult but greater feelings of helplessness
- Circumstances may reflect being transplanted

Elderly (above 65)

- Often suffering from Alzheimer's disease
- Easily attracted to something that strikes their fancy
- Orientation is to past environment instead of present
- Many pose same supervisory problems as children

Elderly (cont...)

- The more active and lucid ones tend to over-extend and exhaust themselves rapidly which can result in heart attack or other potentially fatal complications.
- They are often hard of hearing or deaf which present problems with detection.

Alzheimer's

- "They go until they get stuck."
- Appear to lack ability to turnaround.
- Subject oriented to the past, degree of the disease sends them back in time
- Subject usually found in a creek, or drainage and/or caught in briars/bushes (63%)
- Leaves own residence or nursing home, possibly with last sighting on a roadway

Alzheimer's (continued)

- Coexisting medical problems that limit mobility are common.
- Has previous history of wandering (72%)
- May cross or depart from roads (67%).
- Usually (89%) found within one mile of IPP, half found within 0.5 miles.
- Subject usually found a short distance from road (50% within 33 yards)

Alzheimer's (continued)

- Subject may attempt to travel to former residence or favorite place.
- Subject will not leave many verifiable clues.
- Will not cry-out for help (1%) or respond to shouts (only 1% response rate).
- Succumbs to the environment (hypothermia, drowning, dehydration).

Alzheimer's (continued)

	<12 hrs	>12 hrs	> 24 hrs	> 48 hrs	> 72 hrs
• Walk-out	93%	48%	32%	40%	20%
• Evacuated 7%	33%	35%	20%	0%	
• Dead on Arrival	0%	20%	32%	40%	80%

Mentally Challenged

- Many times they will hold up for days in the same location.
- They really have no physical impairments except they will do nothing to help themselves.
- Vermont has seen multiple searches for the same victim.
- That same victim has gone as far as 8 miles and as little as 1/4 mile.

Mentally Challenged (cont....)

- While Syrotuck had mentioned mentally retarded behavior, he did not have a large enough database to create meaningful statistics. The mentally retarded profile accounts for 3% of Virginia's reported last person cases. It proved to be a unique blend of both the Alzheimer's and lost children's profiles. Mentally retarded children tend to act more like age adjusted children, while adults tended to act more like the Alzheimer's profile.

Mentally Challenged (cont....)

- Blend of both Children and Alzheimer's profiles
- Shape of distance traveled from IPP curve similar to Alzheimer's with slight expansion of distances
- Good survivability rates (96%)
- 97% will not respond to their name
- 17% also had some physical impairments
- Subjects did not travel to identifiable targets

Mentally Challenged (cont....)

- Often found in structure (21%) or yards (16%)
- Will travel into brush/briars, usually to seek shelter. Greater penetration of woods.
- Elderly mentally retarded more similar to Alzheimer's
- None lost taking short cuts (common child strategy)
- Median distance from IPP 0.5 miles (0.8 km)
- Max zone (95%) 2.5 miles (4.0km)

Psychotic

Previous Search & Rescue studies neglected to describe subjects who became the target of search and rescue efforts due to psychiatric problems. In the Virginia database this type of search accounts for 5% of missing person searches reported. These subjects suffer from psychotic disorders with schizophrenia the most common. Another example includes substance-induced psychotic disorders. Some of the hallmarks of these disorders include delusions, hallucinations, and disorganized behavior.

Psychotic (continued)

- Shape of distance traveled curve similar to Children (6-12)
- Fatality rates similar to Alzheimer's (22%)
- Many will not respond to name (93%), but may be verbal (21%)
- Some may be evasive
- Subject did not travel to identifiable target

Psychotic (continued)

- Often found in open woods (30%), structures (23%), or along roads (23%).
- Tend not to penetrate into thick brush/briars
- Large number of walk-outs (21%) and found along roads (14%)
- None got "lost" in the traditional sense
- Lack of medications caused several searches

Psychotic (continued)

- Median distance from IPP 0.5 miles (0.8 km)
- Max Zone (92%) 4.8 miles (7.5 km)
- Law enforcement evaluation for searcher safety
- Consider limited field use of minors

Despondents

- Most often they seek solitude
- Generally will not respond to searchers as they feel it is an intrusion on their solitude.
- They will generally be within sight and sound of civilization.
- They tend to go to a favorite spot.

Despondents (cont...)

- They tend to be found near prominent locations, such as;
 - lake or scenic hill
 - lookout or area with a view
 - seldom found in the underbrush

Despondent Behavioral Profile

- Previous Search & Rescue studies neglected to describe subjects who became the target of search and rescue efforts due being despondent. Syrotuck only had five cases in his original database. In the Virginia database this type of search accounts for 14% of missing person searches reported. These subjects often have set out into the woods in order to commit suicide. Few are truly lost. However, many are in critical condition and require a prompt aggressive search.

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Despondent (continued)

- Two distinctive patterns emerge for distance from the Initial Planning Point (bimodal distribution)
- Most subject simply seeking to get "just out of sight" (50% found within 0.2 miles of IPP)
- Second group of subjects seek a "specific location", often scenic or significant in their life history
- Location may be the method of suicide (cliffs, water)
- Those seeking scenic or significant location are willing to travel (Max zone 96%=5.0 miles)

Despondent (continued)

- No subjects really "lost"
- Many survivors walked out of the woods on their own.
- Subjects typically (21%) located in open woods (remind teams to look up)
- Subjects avoid brush/briars
- Age or sex does not predict "just out of sight" or "specific location" behavior
- Older males had highest mortality rate (>75%)
- Despondent profile has high mortality rate (55%)

Hikers

- Mismatched in capabilities, one often falls behind, becomes disoriented and ultimately lost.
- Generally will rely on trails with a set destination in mind.



Hikers (cont...)

- Problems or complications usually arise with navigation when trail conditions change or become obscure.
 - slide over trail
 - trail not maintained
 - poorly defined junctions
 - game trails

Hikers (cont...)

- Cutting switchbacks will many times result in disorientation or going down the wrong hill or drainage.
- They are very dependent upon travel aids and trails for navigation.
- In analyzing actual behavior (501 cases), the following patterns have emerged;

Hiker Patterns

- 46% followed a trail or path during some portion of their trek while lost/overdue.
- Drainage's are often used paths of travel
- Significant numbers of persons wander about or go cross country
- 43% were found by self - "Walked Out"

Hiker Patterns (cont...)

- 54% went downhill
- 20% stayed on the same level
- 25% went uphill
- 34% were found within a mile of the PLS (point last seen)
- 90% of lost/overdue persons were moving for 24 hours or less -found within first 24 hours.

Hiker Patterns (cont...)

- 2 miles per hour reasonable speed
- 33% traveled at night
- The subjects were usually responsive to searchers
- The subjects were usually young in good physical condition but not prepared.

Hunters

- They tend to concentrate more on game than navigation.
- In the excitement of pursuing game, they are often lead into deadfall areas, underbrush, deep snow .
- They tend to over-extend themselves into darkness and push beyond their physical abilities.

Hunters (cont...)

- They are typically unprepared for extremely foul weather.
- In analyzing actual behavior (167) the following patterns have emerged:
 - The subjects were usually mobile
 - The subjects were usually communicative
 - 40% followed drainage's

Berry Picker Types

- Their intentions are to stay in one place
- They usually carry no provisions or survival gear.
- They go in good weather thus usually only wear light clothing
- They concentrate on or near the ground, thus are often misled by subtle terrain changes.

Berry Picker Types (cont...)

- Attempts to return to familiar ground only puts them further out of contact because of their complete disorientation.
- These circumstances usually put them at high risk for survival.

Fisherman

- Usually they are very well oriented because of the directional flow of a river or the position of a lake
- The reason they are overdue is most often accident related
- A very high percentage is boat related
- **Often this will be a recovery mission**

Climbers

- Usually well equipped and self sufficient
- Tend to remain on or near designated routes
- A primary factor is weather or hazardous conditions
- Falling debris can be a factor
- Technical Rescue needs for both search and rescue

Skiers

- Most are under the age of 35
- Almost all are in good physical and mental condition
- Subjects are generally well equipped and clothed
- Once lost generally follow paths, trails and drainage's, downhill.

Subject Survivability (% Perished)

	Weather	
	Good	Bad
Children	4%	66%
Adults	11%	53%
Elderly	35%	67%