

## SEARCH

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mud and bushes. Like many of the others, she cracks a few jokes about how difficult the task will be, but she doesn't complain.

Bernhisel doesn't know Wilberger, a fellow Mormon, but she's seen her at church. In fact, Bernhisel said she saw the Veneta native at the Eugene Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Institute of Religion on the corner of East 16th Avenue and Alder Street the day before the woman disappeared.

At about 3:15 p.m., Geizler orders the team forward.

The line plunges into the grass. Searchers beat back brambles with sticks and level the shoulder-high grass. Bernhisel drives through the grass, poking, prodding and whacking with her stick, looking for the 5-foot-4-inch, 115-pound blond-haired Wilberger, or some clue that could crack the case. Bernhisel slips into a low, muddy spot, but catches herself and presses on.

Then, a man behind her stops and points out a possible lead — a water bottle standing upright on the ground.

Geizler orders Team Romeo to stop.

Nobody speaks.

Geizler asks the search team members to check for missing water bottles.

Bernhisel checks. It's hers, she says. She collects the bottle.

The team marches forward again, destined to become one of the many fruitless searches by the Corvallis Police Department, countless search-and-rescue units, Mormon Church members, family and friends of Wilberger and complete strangers who simply want to lend a hand.

Bernhisel said she'll keep searching for Wilberger as long as

she can keep hitching rides to Corvallis. She already helped post some of the 15,000 informational fliers about Wilberger in Eugene, and she spent one day last week searching another wooded area in Corvallis.

"Anything you can do to help just makes you feel better," she says. "I felt like I would want someone looking for me."

Despite unsuccessful searching, Bernhisel says family, friends and fellow church members are still hopeful they'll find Wilberger.

"I don't think people would be out here if they weren't," she says.

### Behind the search effort

Dale Romrell hurried between rooms Saturday at the volunteer staging area, directing incoming volunteers and coordinating the behind-the-scenes staff who keep the search operation working.

At the Mormon Church off Harrison Street that doubled as the center of operations, interested volunteers flooded in to learn when, where and how they could help. They collected fliers with information about Wilberger's disappearance, buttons with a photograph of the woman and pin-on ribbons.

Returning volunteers rested, socialized and sipped warm minestrone soup. Volunteers — who spent much of the morning driving on country roads looking for tire tracks on the shoulder — reported their findings. Those who combed the wooded areas on horseback or pedaled through the city on bicycles reported in as well. Nobody returned with any leads.

From this location, 150 people had been sent out Saturday in vehicles to search the roadways, and another 100 went out on foot, Romrell said. As of Sunday afternoon, about 1,200 total volunteer searchers had combed 1,800 acres.

"People just really want to help; we don't go out and look for volunteers," he said. "Some people just walk in and want to help."

Romrell said he searched Thursday and distributed some of the 30,000 fliers that have been disbursed in and around Corvallis. He said the church created the fliers within five hours of discovering Wilberger had disappeared, and the church had 300 locals searching with flashlights on the first night of her disappearance.

Romrell said there's a \$5,000 reward from the Carole Sund/Carrington Memorial Reward Foundation for Wilberger's safe return. That money — plus a large contribution from Borden Chemical in Springfield, where Wilberger's father works — puts the total reward at \$30,000.

### Still no leads

About 60 men, women and children waited in rows of chairs in a quiet, dimly lit room away from the hustle of the dining area. In this room, volunteers were briefed on how to conduct a search and what to expect.

Cpl. Rich Riffle of the Benton County Sheriff's Office told morose volunteers not to touch anything suspicious they find, but to instead call a team leader to investigate. He told them to expect rough terrain with lots of poison oak and blackberry brambles.

He said everyone should expect to be the one to find Wilberger.

"If I send 80 of you out, 81 of you come back," Riffle said.

But Riffle told volunteers he wasn't going to candy-coat the improbability of finding Wilberger.

"What you've been hearing in the media is what we know," he said. "We have no leads."

Contact the campus/  
federal politics reporter  
at [jaredpaben@dailyemerald.com](mailto:jaredpaben@dailyemerald.com).



Tim Bobosky Photographer

Bonnie Dickman, who leads the Romeo and Sierra teams, coordinates searches Saturday with Catherine Salter (left) and Jon Sears (bottom left).

### HOW TO HELP

Updated information about the search for Brooke Wilberger and downloadable flyers can be found at <http://www.findbrooke.com>.

Those interested in volunteering should call the volunteer lines at (541) 740-3640, (541) 740-3641, (541) 740-3642 or (541) 740-3643.

Those who see Wilberger or have information regarding the case should call the Corvallis Police Department Tip Lines at (541) 766-6989 or 1-877-367-2270.

SOURCE: Corvallis Police Department



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