

Lost in the Woods

14-year-old Matt Long loved being in the forest. He loved hiking and camping. He loved cooking food over a campfire. But Matt might not be ready to go back to the woods soon. He had a rough time there last weekend.

Matt Long spent a long, cold night lost in the woods.

Matt has a group of friends from school. They decided that hiking and camping would be fun for the weekend. Three of the boys' fathers and one older brother came with them. The group of twelve set off early Saturday morning.

The boys decided to use a buddy system. They thought this would help keep everyone together. Each boy paired up with a friend. They promised each other they would stick together. They didn't want anyone alone or lost. "We tried to make plans to have a fun, safe trip," explained Doug Allen, father of one of the boys.

Matt's buddy was his best friend, Bryan Nichols. Bryan's dad, Greg, was there too.

The group hiked for two hours in the morning. Then found a spot by the water. They planned to eat lunch and then go swimming. "We were climbing around by some rocks and bushes near the water. Bryan suddenly started yelling. He was waving his arms around like crazy," said Matt. A bee had stung Bryan on the arm.

"Bryan had never been stung before. His mom is really allergic to bee stings. I was worried," explained Bryan's dad. Bryan and his dad decided to hike back down to the car. They would drive back to town. They wanted to be

closer to a doctor. If Bryan had an allergic reaction they could get help.



The rest of the group went swimming. Then they had a campfire.

The group set up tents. Each pair of "buddies" shared a tent. With Bryan gone, Matt was alone in his tent. He thought that was okay.

During the night, Matt woke up. He left the tent. "I had to go to the bathroom," Matt said. He's not sure what time it was. "I think everyone else was asleep. It was dark. There were a lot of stars. The moonlight was pretty bright."

Matt explained, "I walked back onto the trail a ways." The moonlight was so bright. I wanted a darker place in the trees for some privacy. "The moonlight in the trees made really cool shadows. I think I walked for a little while just looking around."

At some point, Matt stepped off the trail. He went back into the trees. "I stepped around tree. I tripped on a root. I fell. But instead of hitting the ground and stopping, I rolled. I just kept on falling."

Matt didn't know where he ended up. He'd fallen 75 feet down a hill into a dry creek bed. He was knocked unconscious.

"I woke up. The sun was just starting to come up. I was so cold. I was so tired. I didn't want to wake up. I tried to pull my sweatshirt down over my legs. Then I noticed how much my arm hurt."

Matt's arm was twisted under his body. The weight of his body had kept it still all night. The cold ground had made it numb. But Matt rolled over. He felt his arm start throbbing painfully.

Back at the campground, the others woke up. They noticed that Matt was gone.

"We notified the sheriff's office right away," said Doug Allen. "We didn't know how long Matt had been gone. We couldn't see him anywhere."

Two teams of rescuers searched the woods around the campsite. They were there in less than an hour.

Matt was hiking through the woods too. "I was too cold to sleep. My arm hurt too much. I started walking. I didn't know where I was. Since I'd fallen down, I thought I should climb back up."

The hill was steep. He climbed at an angle. He didn't know that was moving away from the campsite. He was moving away from the people looking for him.

At 10:30am, two rescuers were walking down the trail. They saw a boy walking back toward them. It was Matt. He had found his way back to the trail. It had taken him several hours. His arms, legs and face were covered in scratches

and bruises. His arm was broken just below the wrist.

"Matt was very lucky," said one of the rescue team members. "He could have been hurt much worse. He was lucky to make it back to the trail." Rescue teams say that someone who is lost should stay in one place. "It's easier to find someone if they aren't moving around. Also, staying in one place saves energy. So you'll be okay for a little longer without food and water."

The best plan is simply to stick with a buddy. "Don't walk alone in the woods. Especially at night. It's never a good idea."