Overdue Mt. Bachelor Academy campers return safely

by Cheryl McDermott

The search for a group of more than a dozen Mt. Bachelor Academy campers and hikers who failed to return from a wilderness training excursion when expected continued throughout Wednesday night and Thursday morning before the missing group called by cell phone to say they were fine â€“ only slowed by heavy snow conditions.

15-20 Crook County Sheriffâ€™s Office Search and Rescue (SAR) personnel, and posse members had been actively searching the Mill Creek Wilderness in the Ochoco National Forest since they were notified about 9 p.m., December 12. Three airplanes from civil air patrol were also at their disposal.

The group, ten students and three staff members, was dropped off Monday about 1 p.m. at the Wildcat Campground, Undersheriff Jim Hensley said, and had planned to hike and camp through the area as part of a wilderness training program, then return to the academy by Wednesday at 5 p.m.

â€œThe group was very well equipped and the three staff members that were with the students had over 30 years of wilderness survival training and experience,â€• Hensley said. The staffâ€™s training included wilderness first responder training (first aid, survival, etc.), he added.

About 9:20 a.m. Thursday, one of the overdue staff members called the academy by cell phone to report their status. â€œThey were fine, in no distress or danger,â€• Hensley said. Their progress was slowed by the amount of snow in the wilderness area.

As the search was called off, the group hiked out to an area where they were met and taken back to the academy.

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