

## Prince George Radio Amateurs Assist Search and Rescue

Graig Pearen  
Regional Amateur Radio Representative (volunteer)

On June 21, 2002, Nicole Hoar started to hitchhike from Prince George to Smithers to pay a surprise visit to her sister. She hasn't been seen since. Her sister didn't know she was coming so Nicole wasn't reported missing until she failed to return to work. When it was confirmed that she wasn't with her family, a massive search was initiated.

On Friday July 6<sup>th</sup>, *Team PERCS* was called into action when Prince George Search and Rescue (SAR) asked the Prince George Amateur Radio operators to assist with the search by providing communications for the search teams the following day. Due to the remoteness of the search area, Amateur Radio was the only communication method that would work. Working under direction of search managers Jeff Smedley, Ray Ouelette, and Claude Desroches, Graig Pearen (VE7EAP) organized the Amateur Radio response. Graig also acted as net controller from the SAR mobile search base (command post).



Prince George's PERCS team assists SAR

On Saturday, 60 people worked from the Prince George search base. Nine Amateur Radio operators were given maps and dispatched to strategic locations on the vast network of logging roads on the south side of Highway 16 between Prince George and Vanderhoof. Eighteen search teams composed of SAR members and Nicole's coworkers then combed thousands of kilometers of logging roads including all the branch trails off them. The search teams reported to the Amateur Radio operators in the field who then relayed the

information to the search base. Andy, VE7EQU was dispatched to the most remote location with his HF mobile in case it was required. Two search teams had flat tires about 100km off the highway and had to be assisted by Steve, VE7RBL. Don, VE7ATC found evidence of criminal activity not related to this case and the RCMP were called.

On Sunday, 50 volunteers worked out of the Prince George search base in addition to the crew at the Provincial Regional Emergency Operations Centre. The search concentrated on highway 16 with additional teams covering the area between the highway and the Nechako River as well as one area not completed the previous day. Six Search and Rescue team members from 100 Mile House drove all the way to Prince George to help with the search. Prince George Amateur Radio operators were spread out along the highway for 120km west from Prince George while search teams walked both sides of highway. When teams completed their assignment, the Amateurs drove them back to their vehicles. Hugh, VE7EQU and Don VE7ATC spent the day about 50km back in the bush south of highway 16.

This was a massive search involving search teams from Quesnel to Terrace. The overall search was coordinated by Jeff Smedley of Prince George SAR from the Provincial Regional Emergency Operations Centre (PREOC) in Prince George. Routine communications between the PREOC and search base were handled by Larry, VE7LYA with a few confidential discussions taking place by cell phone.

Three Amateur Radio repeaters were used to communicate between the search base and the field and one commercial radio channel was used between the search teams and the Radio Amateurs. Over the two days, thirteen Amateur Radio operators worked about 210 man-hours on this search, not including the Prince George Search and Rescue members who are also Amateur Radio operators.

