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Incident Report for May 7-14, 2022
Monashka Bay Road Area, Kodiak AK
Prepared by Philip Tschersich, Secretary

Preface:

The purpose of this document is to offer a brief overview of KISAR's involvement in the search for Sawyer Cipolla in the spring of 2022. This narrative is incomplete because not all KISAR members' activities are memorialized in either narrative or track data form. No effort has been made here to document the efforts by the many, many agencies, organizations, and volunteers not directly involved with KISAR's deployments.

Synopsis:

At approximately 1400 on Saturday May 7, 2022, Philip Tschersich received a call from Alaska State Trooper and KISAR board member Josh Boyle about a 7-year-old male with autism, named Sawyer Cipolla, reported missing in the Monashka Bay Road area. [See Appendix A for an overview of lost person behavior as it applies to the subject of this search.] A physical description of the subject was given to Tschersich who initiated a text group message to 9 other KISAR members (Sharon Wielebski, Steve Wielebski, Mike Gibbs, Doug Dorner, John Sikes, Ryan Cross, Shea Long, Josh Boyle, Nick Szabo) to query about their availability for activation. Doug Dorner then sent an email to the 'kisar_active' email address which went to the full membership. Responding were Tschersich, Sikes, Cross, Dorner, Long, and [non-KISAR-member] Rachel Jermann, who proceeded to the bottom of Three Sisters Way and found an extensive search operation already underway. There were many local volunteers assisting and the area around the last known point (LKP) seemed very well covered, assuming the subject was responsive. The 5 of us did a critical-separation, line-abreast, hasty voice search south and north of the LKP through the neighborhoods along the coast (Figure 1). Had the subject been responsive, we estimated a 50% probability of detection (POD) in the searched areas. If the subject were unresponsive (unconscious or actively avoiding being located), the POD dropped to around 10%. Tschersich obtained track data from as many searchers as possible after each deployment but not all searchers carried GPS units, so the tracks shown are considered the bare minimum of coverage. There were many other search efforts going on in the same area by the local volunteers.

Figure 1. Track data from KISAR's OP1 voice hasty search in the Three Sisters Way residential area (track data incomplete).

Seeing how much effort was being duplicated with the many volunteers and professional services on scene, we redeployed and did a voice search on the western slope of Russian Ridge between Monashka Bay Road (western boundary) and the ATV trail on the top (eastern boundary) between the ATV trail from across from Marmot Drive (northern boundary) and down to the utility corridor from the solid waste processing facility to the upper reservoir (southern boundary; Figure 2). For this leg, Long and Jermann departed, and we were joined by [non-KISAR-member] Bill Dunker (Figure 3). We separated until we had bare visual contact with the searcher on either side; approximately 50 m spacing. Had the subject been responsive, we estimated a 90% POD in the searched areas. If the subject were unresponsive (unconscious or actively avoiding being located), the POD dropped to around 10%.

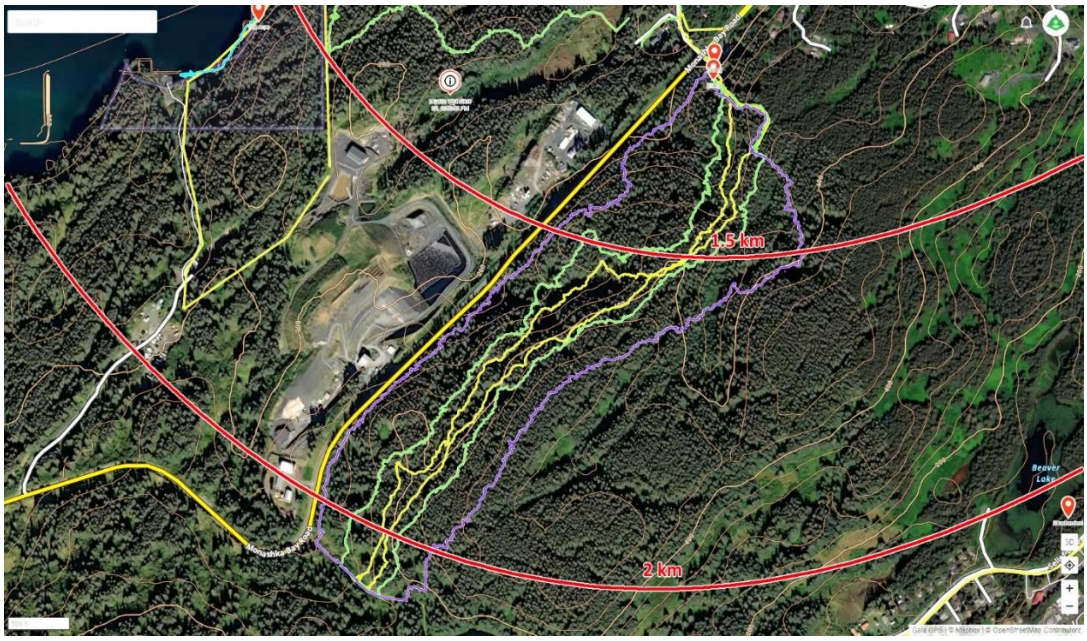

Figure 2. Track data from KISAR's OP1 voice hasty search on the western slope of Russian Ridge area (track data incomplete).

Figure 3. Dorner, Sikes, Dunker, Cross on Russian Ridge.

Then we searched from Otmeloi Park on the ocean side of Monashka Bay Road to Fort Abercrombie, and then back through the borough property between Otmeloi Way and Monashka Bay Road, and then finally around Otmeloi Park itself (Figure 4). Had the subject been responsive, we estimated a 90% POD in the searched areas. If the subject were unresponsive (unconscious

or actively avoiding being located), the POD dropped to around 10%. The Wielebskis came later in the afternoon and Dicky Saltonstall took them down trails around the landfill towards the VFW.

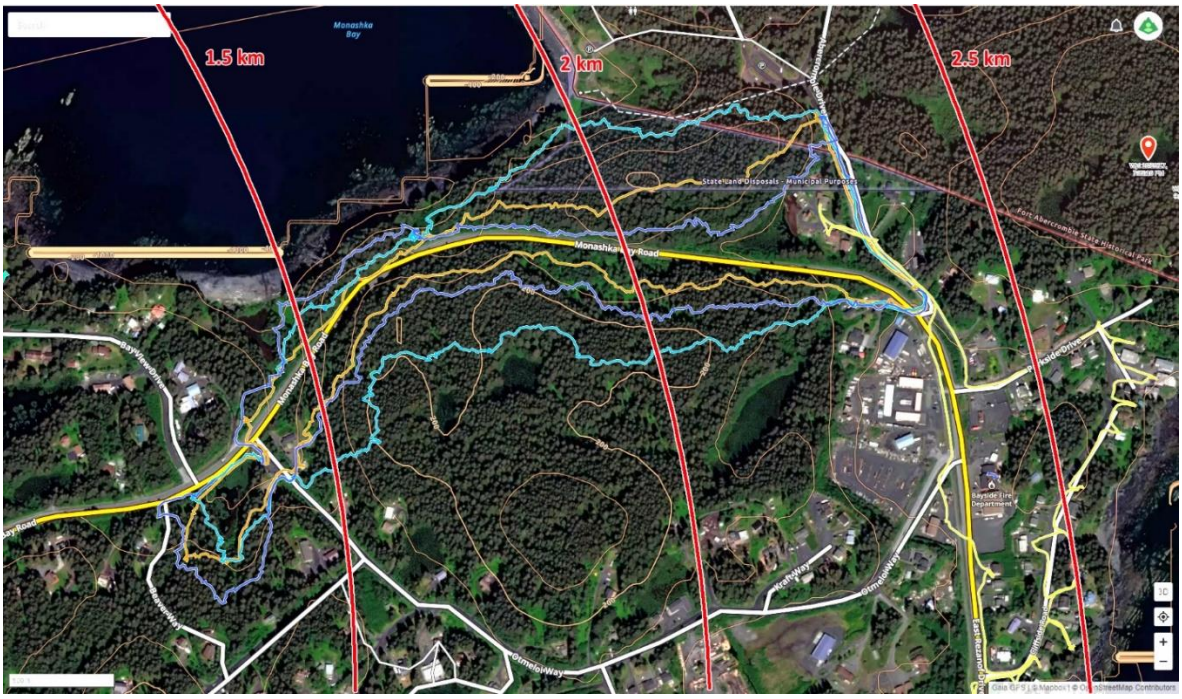

Figure 4. Track data from KISAR's OP1 voice hastysearch on the Otmeloi Park and Fort Abercrombie area (track data incomplete).

On Sunday, May 8 the search entered its second operational period (OP2). The IC was still asking for trained volunteers who could go out and do organized sweep searches of designated areas in groups of 5. The Wielebskis and Long went to Bayside early, and Cross, Dorner, and Tschersich assembled at Bayside Fire Hall at 0830. We reminded KISAR members to be ready to hike through brush for several hours and wear brightly colored clothing. We used our KISAR radios proved very useful in our critical separation searches during the prior operational period.

The Wielebskis and Long were assigned searches in the Pillar Cr and North Sister Trail areas. Cross, Dorner, and Tschersich collected 6 total teams (of 5 searchers each) and led an unresponsive-subject critical-separation search of the west side of Russian Ridge where we had done the voice search the prior day (Figures 5 and 6). We estimated a 90% POD of an unresponsive but stationary individual inside the area. Despite having a group of around 30 people to keep organized and moving through some very thick vegetation, it went surprisingly well.

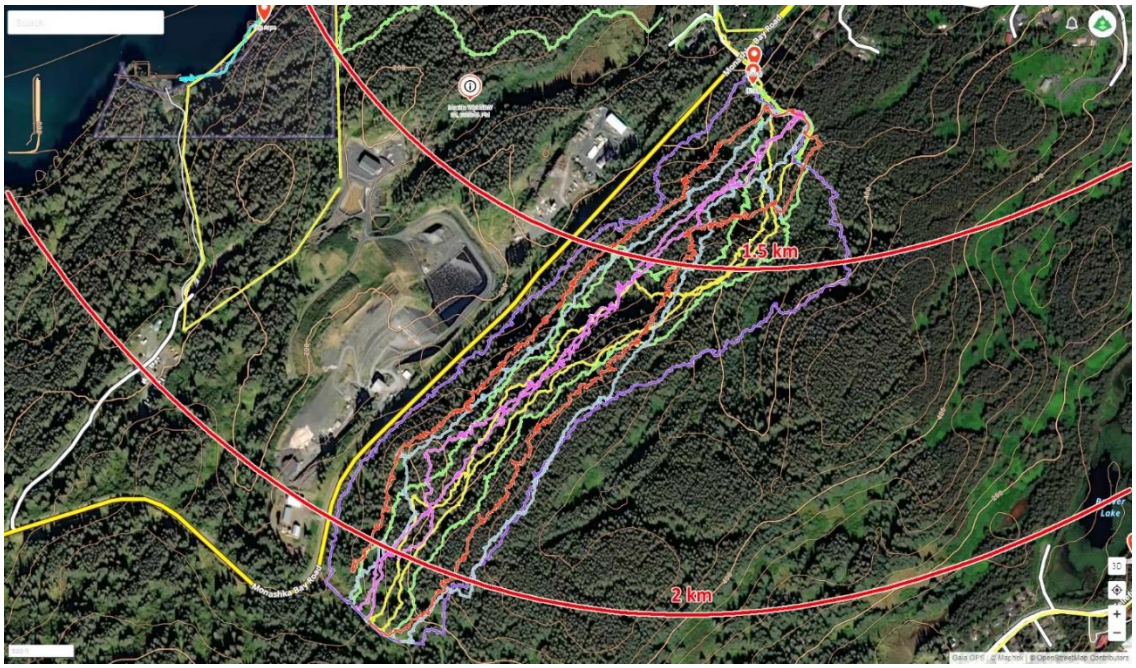

Figure 5. Track data from KISAR's OP2 critical separation unresponsive subject search on the western slope of Russian Ridge area where KISAR led approximately 25 untrained volunteers (track data incomplete).

Figure 6. Volunteer searchers on Russian Ridge.

After returning to the IC to debrief around 1330, Kodiak Fire Chief Dorner suggested holding KISAR in reserve for a more technical assignment like a recovery on difficult terrain or a particularly unpleasant assignment they don't want to send untrained searchers into. They were not short of trained and untrained volunteer help, so Dorner, Cross, and Tschersich headed home to await instructions.

On Sunday evening at 2000 the Wielebskis, Gibbs, Cross, Long, Ferris, Saltonstall, and Tschersich met at Bayside and were assigned the area between the VFW, Santiago Beach, and the landfill fence (Figure 7). We did 3 closely spaced sweeps and were done around 2315.

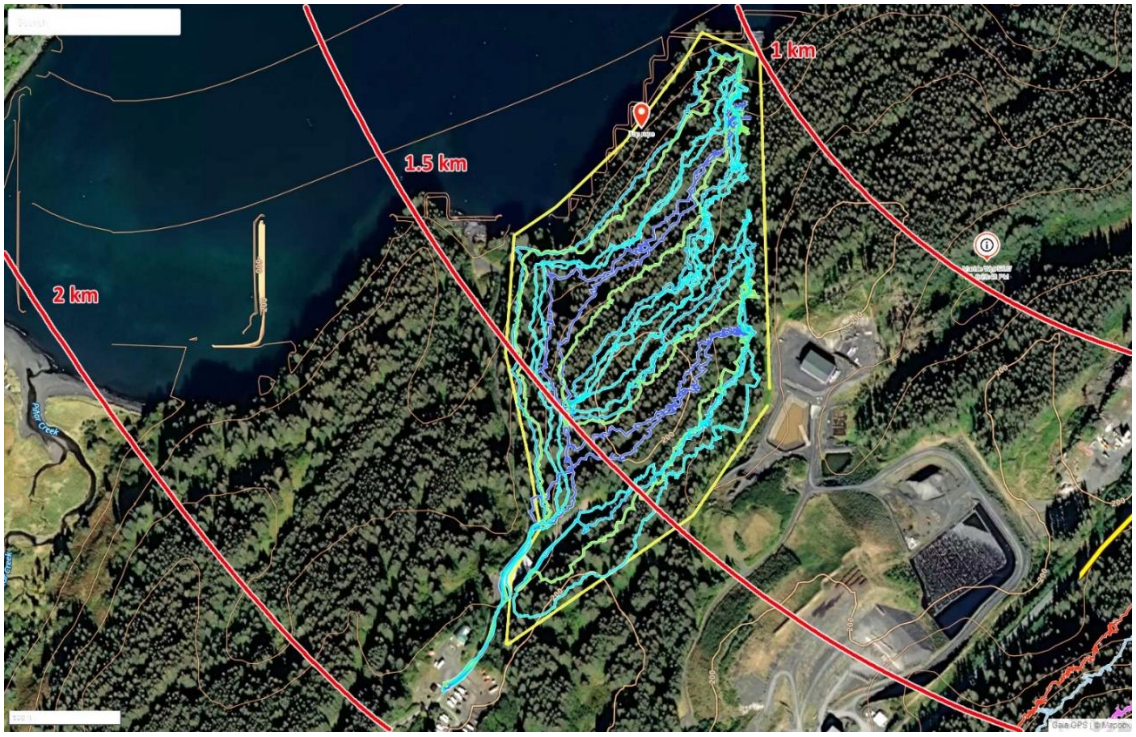

Figure 7. Track data from KISAR's OP2 critical separation unresponsive subject search between the VFW facility and the landfill (track data mostly complete).

On Monday, May 9, the Wielebskis, Dorner, Ferris, and Tschersich searched the area southeast of 'Cocaine Hill' on the ocean side of Monashka Bay Road, to the eastern slope facing Pillar Beach at the next bend in the road in the direction of town (Figures 8 and 9). It was by far the most difficult brush to date. Cross joined us about halfway through. After completing that area, we returned to the IC and Gibbs and Cross went back out to help general population volunteers with a search near Nemetz. In general, KISAR had developed a relationship with the incident command that allowed us to work as a KISAR-member-specific operation. Incident Command acknowledged that KISAR would be more able to change tasks at a moment's notice if we were not already committed to helping untrained searchers in a mission. This way we could redirect for a technical mission like a high-angle or a recovery in hazardous terrain. After the Incident Command synthesized the data collected during the current operational period, Trooper Boyle would pass the assignments (if any) to Tschersich late in the evening, and Tschersich forwarded the information to the KISAR general membership via email. For instance, that evening Trooper Boyle conveyed that they were holding volunteers in reserve until around noon on Tuesday May

10 to allow the dog teams to work and the helicopters to fly without the confusion of searchers in the landscape.

Figure 8. Track data from KISAR's OP3 critical separation unresponsive subject search between the VFW facility and the landfill (track data mostly complete).

Figure 9. KISAR members (indicated by red circles) searching east of the North Sister.

On Tuesday May 10, KISAR members assembled at Bay side at 1130 where they were tasked with joining approximately 25 USCG rescue swimmers to perform a critical separation line-abreast search for an unresponsive subject in the undeveloped land just west of the neighborhood where the subject lived (Figures 10 through 12). The Wielebskis, Ferris, Gibbs, Lewis, Long, and Tschersich searched from the ATV trail at the end of Harbor Way off Marmot Drive north to the coastline, then flipped the line and searched south until we came to the large gravel pad known as “Fish and Chips.” Had the subject been responsive, we estimated a 90+% POD in the searched areas. If the subject were unresponsive (unconscious or actively avoiding being located), the POD dropped to 70%. We flipped the search line again along Monashka Bay Road and searched north until we arrived at the ATV trail we started on. Later in the day, Sikes and Cross led a large group of untrained volunteers through the neighborhood around the LKP (Figure 10).

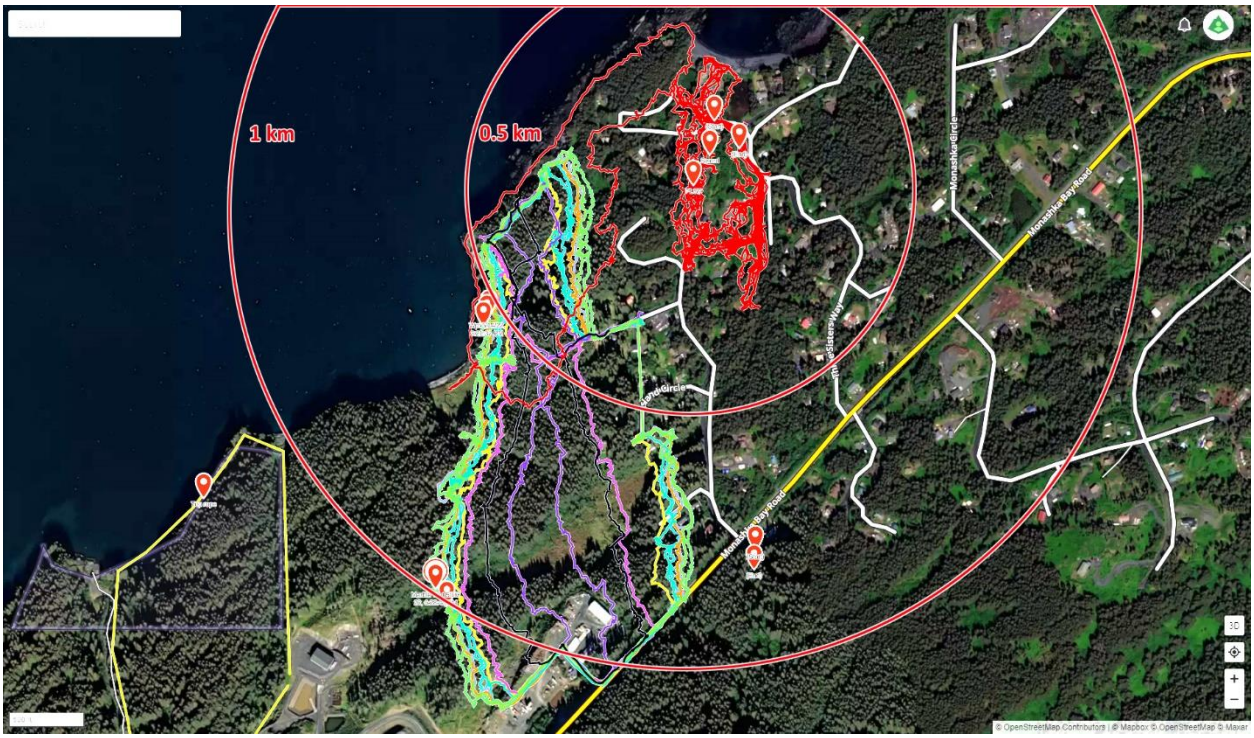

Figure 10. Track data from KISAR’s OP4 critical separation unresponsive subject search with USCG rescue swimmer personnel between the residential area of Marmot Drive, the coastline and Monashka Bay Road (track data mostly complete). Also shown is a residential search led by KISAR members of untrained volunteers near the LKP (red tracks).

Figure 11. KISAR members, USCG personnel, and volunteers southwest of the LKP.

Figure 12. KISAR members, USCG personnel, and volunteers southwest of the LKP.

On Wednesday May 11, KISAR members assembled at Bay side at 1130 where they were tasked with returning to the prior day's search area to close a narrow gap in coverage in the center of the search area (Figures 13 and 14). Had the subject been responsive, we estimated a 90+% POD in the searched areas. If the subject were unresponsive (unconscious or actively avoiding being located), the POD dropped to 70%. After returning to the Incident Command, we were sent to investigate "suspicious bird activity" across from the landfill entrance (Figure 15).

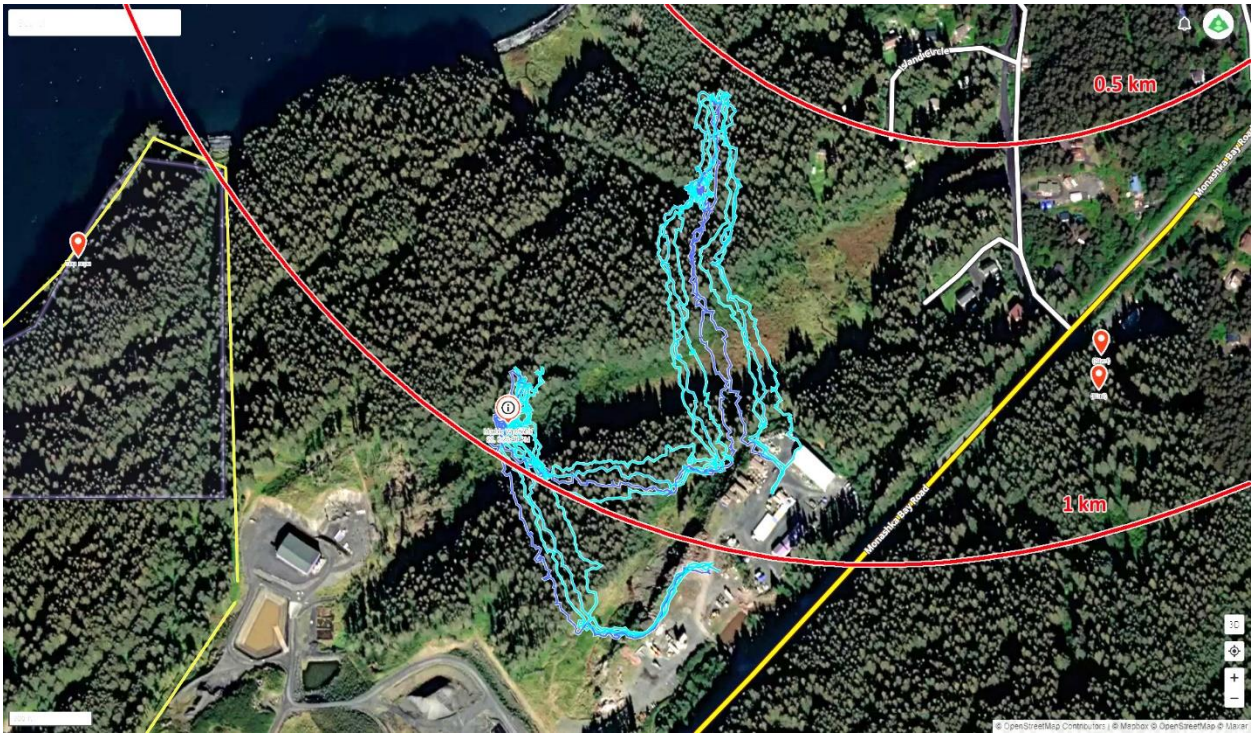

Figure 13. Track data from KISAR's OP5 critical separation unresponsive subject search near the gravel pad known as "Fish and Chips."

Figure 14. KISAR members search north of “Fish and Chips.”

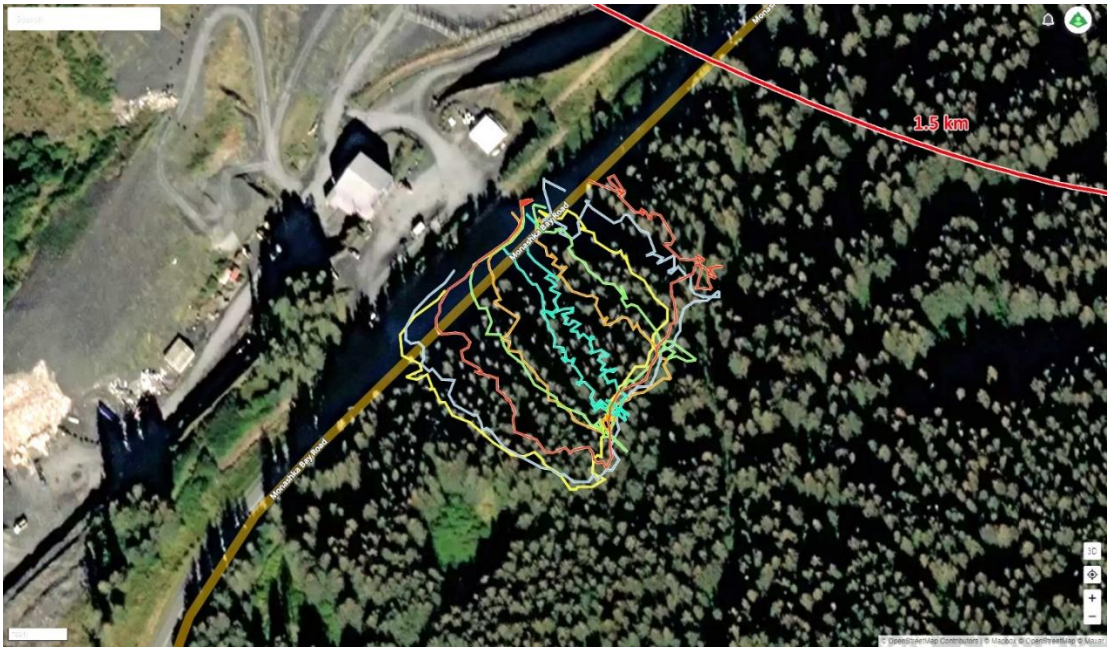

Figure 15. Track data from KISAR’s OP5 critical separation unresponsive subject search near landfill entrance where a different group of searchers report suspicious bird activity.

On Thursday and Friday May 12-13, KISAR was held in reserve while dog teams searched a variety of new areas including Termination Point. Few areas of interest were developed by the dog teams, but Incident Command identified a thin potential lack in search coverage of the clifftops near the LKP. Some complicated features in the cliff face could present areas that did not receive full search coverage from either foot searchers on the top of the cliffs or by aircraft searching the beach and cliff faces. KISAR decided to treat this as a search mission, but also a potential training opportunity for doing high-angle technical rope work.

On Saturday, May 14 it was understood the main search effort would transition out of an active search strategy and into a monitoring phase aided by information provided by the public and ongoing, lower-level efforts by agencies. Brian Baader, Ferris, Lewis, Gibbs, Cross, Sikes, Long, Dorner, Dickey, and Tschersich proceeded to the site above the cliffs west of Three Sisters Way where the K9 teams got their most promising results. We belayed individuals down the non-vertical slopes in several locations where visibility was obscured from above and below due to complex terrain and vegetation (Figure 16). We then selected a site with good trees as anchors and a level, open area to work in, and set up a two-rope, dual-tension raise and lower system. Sikes and Gibbs were both lowered down the cliff with KISAR members performing different roles in operating the rope systems. We converted the main line to a 3:1 raise system and used the belay line as a backup, and hoisted Sikes and Gibbs. Near the end we converted the 3:1 simple into a 5:1 complex (block and tackle mechanical advantage) for demonstration purposes and finished the raise operation (Figure 17).

Figure 16. Belaying a KISAR member into technical terrain.

Figure 17. KISAR members training with a twin-rope, dual-tension lower and raise rope system.

On Saturday, May 14 at 1700 some KISAR members went to the public event at Bayside Fire Hall marking the transition in the operational phase of the search effort. It was well attended and a very moving tribute to the efforts by the Kodiak community to try to bring resolution to the family affected by this tragedy.

Postscript:
On Sunday, May 15 the remains of Sawyer Cipolla were discovered by birdwatchers on Pillar Mountain, 6 kilometers from the LKP.

Appendix A. Lost Person Behavior

LPB data from Nova Scotia in distance traveled by percentile and subject category.

Category	Cases	25%	50%	75%	90%	Range	Survived
Children (1-6)	16	0.50 km	1.03 km	1.81 km	2.02 km	0.10-2.65 km	100%
Children (7-12)	15	0.80 km	1.48 km	2.50 km	3.20 km	0.14-8.00 km	96%
Dementia	41	0.40 km	1.00 km	1.46 km	2.40 km	0.10-5.43 km	73%

Overview: Lost Children
From Ken Hill, as quoted in NASAR's "Managing The Lost Person Incident." [Note: the term “mentally retarded” appeared in the original text.]

- Have relatively poor "mental maps" of their environment.
- Will usually search for familiar places rather than for routes (travel aids).
- Are rarely good at judging direction or distance.
- Often become lost when taking a "short cut" (ages 7 to 12).
- Will often try "trail running" (ages 7 to 12).
- May move randomly or unsystematically (ages 1 to 6).
- May be extremely panicky.
- Are rarely able to find their own way out of the woods.
- Rarely answer searchers calling their name.

Children: 4 to 6 years

They are capable of traveling farther than younger children.

They have a concept of being lost and will generally try to return home or go back to someplace familiar.

They are frequently drawn away from homes or campsites by animals, following older children, or just exploring.

Similar to younger children, they will usually seek shelter when tired, at nightfall, or when the weather becomes bad.
Having been taught to avoid strangers, few children of this age will answer searchers calling their name, nor will they show themselves when searchers are near.

Children (all ages) are rarely able to find their own way out of the woods.

Implications for search planning: a highly thorough search may be required, with searchers focusing on visual clues.

Children: 7 to 12 years

Their navigational and directional skills are much more developed than those of the younger child, and they are learning to construct primitive "mental maps" of their environments, which may be highly inaccurate.

They frequently become lost while attempting a short cut to a familiar location. They may become extremely upset and confused when lost, seeming to react very irrationally. Lost children of this age frequently resort to trail running, which may take them some distance from the PLS. Subjects of this age may respond more maturely if accompanied by a friend or sibling.

Children (all ages) are rarely able to find their own way out of the woods.

Statistical data: an analysis of 9 cases of missing children (7-12 yrs) by Hill (1996) revealed that:

- 89% (8 out of 9) survived.
- 55% (5 out of 9) of the cases involved 2 or more subjects.
- No child of this category found his/her own way out of the woods.

Implications for search planning: because of the distance they tend to travel, combined with their panicky state, the search for a child of this age can be particularly difficult. Confinement of trails, roadways, and other travel aids is a top priority.

Walkaways

These are individuals who "walk away" from a constant-care situation, whether a hospital or a residence. This includes people with senile dementia (for example, Alzheimer's disease), mentally retarded individuals, as well as person suffering from some debilitating form of mental illness (for example, psychosis). They rarely understand they are lost, and their wanderings may seem non-purposeful or at least non-predictable. They are almost never dressed appropriately for wet or severe weather conditions. They rarely respond to callers, and in some instances, such as with mentally retarded subjects, they may hide or even run from searchers. Persons suffering from Alzheimer's disease (or related illnesses) may be attempting to return to some former home or place where they once enjoyed being (however far away that place may be). They often walk in a straight line until running into a barrier, then turn and continue in another directions (the so-called "pinball effect"). Eventually, they become entangled in brush or mired in mud, unable to continue. Some have even walked straight into a lake and drowned. Walkaways who are allowed some independence by an institution (or a person managing home care) with respect to going outside unsupervised, may travel farther than persons requiring more supervision. The fatality rate for subjects in this category is extremely high.

Statistical data on Walkaways. An analysis of 22 cases of missing walkaways (general category) by Hill (1996) revealed that:

- 45% were found dead (from exposure or drowning).
- None walked out to safety on their own.
- None called for help or answered searchers' calls.

Statistical data on Alzheimer's patients in particular: An analysis of 25 incidents involving missing Alzheimer's patients (Koester & Stooksbury, 1992) revealed the following characteristics:

- Average age was 73 years (59% male).
- Not one Alzheimer's subject called for help from searchers.
- 28% were found dead.
- They were found a median distance of 1/2 mile from the PLS.

Implications for search planning: the search for a walkaway should be considered highly urgent. Man-trackers and trailing dogs may be especially effective, with air scent dog teams employed in high probability areas with dense vegetation. Because walkaways are usually very difficult to detect, often hidden under brush or in thickly treed areas, a highly thorough search may be necessary. Alzheimer's patients, mentally retarded individuals, and other institutionalized walkaways are often found somewhere on the grounds of their respective institutions, so a thorough search should begin there. Confinement of Alzheimer's patients is not normally a high priority, compared to other lost person categories, as these walkaways seldom travel great distances. However, be warned that some allegedly "frail" Alzheimer's patients have traveled much farther than their caretakers had expected. As well, mentally retarded subjects have been known to hide from searchers and to flee when spotted. Recurring discrete patrols focusing on visual searching may be helpful.