Expert tracks missing child

By ERIK LARSEN MANAHAWKIN BUREAU

WARETOWN — A 13-yearold boy who left his home yesterday is home safe today after tracker Tom Brown Jr. found him sleeping in the woods opposite the Frederic A. Priff Elementary School on Wells Mills Road.

Christopher Robertson of Laurel Wyck Drive, a seventh-grader at the Southern Regional Middle School in Stafford, had left early yesterday after a discussion the night before with his parents regarding his report card, according to authorities.

Ocean Township Police Lt. Scott Sprague said the boy, who just wanted quiet time to himself, was returned to his parents.

Seven township police officers, two members of the Ocean County Sheriff's Department and a State Police helicopter combed the thick

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Pine Barrens around Robertson's home for about six hours before township police Cpl. Mike Ward suggested authorities contact Brown, who lives in Harvey Cedars.

Brown has written 16 books about wilderness survival that started with "The Tracker" in 1978, and heads a tracking, nature awareness and survival school here. He has helped police solve several burglary cases over the last three years.

Brown arrived with Kevin Reeve, director of his school, and, later, 30 of Brown's students.

Brown traced Robertson from the family's back yard, onto the street, onto a path through the woods, over the route of the old Tuckerton Railroad and along the shoulder of Wells Mills Road (Route 532).

By examining "track degradation," Brown said, he determined the footprints were made about 1 a.m. yesterday. The boy was found about 2:30 p.m. "Have you watched him (Brown) do this?" Sprague asked. "You watch him and you say to yourself, "This guy is trying to pull the wool over my eyes. There's no tracks on the pavement to see. Who does he think he's kidding?' Yet, he was able to do in two hours what nine cops, a bloodhound and a guy in a helicopter could not do in twice that time."

Brown said all movement creates disturbances and it's a matter of knowing what to look for.

The trackers were able to determine when the teen had ducked into the woods along the road in order to avoid being seen by passing traffic.

"He was about 25 feet from the road in a little depression, sound asleep," Reeve said. "As I approached, my heart went into my throat, because I saw this little tuft of brown hair and I thought, he's either dead or asleep. When I whistled to the police officers and the detectives waiting nearby, his head popped up, he rubbed his eyes, and I said, 'Christopher, we've been looking for you.'"

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