



Cold Case:
Shannon Joy Schell

'Emotional roller coaster'; Rescuers press search for woman missing three days on Rincon trek

Sarah Tully

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Shannon Joy **Schell**'s parents told her she should not hike alone before she headed out Wednesday morning.

But **Schell** was determined to take on the 32-mile trek in Saguaro National Monument East that day - do or die.

As of late last night, **Schell** had yet to return.

"It was something she wanted to do," said her mother, Joyce Emmons.

"Nobody could talk her out of it."

Schell, 34, was reported missing at about 1 a.m. Thursday after she failed to get back from hiking the Tanque Verde Ridge trail to Manning Camp in the Rincon Mountains. The trail climbs a mile in altitude through rugged terrain.

By last night, her third night out, **Schell** was without food and water.

She had little clothing to handle the cool weather and was wearing thin boots with a flexible rubber sole and no ankle support.

Yesterday, rescue workers found footprints and items that they think

Schell's boyfriend told him that she had yet to return from the hike at 11 p.m., Mrs. Emmons said.

The boyfriend, Carl Bugel, said he would look for Schell and advised the parents to report her missing if he did not come back by 1 a.m., Emmons said. The boyfriend returned midday Thursday.

When she hiked, Schell usually carried at least two bottles of water and snacks, such as fruit and nuts, said Shunk, a hiking partner over the past 10 years. Schell also brought a backpack and fanny pack, with leggings and a light jacket inside.

The night before she left, Schell told Shunk that she was planning to bring flashlights.

Schell, who works at Jason's Deli, invited Shunk to come along. Shunk declined because she is recovering from the flu and suggested they make the journey another day. Schell also asked another friend.

"She (Schell) said, 'I've got to do it tomorrow. The weather's changing, and I don't know if I'll get another chance,'" Shunk said.

"She was insistent on doing this one."

Schell tried the trail before, but was unable to make it all the way.

"She talked about this hike for two or three weeks," Emmons said.

"It's something she's wanted to do for a long time."

Schell probably left between late Thursday night and yesterday morning about 2 1/2 miles up the trail, said Tom Danton, monument spokesman.

Searchers combed the trail many times and never saw the empty water bottle with a cigarette in it, a bottle of nail polish, a newspaper sports page and cough drop wrapper.

The cough drop and cigarette matched the brands left in Schell's Camaro, which remained parked at the monument last night.

"I feel like she left it to say 'I'm here, I'm around,' " said her best friend, Kebbie Shunk.

But by 8 p.m. last night, a helicopter with an infrared sensor had yet to detect any signs of her in the Rincon Mountains, Danton said.

About 30 workers searched the mountain during daylight hours, while 15 others stayed "behind the scenes" to help. Many of them were volunteers.

One person remained at Manning Camp last night, but the others came in once it grew dark, Danton said.

Although some signs of Schell were spotted, Shunk and Schell's parents said they were feeling less optimistic last night as they sat in the Emmons' recreational vehicle near the trail head.

Lee Emmons, Schell's father, moved the RV there on Wednesday after

She and her husband told **Schell**, who has lived with them since a divorce five years ago, that they would rather she go with someone, Emmons said.

Shunk said she wasn't very worried because **Schell** had gone on hikes alone before. She described **Schell** as a knowledgeable hiker.

Emmons said she was unable to eat yesterday because she was thinking that **Schell** had nothing.

"I can't do it," Emmons said. "I know she's cold. She's hungry. I want to just hold her in my arms again."

Schell's family and friends have been on "an emotional roller coaster," said Shunk in between tears.

She urged the public to be on the lookout for **Schell**, who may be disoriented. **Schell** is described as 4 feet 9 inches tall and weighing 85 pounds. She has amber eyes and short brown hair, which she recently cut and dyed.

Searchers want to talk to hikers

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In hopes of tapping information about a missing hiker, rescue workers want to speak with anyone who hiked Wednesday on the Tanque Verde Ridge trail.

Shannon Joy Schell, 34, remained missing last night after leaving at 9 a.m. Wednesday for a 32-mile hike in Saguaro National Monument East. Monument spokesman Tom Danton said other hikers may have seen **Schell** and could provide more detailed descriptions of her clothing and items. Hikers may call the monument at 296-8576.

The search continued yesterday with 50 workers. A helicopter flew overhead in the early morning but came back about 10 a.m. because of 45 mph winds. A team of dogs was sent out to sniff for clues, but the wind hindered the effort, Danton said.

Search for missing woman in Rincons is scaled back

Carmen Duarte

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The number of volunteers looking for **Shannon Joy Schell** is dwindling as the search for the missing hiker enters its sixth day.

Many must return to jobs or are simply exhausted from combing the Rincon Mountains for **Schell**, who has been missing since she left for a 32-mile hike in the Saguaro National Monument East.

The search began last Thursday for the petite 34-year-old woman, who had bronchitis and was just getting over the flu, authorities said. It was hampered over the weekend by snow and rain, according to Tom Danton, a monument spokesman.

"Her chances of being alive are not good," Danton said yesterday.

"There is always a chance that there will be a miracle, but as time goes on her chances of survival are slim."

Schell's family and friends are optimistic that she will be found alive, and are "having a very tough time" accepting that may not be the case, Danton said. "The not knowing (what has happened to **Schell**) is very frustrating for the family."

He said **Schell**, who is 4 feet, 9 inches tall and weighs 85 pounds, is a "recreational hiker and not a backpacker who has gone on real long hikes."

Friends who have hiked with **Schell** told authorities she has gotten disoriented at times while hiking in the past, and several years ago was lost for two days in Madera Canyon.

A U.S. Customs helicopter ferried 25 monument volunteers, including six trackers for the state Department of Corrections, into steep terrain off the Tanque Verde Ridge trail - the trail she planned to hike to Manning Camp.

On Friday, six miles up the trail, searchers found a fire ring. They also found cigarette butts with lipstick, cough drop wrappers, a newspaper, and shoe prints that all are believed to have been left by **Schell**.

Volunteers, who numbered about 50 Saturday and 30 on Sunday, have searched caves and stone waterfalls off the trail.

Experienced hikers are having a hard time coping with the weather conditions, and on Sunday some of the searchers suffered mild cases of hypothermia, Danton said.

Psychic joins hunt for hiker; Rescuers search Manning Camp site

Angélica Pence

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Acting on a prediction by a psychic, search officials sent a rescue team into the Saguaro National Monument East yesterday to search for **Shannon Joy Schell**.

An eight-member team of volunteers and park rangers was flown into the rugged area less than a day after monument officials cut back the search for **Schell**.

Schell's parents sought the help of psychic Joyce Martin after traditional rescue efforts failed.

Martin, who has aided in other missing person cases in Tucson, met with the missing hiker's family Wednesday night and told them **Schell** was badly injured but that she was still alive.

"**Shannon** is isolated and alone," Martin said. "But she is alive."

Schell's family provided Martin with a picture of their daughter and some of her personal items, including a comb, she said.

"When I was touching her picture I felt she had fallen and was very

hurt," Martin said.

Eight days ago, **Schell**, 34, went hiking on the monument's Tanque Verde Ridge trail in the early morning hours. Rescue workers were called the following morning when she failed to return home from the 32-mile hike.

Martin met with rescue workers at the foot of the trail at the Javelina picnic area yesterday afternoon to guide them in the search.

By placing a map of the area face down and "feeling the heat from a certain spot," Martin said she could predict where **Schell** was located. Martin said she will remain on call as long as rescuers and family members need her services. She told the family that **Schell** had been hiking off marked trails and had fallen down past the Tanque Verde Ridge trail into a rock crevice.

More than 120 volunteers worked more than 2,000 hours looking for **Schell** before the search was officially scaled back Wednesday, officials said.

Yesterday, rescuers were flown in by a Department of Public Safety helicopter to a 3-square-mile area near Manning Camp where **Schell** is said to be.

Renewing the search on the basis of Martin's prediction "is not normally what might be done in a situation like this," said Stanley

Lawhead, a monument spokesman. "But all of the normal avenues have failed and we have to follow through with any new clues," Lawhead said.

While briefing the search team, Martin said she had a headache and felt pain in her back meaning " Schell's back might be broken," she said.

"She is in a lot of pain," Martin said. Schell also injured "the back and left side of her head," she said.

Schell, who is 4 feet, 9 inches tall and weighs 85 pounds, has survived the cold temperatures by keeping warm with the extra clothing her parents said she was carrying in her backpack, Martin said.

Martin said she is unfamiliar with the Rincon Mountain range and has never gone hiking there.

Rescuers searched until nightfall yesterday and will continue their search this morning.

If no significant clues are found, the search will be called off, Lawhead said.

"There comes a point when you have to draw the line and stop looking," he said. At that point park rangers "will discontinue a comprehensive effort."

Mom: 'It's time to let Shannon go'

Alexa Haussler

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Nine painful months after Shannon Joy Schell failed to return from a hike, her loved ones brought themselves yesterday to a dreaded task. They said goodbye.

"I wanted to let her know I would let go," said Joyce Emmons, Schell's mother. "It's time to let Shannon go in peace."

About 40 friends and family members held a memorial service yesterday for Schell, who has been missing since she set out Oct. 12, 1994, for a hike.

Schell, 34, set out alone to hike along the Tanque Verde Ridge Trail in the Rincon Mountains. Rescue workers were called the following morning when Schell, a recreational hiker, failed to return home from the 32-mile hike.

"I waited all these months because it's very hard for me to have this memorial. But it's for her," Emmons said.

Friends and family gathered at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, 545 S. Fifth Ave., where they prayed, wept and told stories about their times with Schell.

"I remember she was petite but she had a big heart," said Schell's longtime friend Sandi Diaz. "I remember she shared her joys but never her troubles.

"I remember how she could turn an ordinary day to a special day just by being there," Diaz said.

Friends described Schell as a spirited, family-oriented person with a passion for hiking and watching football.

"My favorite thing was watching a football game with her, and I hate football," Diaz said.

Schell graduated from the University of Arizona in 1982 with a bachelor's degree in business administration, Emmons said. Schell was a manager and bookkeeper for her father's electronic business for 15 years before he retired, Emmons said.

When Schell disappeared, she was working at a local deli and looking for a job in business, Emmons said.

Family and friends, who have accepted that Schell is probably no longer alive, said the memorial service was not closure, and vowed to continue their search.

Some 120 rescuers, 10 agencies, tracking dogs, helicopters and a local

Some 120 rescuers, 10 agencies, tracking dogs, helicopters and a local psychic took part in the search for more than a week before calling it off. She was presumed dead Oct. 19 and no trace of her body has been discovered.

Friends still make the trek every so often, hoping to turn up some clue of what happened to **Schell**.

Pima County Sheriff's detectives continue to investigate the case, but have turned up no new leads, said Sgt. Michael Downing, homicide supervisor. Sheriff's Homicide division also investigates missing persons, Downing said.

"At the time of her initial disappearance we did everything humanly possible to try and locate her and we were unsuccessful in that," Downing said.

Family and friends vowed to continue searching.

"I don't think any of us will ever quit hoping that we'll find **Shannon**," Diaz said.

Emmons said she and her husband hope the memorial service will leave **Schell** at peace.

"But as for my peace, there will be none until I know what happened to her," Emmons said. "I keep the faith that someday we will know."