

## 13-year-old girl hiding from searchers

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By Erin D. Randolph  
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A teen-ager with her heart set on playing badminton in her hometown in Japan wanted to get home, even if she was an ocean away at camp in the San Jacinto Mountains.

She disappeared Tuesday from a Garner Valley Girl Scout camp, and her uncle figured she was trying to get home.

But more than 20 hours after disappearing, the homesick 13-year-old girl was found Wednesday afternoon hiding in some brush near a tack room on the campground, which is about 10 miles southeast of Idyllwild.



Yuri Kumagai

At least 50 search-and-rescue workers from as far away as Santa Clarita came out to search the 700-acre campground for the girl. Searchers used horses, search dogs and helicopters to try to find the missing teen, who was eventually found about a quarter-mile from where the search began.

Yuri Kumagai of Sendai, Japan, was at the Camp Scherman Girl Scout Camp with her two cousins when she decided to leave the camp around 4 p.m. Tuesday. Yuri, who is not a Girl Scout and speaks very little English, came to the camp with her cousins at her mother's insistence, said Ken Hamamoto, Yuri's uncle, who lives in Irvine. Her uncle believed Yuri was trying to return to Irvine and then catch a plane home.

Around 1:20 p.m. Wednesday, Riverside Sheriff's Mounted Posse volunteer Salvador Huereque spotted Yuri hiding in some brush near a tack room about a quarter-mile from the command post set up on Morris Ranch Road.

Huereque, not realizing he had found Yuri, walked up to the girl and asked her if she knew the girl pictured on the flier he was carrying.

After Yuri told him yes, Huereque realized she was wearing the blue sweatshirt reading "CHERRY" that he was looking for. Yuri appeared to be in good condition and was carrying a canteen with a small amount of water in it, Huereque said.

In Huereque's 15 years and 15 to 20 child searches with the mounted search-and-rescue team, Yuri was one of only two or three children he said he has found alive.

"You'll never know how it felt," Huereque said. "When you find a child alive, it makes life worth living."

Hamamoto was starting to lose hope of finding Yuri on Wednesday when he got the news that Yuri had been located.

"I'm ecstatic. I'm relieved," Hamamoto said.

Hamamoto spent most of Wednesday flying in a sheriff's department helicopter calling Yuri's name from a loudspeaker and speaking to her in Japanese hoping she would come out of hiding.

Yuri is scheduled to return to Japan on Wednesday but could return earlier if her mother comes to get her. Hamamoto said it was best for him and the camp if Yuri went back to Irvine with him.

Hamamoto said he didn't know if Yuri realized how many people were searching for her.

"She put a lot of people at risk. They expended a lot of effort to find her," Hamamoto said. "We will impress this upon her."

RMRU is a volunteer search and rescue team that covers Riverside County and assists other teams with search and rescue efforts in other counties. Each member purchases their own equipment and takes time off work, without compensation, to participate in search and rescue missions. Team equipment is purchased from contributions from the community. We are a non-profit organization and are funded by [donations](#) from people like you.