

Nine Mentally-Challenged Hikers Stranded

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Dark Canyon, San Jacinto Mts
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The pagers went off at about 9 p.m. and Art Bridge and I left the Upland area and arrived at Lawler County Campground, near Idyllwild, a little later than some of the Riverside and Hemet people as usual.

Jim Fairchild was at the van waiting for us and one team had already been deployed down Fuller Mill Creek, taking the wheeled litter with them.

The report was that nine mentally retarded people from the Foundation of the Retarded of the Desert, in Indio, and their counselors were approximately two miles down Fuller Mill Creek. We were told Dave Wemple, the camp ranger, and members of the Pine Cove Fire Dept. were already at the scene.

Jim, Art and I then started down the creek bed, hopping boulders and criss-crossing the creek as we went. We overtook the other team just as they got to the subjects.

Dave and the firemen had done a good job keeping them together but could no longer keep them moving. We immediately got warm clothing on them and fired up the stoves and made soup and hot drinks for everyone.

Dave Wemple, John Dew and the firemen got the group moving again, except for a girl with an ankle injury, with Dave in the lead the party hiked out with no major problems. After Art and Walt Walker administered first aid to the girl, we put her in the litter and tried to wheel her out. I say tried because after about an hour we gave up our futile attempts to find a route in the dark good enough for the litter in the boulders and the thick brush.

We bedded down for the night and when more team members hiked in the next morning, we wheeled out the litter with no further incident.

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