

Hunters caught in snow storm

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Santa Rosa Mountains
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By Kevin Walker

Being that this was the first major snow storm of the season, we were not surprised when we were notified of a second search mission as we were just finishing one in the San Jacinto Mountains. The call was for two hunters overdue from a deer hunting trip in the Santa Rosa Indian Reservation.

It was decided that it would be advantageous to use a helicopter, and make an initial search of the area by air. So after catching a quick breakfast, RMRU members cleared from the previous mission went to Camp Maranatha to await the arrival of the helicopter. Just as someone commented that it was 9:00, off in the distance we could hear the familiar high pitched, "chop-chop" of Don Landells helicopter. It was decided that fellow team member Jim Garvey and I would ride with Don to make the initial search. So, without any waste of time Jim and I climbed into Don's turbine powered Bell Jet Ranger, and were off for the Santa Rosa Mountains.

Upon reaching the search area we were surprised to find about a foot of snow on the ground, with drifts up to three feet. We were hopeful when we spotted the hunters car parked in front of a locked gate. But after hovering directly over the car and no response from inside we moved on up the road. Only after about five more minutes of flying, we were pleased when we saw two men carrying rifles walking down the road. So with a quick landing by Don, Jim climbed out and went down to the two very puzzled men. Upon questioning them, Jim looked back at Don and I, and nodded in an affirmative manner. Don then told me that he could move the two men down to their car, and then come back and get Jim and I. I then got out of the chopper and went down to Jim and the two men and gave the hunters all the warnings about helicopters, mainly, keep your head low. We then loaded the hunters into the chopper, and Don was off. The bird was only gone for five minutes, but it would have taken the two men most of the day to reach their car. While the bird was gone, Jim related to me what he had been told by the two men. They had started Friday before the storm arrived, and had left their car at the locked gate, and continued up the dirt road. When the storm hit, they found an abandoned cabin and stayed there till Sunday morning when the storm subsided. They then started down the road, and that is when we came in.

Upon Don's return, we headed back to the two men's car to see if they had it started. With steam coming out of the tail pipe, we headed back to complete one more task. And that was to see if there was any hikers in need of aid due to the heavy snow. After making a quick check of the San Jacinto high country, all of the hikers we saw, had good equipment, and were going about their way in a normal manner.

Once back at base we were informed that the two hunters had made it out to the highway. With that, Don headed back to his home, and the rest of us soon did the same.

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.