

Hunter separated from companions

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By Ed Hill

Saturday, four men went quail hunting. They planned to hike down the Morgan Trail into Morrell Canyon, hunt the canyon bottom and return to the Main Divide Truck Trail that runs along the crest of the Elsinore Mountains. That afternoon one of the hunters became separated from his companions. He traveled west into Decker Canyon instead of travelling east into Morrell Canyon. The two canyons are separated by a low very brushy divide at this point.

When his companions could not locate him, they reported to the sheriff that he had fallen down a hillside and had broken his leg. Because of the heavy brush, they were unable to get to him. The sheriff called the team, and we rolled in the early evening. I was late so I missed going in with our first team, the hunters, and the Cleveland National Forest rangers. They carried our wheeled litter and the large first aid pack. Soon it became apparent that the informants really did not know exactly where the missing hunter was. The wheeled litter was left where the Morgan Trail crossed the creek in Morrell Canyon. The first team proceeded to search the brushy hillside just west of Morrell Canyon.

Craig Britton drove up, and he and I were asked to go get the wheeled litter. We asked if we could do a little searching in the upper part of Morrell Canyon and were told to go ahead. We hiked in, located the litter and the Cleveland National Forest people. We talked them into carrying the litter out while we looked around some. Craig and I hiked all the way up the Morgan Trail observing that it had not had a lot of traffic on it. Not nearly as much as had expected to find. At the Main Divide Truck Trail the Morgan Trail split up into several trails so we decided to see if we could find the one that the hunters had used.

At two in the morning, we heard that team one was bedding down for the night, so we decided to do the same. just as I was crawling into my bivouac bag, Rick Pohlers, the operations leader decided to crank up the siren on the van. As the wail died away, we heard gunshots in the eastern part of Decker Canyon. We radioed the news in and were told to pack up and try to reach the source of the gun fire. On the first try, we stayed on the ridges and were thrown back completely. On the second try, we ended up in a creek bed that went sort of in the right direction and so were able to bash our way down the canyon. At times we

were crawling on our hands and knees. At one point, both of us fell over a small waterfall completely hidden in the brush.

About four in the morning, we located our missing hunter. He was huddled in an area of live oak on the side of the hill. He had severe leg cramps and was cold, hungry, tired and thirsty. He was toting a forty four magnum pistol, a large knife and a shotgun. He had no food, no water and no jacket. Fortunately, the night had been mild. We fed him, watered him, and all of us bedded down until dawn, two and a half hours later. The only problem besides the cold, was the horde of very hungry mosquitoes.

At first light, Craig and I were up trying to figure out where we were. We could just make out the corner of the Main Divide Truck Trail. We were not sure that the hunter could crawl out the way we had come in. So we asked if we could be lifted out by helicopter. The sheriff reported that he was working on it. Finally we were told that a San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department helicopter would do the job if we built a helispot. Even the hunter helped clear a small knoll.



BIVOUAC SITE - RMRU member Bob Attride prepares to load his pack after his search team had to spend the night in the middle of a brushy slope. Member Joe Erickson looks on in anticipation of a hot breakfast in Elsinore.

The helicopter showed up and first flew down to our vans in order to be briefed as to where we were. He then flew back toward us and was talked into our area. We hit him with a signal mirror and the rest was simple. He flew the hunter out first and returned for Craig and myself. It was a very tired and grateful hunter that was returned to his companions and his wife. I would like to thank the San Bernardino County Sheriffs for Picking us up out of the brush that morning and sparing us the long bash back to the Truck Trail.

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.