



Couple missing for two days

January 11, 1999
North Face San Jacinto
1999-001

By Ray Hussey

A call was received early Monday morning January 11th, 1999 regarding a San Clemente couple, Thomas & Kristen Kidwell, overdue from a climb of the North face of San Jacinto. The first report was that the subjects had started the climb on Friday, this eventually was found to be incorrect. They actually started the climb at noon Saturday. Thomas & Kristen were both experienced hikers and climbers but since Thomas was overdue at work on Monday the search was started. Initially teams were deployed to search the desert floor for the subjects vehicle, and a hasty team was sent to search for tracks and cut for sign along the plateau to approximately 3,500 feet where the East Fork of snow creek presents a natural barrier. The State Park was notified and asked to check the summit register and interview all hikers coming from the peak. Riverside Sheriff's Office helicopter Star-80 was requested and on deployment spotted a vehicle 3 mi. east of snow creek road.

Desert Search and Rescue (DSSAR) responded and radioed back the license plate. This confirmed that the vehicle spotted was in fact the subjects' vehicle. A RMRU team was sent up to the tram to walk the North Face ridgeline checking for any movement and/or distress signals. The RMRU hasty team reported no recent disturbance or tracks at the 3,500 ft. level, which was very surprising since this is the usual route of ascent. The search was temporally suspended, at nightfall because of the technical degree of difficulty with darkness and danger to the searchers.

The Office of Emergency Services (OES) was contacted and additional helicopter support from San Bernardino County arrived early the next day (Tuesday) along with Mountaineer trained personnel from Sierra Madre SAR [Search and Rescue] teams. DSSAR tracked from the vehicle along the east ridge. Sierra Madre, China Lake and RMRU teams were airlifted to strategic locations on the North Face. Mid-afternoon a flashing reflection/light was seen by spotters at the 9000 ft level. Star-80 was dispatched with an RMRU technical-medical but the flashing turned out to be the sun shining intermittently on a sheet of ice. Shortly thereafter the DSSAR team found the two subjects & hiking down the east ridge at the 4,000 ft level. The subjects were airlifted to base by Star-80 and rehydrated. When interviewed it was determined that the subjects had avoided the usual ascent route since they hadn't

obtained the proper permits. Their clothing was dark and they didn't attempt to signal the sheriff's helicopters. Their climb was terminated due to time constraints and the degree of difficulty. A very happy and relieved family warmly embraced them at base camp.

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.