



Four Scouts and Two Leaders Overdue on Hike

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Tanaja Trail, Ortega Highway
1999-010

By Jim Fairchild

Astute Boy Scout leaders, planning to conduct treks in California's High Sierra, take their Scouts on a number of conditioning and training backpack outings during the months prior. This is the case with a Troop from Orange County. Two groups, starting at opposite sides of the area between Fisherman's Camp and Ortega Highway in the Santa Ana Mountains planned to hike to the other's roadhead, crossing somewhere along the way, but using trails mostly separated by a small distance. They met Saturday night, then split. The Group heading west along the Tenaja Trail were greatly delayed, having problems finding the path, being forced to camp well short of the highway.

They were reported to the Sheriff's Office in the early hours of today, Monday. RMRU was called. We arrived at a General Store down the far side of the mountain at 0600. We being Darrell Bell, Base Camp Operator, Dr. Ray Hussey, Operations Leader, Phil Thompson, who became the relay, and 'ol Jim. After a period of organization, the writer, along with two of the boy's parents Debby and Ron and a nurse who was a friend, Jean, hiked along the Tenaja Trail in hopes of either finding tracks or intercepting the group. Normally, we don't take relatives or friends of the subjects into the field, but these folks were good hikers.

The rather nice hiking was punctuated by dodging poison oak, listening to bird calls, describing plant uses, and encountering trail signs that were sometimes different from trail names on the topographic quadrangle. No problem, we stayed on the most traveled path, calling loudly at times.

Finally, a bit over two miles, we came to a sign where the trail branched a bit left from an abandoned truck trail (dirt road). We guzzled some water and then I gave a call up the road, no answer, down the road, got an answer. While I radioed Base with the good news, the others walked down for hugs and questions. We had them take off packs, become re-hydrated, eat food, and fix blisters. They were all O.K., described their frustration in trying to find the trail, finding that a spring where they hoped to fill canteens was covered and locked.

Part way back to base we met Rick Rhay and Michael George who had come in to offer any needed assistance. They, the overdue group, did everything right, sticking with trying to locate their trail and staying together. Had they been truly lost deeper into the

wilderness, and out of water, today's heat could have rendered a different outcome.

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.