

Four hikers spread out on trail, one got lost

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Pacific Crest Trail, near Spitleer Peak
1999-019

By Janet Hillard

The characteristic 3 beeps in a row were chirping as I woke up after 2 A.M. on Labor Day. A lost hiker, somewhere near the Pacific Crest Trail Northeast of Lake Hemet, was awaiting our aid. Upon arrival at the Lake Hemet Sheriff's Station, we found the 24 year old subject's brother and 3 friends describing the route they'd taken. Our subject had no light, warm clothes, food or extra water. He'd separated from one friend in order to "catch up" to the others, but they never saw him after that.

Jim Fairchild and I loaded our packs into his truck and drove up Fobes Ranch Road, spotting the hiker's white sedan as we ascended. At road's end, we shouldered our packs and began the hike, to the accompaniment of Jim's informative descriptions of medicinal plants, stars, constellations and wildlife we observed. We'd reached the saddle of Spitleer Peak without hearing a single response to our repeated calls and spotlight signals.

"We'll either see him in 20 minutes or he's gone in another direction", Jim said as we resumed hiking. I checked my watch in the emerging light of dawn...6:10. At 6:30, Jim (in the lead) yelled to a figure above us, "Is that you, Matt?" Our subject responded "Yeah, it is." and I experienced the thrill of my first "find"!

After a quick check of his physical condition and some water we commenced our hike back the way we had come. It wasn't too long before we were at the trail head where Jim had parked his truck. In and going with the heater going to warm up our subject we soon arrived at base for a quick conversation with the Sheriff. The reunion with brother and friends had taken place at the trail head.



The missing hiker back at base camp

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