

Hiker took a short-cut and never made his destination

September 16, 1999
Spitler Peak Trail
1999-020

By

On Wednesday, September 15th, Manuel Areallano was taking five gallons of water to the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) via the Spitler Peak Trail. This was in support of about 30 Marines from Twenty-nine Palms who were hiking the PCT from Fuller Ridge to the Desert Divide. At about 4:30 PM, he decided that Spitler Peak Trail was not the quickest route and that it would be better to go straight up the mountain. He never made it to the PCT.

His fellow Marines realized that he was overdue and searched for him until Thursday afternoon when they decided they needed to call for assistance. RMRU was contacted and were in the field by about 8:00 PM. Later that night, additional personnel were requested from the Desert Search and Rescue from Palm Springs. In the morning, helicopter support was provided by the Marine Corps Air Station in Yuma, Arizona and the Riverside Sheriff's Department.



RMRU Base Station at Lake Hemet

Chris Babcock

Teams were sent in from several directions to cover the perimeter while other teams searched from the point last seen (PLS). Teams searched all through the night and well into the morning. None of the perimeter teams ever made contact with Manuel but one team, near the PLS, found his tracks on the hillside. As that team was following the tracks, we were notified that Manuel had found his way out.



Chris Babcock

Marine Corps search and rescue helicopter gives lift to rescue teams.

After interviewing Manuel, it was learned that on Wednesday he hiked up and around the south side of Spittle Peak. On Thursday he spent the entire day crawling through dense brush. During that difficult day he dropped his water container and most the water spilled out. By the end of the day he was out of water. He decided to leave his backpack behind since it was slowing him down. He slept Thursday in the cold without his sleeping bag. Friday morning he hiked downhill to where he could see the buildings at Forbes Ranch. A man in one house gave him food and water before driving him back to the trailhead where he was reunited with his friends.

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.