

## Lost Hiker, Wet and Cold

**March 19th, 2005  
Deer Springs Trail, Idyllwild  
2005-010**

Search finds lost hiker safe near Fern Valley

by Becky Clark, Editor, Idyllwild Town Crier

Riverside Mountain Rescue Unit (RMRU) saved a La Jolla man from possible hypothermia and death after the man used his daughter's cell phone to report being lost on a day hike.

Richard Smith, 42, was hiking alone in the vicinity of Deer Springs Trail and Suicide Rock Trail Saturday when he lost his way as the weather began to worsen and dusk approached.

The man's hike to Suicide Rock was intended to memorialize a friend from San Diego who recently had committed suicide, according to Smith's rescuer, RMRU member Henry Negrete of Idyllwild.

Smith was wearing light clothing -- a long-sleeved cotton shirt and sweatshirt and had no food or supplies, including a parka or rain gear.

At about 4:45 p.m., Smith phoned 9-1-1 to report being lost.

Six RMRU team members responded and divided into two teams. Negrete, Travis Henderson, Dave Webb and Robert Poe followed the Marion Creek drainage in Fern Valley while Glenn Henderson and Brenda Luna took the Deer Springs Trail to the Suicide Rock Trail junction.

"He did go up to Suicide Rock and on the way back, apparently he had gotten off on one of the climber's trails which brought him down into the Marion Creek drainage," said Negrete.

Negrete located Smith in the drainage about 2 miles north of Fern Valley at about 9 p.m.



Photo: Patrick McCurdy

Rescuer Henry Negrete with Richard Smith

"He was in the beginning of the second stage of hypothermia," said Negrete.

"He was feeling numbness in his hands and feet and was shivering uncontrollably."

Team members got Smith into dry clothes and gave him food and water. Negrete said Smith was so drenched from the constant rain that day that his clothes weighed between 10 and 15 pounds. He had no injuries and said he was capable of hiking out.

RMRU members accompanied Smith to Fern Valley which they reached at about 11 p.m.

Negrete said Smith probably had taken off on the hike between showers, figuring he would dash up to Suicide Rock and back down in a short time.

"We did praise him for one thing," Negrete said. "He did stay in one place. He did have to hike out a couple of times to get his cell phone to work but he returned."

Rescuers were unable to triangulate Smith's phone signal to find him sooner because two or three cell towers rather than one are required.

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.