



Desert Search at Lake Cahuilla For a Missing Female

April 8th, 2005

lake Cahuilla

2005-011 and 2005-012

by Brenda DeLuna and Grace Manues

The mission for Susan R., 53, began when two hikers discovered her vehicle, high-centered just off a 4WD road, 2 miles from Lake Cahuilla. DSAR initiated the search on Thursday but was unavailable to continue the search on Friday.

RMRU members responding to the OES call-out included: Brenda DeLuna (OPS leader), Travis Henderson, Patrick McCurdy, Grace Manues and (late comer) Ray Hussey. Three members of Riverside County Search Dog Team and their dogs were also present.

On Friday morning, each RMRU member was paired with a dog team member. Collectively, the three teams covered miles of desert, drainages, canyons and even a waterfall, with no sign of Susan. Helicopter Star 90 also searched the area for most of the day.

While the field teams were doing their thing, Brenda came to the rescue of the Channel 2 news reporter. After having hiked over 1/4 mile in heels, Brenda selflessly offered the grateful woman her boots to wear for the remaining 1h mile hike to the subject's vehicle (with the approval of the sheriff's deputy).

After lunch, Travis, Patrick, Grace, and Ray, continued the search sans dogs. After coming upon a rattlesnake, Grace alerted her fellow team members (with a scream that could have been heard in Hemet).

The search continued through the weekend with a large-scale call-out involving over 50 searchers on foot, ATVs, and horses. RMRU members responding on Saturday included Travis, Patrick, and Ray. Despite hours of searching, no sign of Susan was found and the active search was suspended several days later.

Postscript: Two months later, in early June, a field worker found the subject's skull in a vineyard two miles from her abandoned vehicle. While the discovery confirmed her family's worst fear, it also brought them some closure and peace of mind. May Susan rest in peace.

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.