

Search for Missing Danish Hiker

April 16-17, 2006
Palm Springs Tram, San Jacinto Mountains
2006-04-16

by Kevin Walker

Easter Sunday. A day that Christians celebrate the resurrection of Christ, a day of children hunting for brightly colored eggs, a day of family. That is what was scheduled for my family.

RMRU was activated by RSO to respond to the Tram to search for a missing hiker from Denmark. Members arrived prepared for winter conditions as a late winter storm had deposited fresh snow at the upper elevations of Mt. San Jacinto on Thursday. On this operation I took Operations Leader and Gwenda Yates assisted me with Base Operations at the mountain station. Hans Ebbenscaard, vacationing in the United States, had taken out a day hiking permit on Wednesday to hike to Mt San Jacinto and return to the tram by nightfall. With his car still in the parking lot at the lower station on Saturday evening, we were activated. This was all of the information we had to start. **Nothing else.**



Photo: Patrick McCurdy
Grace Manues searching for Hans

First out was Pete and Jim, headed to the summit in high gear. Team 2, Patrick, Grace and Bill headed to Round Valley and then on towards and over the Wellman Divide to search the Willow Creek drainage. Because Hans had been missing since Wednesday and weather had been a factor, we asked and received a California OES operations number quickly allowing us to ask for and receive help from other agencies.

As more RMRU members and other teams arrived we assigned the personnel to the prime search area and then to the more outlying areas. Glenn and Elizabeth headed from Hidden Lake to Caramba Camp in hopes of finding prints at the narrows of Caramba. Historically this has been the trap of the San Jacintos. Lost hikers are easily drawn downhill to it, and then can see the Palm Springs below, and then enter the steep and extremely dangerous canyon. As members worked the search areas, our RSO helicopter (Star 9) and CHP H60 searched from the air. L.A. County with their mighty Air 5 moved additional teams into the field.

In base we were swamped with chores. With Sierra Madre veteran Dick Sale helping me with plans, we continued to assess assignments and make new ones, while Gwenda headed up the detective end of things with the sheriff and the tram. As the day progressed more completed information was gathered on Hans such as getting his identification, photos from

his laptop computer (at his hotel in the desert) and better description clothing worn.

Unfortunately as the day wore into the late afternoon bad reports started coming in from field teams. Pete and Jim found no prints at on the summit as the storm two days earlier had deposited more a foot of fresh powder, covering any sign if Hans had been there. At lower elevations basically the same thing, in Glenn and Elizabeths case rain had completely washed the ground clean at Caramba. So Hans could have walked through and we would not know. Patricks team occasionally saw very weak sign in the snow. Keeping that in minds we pressed on. Teams searched until after dark. Air 5 brought in the teams from the high country and Glenn and Liz from Caramba.



Photo: Patrick McCurdy

Bill Delo takes a break during the Hanz search

I missed the evening planning session as my daughter Shelby had injured her ankle and I spent my night in the Loma Linda ER. Glenn Gwenda from RMRU and Dick Sale and Arnold Gaffrey from Sierra Madre worked into the night preparing for Monday.



Photo: Patrick McCurdy

Tahquitz Rock from Wellman's Divide

Monday brought clear skies to the mountain, but high winds in the desert. RSO was unable to get Star 9 out of the Hemet area, but L.A. Counties Air 8 (a patrol helo) was able sneak through the Banning pass and arrived at 0800 to continue the air search. With no sign of Hans in the central search area it had been decided to expand the search area, re-search in close and have the helicopter search the North Face of Mt San Jacinto. Caramba was bothering me. Too many times people had gone through and into Tahquitz Canyon. We had Air 8 move over to Tahquitz. I

also wanted to get two teams into the canyon to cut for sign. One at Tower Helispot (3500') and one team at the Grapevine Helispot (2500'). The Sheriff gave us the ok (thank you Gwenda) to request Landells Aviation. With the ok given, Elaine Landells was contacted. Steve deJesus was about to leave on a Department of Fish and Game project but could hold it off. As Steve re-fitted the Bell Jet Ranger for our operation the radio came to life. Air 8 had located a male hiker at the 3500 foot level on a small ledge in Tahquitz Canyon. Air 8 was not equipped for a rescue pickup. They stayed on scene as Steve flew over from Desert Hot Springs. Jim Manues and Dave Webb flew in with Steve. Once the subject was located, Steve put the toe of the skid down on a small ledge. Jim and Dave stepped out, Steve then backed away. The confirmation came back, it was Hans. He was dehydrated and weak but uninjured. Steve came back in, put the skid down and with Hans and RMRU on board returned to the lower tram.

It was decided to have Hans transported to Desert Hospital for medical assessment. I went

with Hans to the hospital in the back of the Landells ship. From the roof heliport Hans was taken to the ER. He was given IV therapy for dehydration and a well deserved meal after his check up. Indeed Hans was in very decent shape. He later told us that he had hiked to the Mt. San Jacinto saddle on Wednesday and decided not to finish the last push to the top. He



RMRU Members with Hanz at the Hospital

wanted to come back a different way and took the trail to the west towards Little Round Valley (mistake #1). Shortly after starting down that trail he decided to go cross country to the south and then turn east again and come over the top of the mountain and then return to the tram (mistake #2). Hans instead moved in a southerly direction until he reached the southern end of the 10,000 massif. He could hear water below (Willow Creek), and headed towards it. Hans ended up in the Willow Creek drainage (he was now in the trap of the San Jacintos). By Wednesday night Hans was in the in

Tahquitz Canyon, and actually going into the canyon saved his life. When the storm arrived he was weak but able seek shelter in a cave/outcropping below snow level. Over the four day period he had descended to the 300 foot level just above the largest of Tahquitz Canyons waterfalls. There he was physically and emotionally spent. There he waited. Either to be found, or to die.

This is a classic Mt San Jacinto search operation Good weather, lost hiker, winter snow, Palm Springs Aerial Tram, Tahquitz Canyon, OES, multiple helicopters, multiple MRA and county teams.and another life saved!

Resources employed:

RMRU Members: Pete Carlson, Bill Delo, Michael George, Glenn Henderson, Travis Henderson, Grace Manues, Jim Manues, Patrick McCurdy, Jeri Sanchez, Elizabeth Sanz, Brad Scott, Kevin Walker, Dave Webb, Gwenda Yates.

Additional Riverside County: Desert Search and Rescue.

Mountain Rescue Association Teams: China Lake Mountain Rescue Group, San Diego Mountain Rescue, Sierra Madre Mountain Rescue, West Valley Search and Rescue.

Additional San Bernardino County: Rim of the World Search and Rescue, San Bernardino Cave Rescue Team.

Helicopters: California Highway Patrol H60, Landells Aviation, Los Angeles County Air 5 and Air 8, Riverside County Star 9.

The Palm Springs Aerial Tramway and its entire staff and facilities.

In excess of 75 persons.

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.