



Missing Camper

July 30th, 2007
Black Mountain Area
2007-016

by William Carlson

Three back to back text messages at 9:30 on a Saturday night could only mean one thing... a change of plans. I called the Rescue Line to learn that a 40-year-old man, Joel, had left Black Mountain Group Campground around 7:00 in the morning, and had not returned. After returning home and packing summer search equipment, Pete (my dad) and I headed for Black Mountain.

We arrived at the group camp and met a Riverside Sheriff Office (RSO) deputy and fellow team member Dan. We gathered the basic information about the subject and began creating a search plan. Shortly after, team members Gwenda, Marty, and Jeff arrived. We decided to first search the prominent Fuller / Mill Creek drainage directly behind camp. Pete and I would be Team One and search from the group campsite down the drainage to the Pinewood area. Team Two consisted of Dan, Marty, and Jeff. Their assignment was to drive down to the Pinewood area and work the drainage up toward team one.

We began our assignments right at midnight. We began calling out the subject's name from the group camp. Our voices carried for what seemed like miles which was helpful because we knew if the subject was in the area he would hear our calls. Though Team One made good progress, the terrain was extremely steep and littered with obstacles. At many points we had to climb back out of the drainage to avoid 30-foot boulders. Team Two encountered the same difficulties and opted to remain in the Pinewood area in case the subject came out. Around 2:30 in the morning Teams One and Two met up and returned to base to catch a few hours of sleep in preparation for an early start in the morning.

In what seemed like the wink of an eye 6:00 rolled around. We picked our achy bodies up off the ground (our bed) and enjoyed a quick cup of coffee while planning out the next assignments. Around this time team members Patrick, Glenn, Brad, and Grace arrived. We quickly handed out assignments. Gwenda and Glenn would run operations at base. Pete and I would be Team Three. Our assignment would be to hike up the Fuller Ridge Trail to an unnamed peak and work our way down the second drainage away from the group camp. Team Four was Grace, Marty, and Dan. Their assignment was to stay on the ridge north of camp and search for any sign that our subject may have headed down toward Cabazon. Team Five was Jeff and Dana. They were starting

at the group camp and covering the area between the camp and the second drainage which Team Three was searching. Lastly, Team Six, consisting of Patrick and Brad, was assigned to cover the initial Fuller / Mill creek drainage again. This was in case the subject was asleep the night before when it was searched.

Pete and I reached the unnamed peak in no time at all. However, the sight of a twenty foot high sea of brush made us rethink our assignment. We realized the subject would not be in that immediate area so we decided to return to the Fuller Ridge trail head and work our way through easier terrain to our original assignment. It only took us an extra twenty minutes to regain the ridge in the area we wanted to search.

Approximately a quarter mile down the ridge we reach a sandy area. To our amazement a single set of tracks walked right through the sand. We radioed in to base that we had found tracks and that we were going to follow them. They seemed to be walking in circles and then went uphill to a small point. When we reached the point we gave a yell, and to our amazement got a response. Our Sheriff Department helicopter flew overhead and guided us through the maze of boulders straight to the subject.

The subject was dehydrated and tired, but overall in good condition. We took a few minutes to give him food and water, and put out his signal fire. The subject had been hiking since 9:00 the previous morning and had realized he was lost around noon the previous day. His condition improved rapidly. We walked him back toward team five and eventually back to a camp full of relieved campers. Another successful mission for RMRU.

Members Present: Gwenda, Glenn, Dan, Pete, Will, Marty, Jeff, Patrick, Brad, Grace, Steve, and Jennifer. Special Thanks: RSO Aviation, USFS Rec 52 and Patrol 54.

(Editor's Note: Thanks also to Desert Sheriff's Search and Rescue, who were en route to assist with the search when the subject was found.)

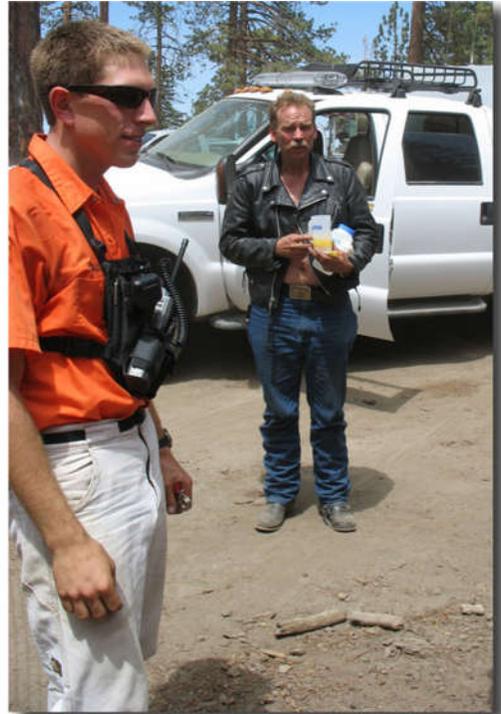


Photo: Patrick McCurdy

William Carlson and Joel, After Returning To The Incident Command Post

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.