



Missing Hiker With 3-Year-Old Daughter

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South Ridge Trail, Idyllwild
2007-024

By William Carlson

"What an amazing day!" was my thought as I lay on the couch at my friend's apartment while she kindly prepared dinner. We had spent the day climbing in the cool temperatures of Idyllwild and were enjoying a little rest and relaxation when the (recently) all too familiar sound of my pager broke the silence. "All RMRU we have a search / rescue on the Southridge Trail." Dinner was quickly transferred into a to-go package and I headed out.

I followed our rescue vehicle to the Southridge Trailhead where Lee was in the field and Grace, Jim, Nick, and Patrick were packing. Grace took over as our base coordinator and a quick planning discussion with Lee revealed it would be best for a team of three to follow the trail to the south searching for Pablo and his three year old daughter Veronica. Patrick headed north up the trail to tie in with Lee as team one. Jim, Nick, and I headed out as team two.

We began calling for Pablo a few hundred feet down the trail. To our surprise we instantly received voice contact with Pablo. From where his voice was coming from we figured he was a half mile east of our location in thick brush. Due to the treachery of bushwhacking at night, we chose to have our Riverside Sheriff helicopter locate the subject's exact location and provide us the quickest access.

Thirty minutes passed while the helicopter searched for Pablo and Veronica's exact location. This was due to the fact that they were standing in twenty foot high brush and they did not have a flashlight to signal with. The helicopter did eventually locate the two and decided the quickest way to reach the subjects would be a hoist operation, even though this would be tricky due winds and the fact that it was now 11 p.m.

Crashing through brush would be a last option due to the probability of injury at night. All of the field teams regrouped at the location where we had voice contact and I was driven to Keenwild helispot to perform the hoist operation. After receiving a briefing from pilot Tony Bowen and TFO John Irish, we were ready to begin.

A three minute flight left us hovering over the missing hikers. Tony and John spent about ten minutes working against the winds trying to find an open area to safely put me on the ground. (As a side note from listening to their conversations through the headset I would like to commend their professionalism. Their teamwork and level of communication made

me more comfortable as a rescuer.) Eventually a quality location was found and I was called to the door. I was lowered from the helicopter and with a little work set down in a small clearing just above the missing hikers.

It is always amazing how quiet the air becomes when the helicopter flies away. With a quick yell I was able to decide which direction to head. Pablo and Veronica were only a few hundred yards away. However, it took me ten to fifteen minutes to crawl through the brush in order to reach them. Both Pablo and Veronica were in excellent condition when I arrived. Veronica was a little cold but a jacket warmed her up quickly.

Tony and John flew to Hemet to refuel the helicopter which gave me time to attach a harness to each of them and explain the process of being hoisted into the helicopter. The local winds began to increase while the helicopter was gone and at some point became too high for a hoist operation. We then turned to Plan B in which Tony and John dropped an overnight pack with sleeping bags, jackets, food, and extra water. With the high winds we were going to have to spend the night.

Camp took a little work to set up considering there were no flat spots to be found in the area. Pablo and I created small ledges to sleep on. We all crawled into sleeping bags to get as much sleep as we could before morning. The plan was for the helicopter to return at 6:30 a.m. for a hoist operation.

The winds really began to increase around 4 a.m. I lay in my sleeping bag dreading the inevitable hike through brush to hike Pablo and Veronica out. The one reassuring thought was the nine reliable teammates at base camp that were eager to help. 6:30 a.m. rolled around and pilot Steve Bertling and TFO Andy Rasmussen advised they would not be able to perform a hoist but would however be happy to help with route-finding from the air. They flew back to Keenwild helispot while we packed up and began hiking back up to the closest trail where the rest of the team would meet us.

After a couple of hours of crawling through brush we (with the help of Steve and Andy from the air) were able to make it to the Southridge Trail. We quickly met up with Jim, Rob, Patrick, and Mike. Together the seven of us hiked back to the trailhead where Pablo's family was eagerly awaiting his and Veronica's arrival. It was another happy ending for RMRU and another reminder of why volunteer organizations such as RMRU exist... "So others may live!"

Members Present: Patrick McCurdy, Lee Arnson, Nick Nixon, Jeri Sanchez, Jim Manues, Grace Manues, Rob May, Mike George, Brenda DeLuna, and William Carlson.

Video

Try downloading the video to your computer and watching it there (right-click the link and "save-as" to your local home computer). Our server does not stream video well.

[Father and daughter](#) being hiked out by RMRU team members.

[Reunion](#) with family members.

Photos



Family member holds the little girl after being reunited back at the command post.



The missing people, family, and RMRU searchers.

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.