



Missing 54-Year-Old Woman

March 21, 2008
Apple Canyon, Garner Valley
2008-009

Update: See [Mission 2008-015](#) for the resolution of this search.

By Patrick McCurdy

On Friday, March 21st, RMRU was called out to search for a woman missing five days in the Apple Canyon area of Garner Valley, in the San Jacinto Mountains. The woman, Debbie, had last been seen the preceding Monday and there had been a fair amount of rain and snow in the area.

That night one team went up the trail from the Zen Center to where it intersects with the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT). Another team, along with several members of Riverside County Search Dogs (RCSD), worked down the canyon from the Zen Center toward Pine Springs Christian Ranch. No sign of the woman was found.

Saturday we had a very good turnout from RMRU, RCSD, and Desert Sheriff's Search and Rescue (DSSAR). Multiple field teams searched the draws from the canyon up to the PCT, several peaks in the area (Spitler, Apache, etc.) and north and south along the PCT. William Carlson and Jim Manues found some outer clothing above an icy shoot that dropped to the east from the PCT. The clothing was confirmed to be Debbie's.

Sunday, with the search now focused on the PCT, RMRU requested through our Sheriff's Emergency Response Team for help from out of county teams qualified in snow and ice conditions, as the PCT had large patches of ice and snow covering it. San Dimas Mountain Rescue Team, Sierra Madre Search and Rescue, and San Diego Mountain Rescue each sent 6-8 members to assist RMRU in the search.

Teams were searching their assigned areas when a search member fell on a ice patch and needed to be rescued himself (See below for William Carlson's comments on this part of the search.) By the time that searcher was rescued there was little daylight left and, with no good leads on Debbie's location, the search ended for the day.

The same teams again went out on Monday, but with similar lack of results. The official search was called off Monday evening.

RMRU held an unscheduled "training" the following Sunday with assistance from the Riverside Sheriff's Air Wing. The idea was to fly teams into Murray Canyon from the east,

then have them search down that canyon with the hope of locating signs of Debbie. Extremely high winds prevented the helicopters from inserting our field teams very high up the canyon and two team members almost had to spend the night on a ridge, only being airlifted out at the last minute through the skills of pilot Tony Bowen and TFO John Irish.

While the official search is over, RMRU has not given up on finding Debbie. As we did with John Donovan, we will continue to search this area on training weekends and when team members can get out there on their own.

By William Carlson

Rescuer Down! Two words you never want to hear in your search and rescue career. We had spent the morning searching an ice chute for a missing hiker when we got the call that a San Dimas rescuer had fallen 150 feet on an ice slope and was injured. Perfect cooperation between Sierra Madre Search and Rescue Team, Riverside Mountain Rescue Unit, and San Dimas Search and Rescue allowed us to execute a complicated alpine rescue in a timely manner. The patient was transported across the ice field to an open area where a Riverside County Sheriff Helicopter transported him to a waiting Mercy Air Helicopter. All teams then returned to the command post where the search would continue one more day.

IMAGES



Art Fortini of Sierra Madre Search and Rescue, checking rope anchors.



Eric of Sierra Madre, coming up a rope in an ice chute.



San Dimas team, passing an icy patch of the PCT.



William Carlson and Lee Arnson, looking into Murray Canyon



Jim Manues, descending from a ridge into Murray Canyon.

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.