



Two Mountain Lion Researchers Rescued

April 2, 2008
Hell's Kitchen Area, San Jacinto Mountains
2008-011

By Grace Manues

As the sun began to set on Wednesday, April 2nd, two men in the middle of rugged terrain known as Hell's Kitchen set off a personal locator beacon (PLB).

This modern-day equivalent of a smoke signal rose up to a satellite then bounced back down to the Air Force's Rescue Coordination Center in Florida. The alert set off a series of phone calls; the first to the registered owner. The wife of the owner confirms that her husband, a respected and experienced wildlife veterinarian, is in the field tracking mountain lions for a conservation project. Given the nature of his work, he has carried a PLB for years and would not set it off if it was not an emergency. The next call, the Office of Emergency Services in California.

As luck would have it, RMRU is gathered at the Sheriff's Hemet substation for its monthly meeting. Those who are able quickly reassemble at the Lake Hemet substation for the all night mission.

Given the nature of the call (possible medical emergency), the location of the subjects (at least 5 hours away by foot), and weather conditions (forecast for rain), RMRU requests air support for the safest and fastest evacuation of the subjects. On one of the rare occasions when an RSO airship is unavailable, a San Bernardino Sheriff's aviation unit quickly responds. Unfortunately, heavy winds prevent the airship from reaching the subjects.

Plan B. Field teams are dispatched at first light. Additional manpower from out-of-county teams is requested. San Diego, Sierra Madre, and San Bernardino teams respond. Members of the Civil Air Patrol - ground and air - also respond to pinpoint the location of the PLB.

Good news; the signal is moving. It appears the subjects are making their way back to their vehicle.

By 11:00 a.m., Team One (Lee Arnson and Jim Manues) reaches the subjects. One has a minor leg injury that prevented them from hiking out the night before. He is now able to slowly hike back to his vehicle under his own power.

To those thinking about carrying a PLB, yes, they are effective. Obviously, knowing a subject's exact location facilitates a rescue operation. However, be aware that unlike 911 in the city where help arrives in minutes, help while you are in the wilderness can be hours away. A PLB cannot replace wilderness skills. Hike safely. Carry the 10 essentials. Never hike alone. Also know that RMRU will always respond as if your life depended on it.

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.