



Missing Hiker Marion Mountain Trail

**November 13-14, 2010
San Jacinto Mountains
2010-034**

Written by Kevin Varner

The text message stated that there was a mission for a lost hiker in the Idyllwild area, and the team was short on members. A number of team members were on a camping trip in Death Valley and unavailable for the mission. I called the rescue line and stated that I was available for the search, but it would take a while since I was visiting family in the Los Angeles area. Gwenda Yates told me that any help would be appreciated. I grabbed all the gear I had available and started out on a three hour drive to Idyllwild.

I received a text message shortly before 9:30 p.m. that base ops was being moved to the Deer Springs trailhead. Minutes later I received a call from Les Walker in which he said, "Pack for an all-nighter, we've got a lot of ground to cover." We had been informed that the subject was an experienced hiker who had had survival training, was in good physical condition, but was equipped only with a jacket.

I reached the base at Deer Springs Trailhead at midnight and found two sheriff deputies, Les Walker, and Carlos Carter waiting for me. Les was running base and informed me that the 28 year old hiker had become separated from his group (six in total) while descending from San Jacinto peak. The group had originally departed from the Marion Mountain trailhead and had returned to the same location. Another team, Lee Arnson and Bob Bakos, were currently clearing the Seven Pines trail. Carlos and I were instructed to clear the Deer Springs Trail to the Marion Mountain Junction. Both search teams would then descend down the Marion Mountain Trail from the point where all three trails converge.

I packed whatever food and cold weather gear I had available (which wasn't much) and started out with Carlos on the Deer Springs trail at roughly 12:30 a.m. It was very dark and the wind was howling, which decreased any chance of finding the subject if he was off trail. We gave yells every few minutes in hopes of hearing a response, but the wind made it very difficult. We checked for tracks at many points, but found no tracks that pointed downhill (the only possible route the subject would

have taken).

Roughly a half hour after beginning our search the radios lost contact with base. Carlos and I could receive transmissions from Les at base; however, we could not transmit ourselves. This would later prove problematic for the other team members. I was very impressed by Carlos' tenacity and endurance. During our hike, Carlos informed me that he had spent the entire day hiking and reached San Jacinto Peak earlier that afternoon. I don't know how many miles Carlos put in over that 48 hour period, but he was trooper all the way through.

After searching for three hours to no avail, we reached the Strawberry Springs Junction. It was incredibly cold and windy, and we both agreed that a couple hours sleep was the best course of action. We figured it would be best to sleep next to the trail junction in case the subject may pass by during the night. We braved through the cold and managed to catch a couple hours of sleep. We woke early the next morning around 6:15 a.m. and ate a quick breakfast of Kits-Kats and Slim Jims. We struck out on the trail again around 6:30 a.m.

Our radios were still down and we were unable to communicate with base. At this point, we could neither send nor receive transmissions. We stuck to our original mission plan to reach the Marion Mountain Junction and then return to base via the Marion Mountain Trail. Upon reaching the Marion Mountain Junction we encountered a lone hiker on his way to the Mt. San Jacinto Peak. He said he was not our missing subject but would keep his eyes open for him. We descended down the Marion Mountain Trail and soon spotted a Sheriff's helicopter circling nearby overhead. Carlos and I thought that they might have found the subject and were commencing with a rescue. We would later find out that in fact they were looking for us.

Carlos and I continued down the Marion Mountain Trail as planned in the hopes that the subject had been found and rescued. We were relieved to see a person in a familiar orange shirt walking up the trail. It was fellow team member Chad Marler. He informed us that the subject had bedded down the night before, not far from our location, but could not hear our yells. The subject was only equipped with a jacket to stay warm and used the pine needles and leaves on the forest floor to make a blanket to stay warm. He awoke at first light and managed to hike down the Marion Mountain Trail just a few hours ahead of us.

Chad gave us a lift back to base where we were greeted by fellow team members Les Walker, Lee Arnson, Bob Bakos, Gwenda Yates and Sheriff's Deputy Cadenhead. As we reviewed the mission, our team members gave us a breakfast of hot coffee and warm Mountain Muffins. The mission was an overall success because the subject

survived the ordeal without any injury and all the team members did a terrific job. Les Walker did a terrific job running base, planning a thorough search, and coping with the faulty communications equipment. Lee Arnson and Bob Bakos did a terrific job clearing their trail and sticking to the mission plan. Carlos Carter deserves particular recognition for his tenacity and determination. He had climbed San Jacinto Peak the day before and then stuck out the entire mission without any complaints.

RMRU members present: Lee Arnson, Bob Bakos, Carlos Carter, Chad Marler, Kevin Varner, Les Walker, and Gwenda Yates.

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.