



Missing San Jacinto Peak Day Hikers

May 22, 2011
Palm Springs Aerial Tramway
2011-012

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Written by Glenn Henderson

It started out as a report of two overdue hikers at 10 p.m. Saturday night. By 2:30 a.m. Sunday morning one call had become two as we had received another report of two more overdue hikers. Gwenda Yates phoned me and we agreed that she would get the first call started and I would get the second one going. The first mission ([Mission 2011-011](#)) was on the Deer Springs Trail near Idyllwild; I went to the Palm Springs Tram for the second search.

Our search was for a 56 year old male, Michael Cao and his wife, Yi Mei, 55. They had pulled a permit to go to the summit on Saturday and to return the same day. When they did not return home to Carson City, their niece called 911 and we were called out.

We met the first tram car up at 6 a.m. Deputy Granito was our Sheriff's liaison for the mission. I sent our first team of Pete Carlson and Carlos Carter out to cover the Long Valley Drainage, Hidden Lake, Hidden Lake Divide and then down to Willow Creek Crossing and on to Laws Camp. If they found no sign they were to go on down to Caramba (Caramba is where you send people you don't like!). Well, I like Pete and Carlos but I sent them anyway. The area is notorious for capturing lost hikers that get on the wrong side of Wellman's divide.

At the same time I sent our second team of Nick Nixon and Mt. San Jacinto Park Supervisor Sue Neary out to Round Valley. Sue reported that about 100 Boy Scouts were camped in the area. We hoped they had seen our subjects.

About 8 a.m. Dana Potts was our third team out with Desert Search and Rescue (DSAR) members, Sharon Ollenburger, and Joe McEuen. Their assignment was to go up the Sid Davis Drainage and then on to the Tamarack Benches. Also by this time Gwenda Yates had arrived to help with planning after turning the first mission over to Les Walker at the Deer Springs Trailhead.

Chris Miller and Chris Stevens from DSAR arrived and became Team 4. I gave them the daunting task of going to the summit of San Jacinto as fast as possible, checking out

the stone hut on top and then going down to Little Round Valley Campground.

We now had a report of our subjects going to the summit at 2:30 p.m. and another report of them on the summit but going off on the wrong side, west instead of east.

About 10:30 a.m. Team 3 reported they had made voice contact. YESSSSSSSSSSSS!!!! Then, NNNNOOOOO!!! The wrong Michael was answering their calls. All teams resumed their assignments.

DSAR members Donna Deane, Dave Gomez, Craig Patton and Rich Dolezm arrived. I kept Rich back with Gwenda to possibly be a radio relay and sent the others as Team 5 to take the trail toward Hidden Divide and then cut across to Round Valley Campground.

Lew Kingman and Jeri Sanchez from RMRU were sent out as Team 6 to cover the Cornell and Yale Peak areas east of Mt. San Jacinto.

Pete and Carlos made it to Laws Camp and did not find any sign but did stop three hikers that were coming up from Caramba. The three had not seen anyone so I turned Pete and Carlos around and sent them up Willow Creek toward Wellman's Divide.

About 12:30 p.m. Team 4, Chris and Chris, reported that they thought they could see our subjects coming down from the summit with two other people. These turned out to be our subjects being helped by two day hikers whom they had asked for help. Our subjects had spent a very cold night on the wrong side of Mt San Jacinto. They did get down to Little Round Valley where some Boy Scouts gave them food and water and put them on the right trail. Chris and Chris caught up with them and took over escorting them to Wellman's Divide, where they met up with Teams 1, 2, and 3.



Michael Cao, Yi Mei, and Rescuers
Photo by Jeri Sanchez

All teams were out of the field and the mission concluded at 3:30 p.m.

Special thanks go to the Mt. San Jacinto Park Service for their invaluable help - Supervisor Sue Neary and Shawn McIntyre, Brian Everest and Rick Hanson all did a great job covering a lot of area during the search; to Desert Search and Rescue members for their expert assistance and for finding the subjects(!); to the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway for transporting team members up and down numerous times - we could not have completed this mission so successfully without your support; to Riverside Sheriff's Helicopter Star 9 that searched until called away on a possible sniper call; and to Deputy Granito, whose constant support made our job so much less stressful.

RMRU team members present: Pete Carlson, Carlos Carter, Glen Henderson, Lew Kingman, Nick Nixon, Dana Potts, Jeri Sanchez, and Gwenda Yates.

Assisting teams: Mt. San Jacinto Park Service and Desert Search and Rescue.

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.