



Missing Female Hiker Ortega Hwy

August 14, 2011
Ortega Hwy 74, Candy Store
2011-020

Written by Donny Goetz

We got the callout Sunday right at 5 p.m. I was just settling in for the evening as I had to be on the road to work the following morning at 4:30 a.m. But, as we do, I grabbed my radio off its charger and hopped in my truck to head down to Ortega Highway. Luckily traffic was light and I made it to the trailhead by 5:45 p.m. Roger May was already on scene along with several CHP officers and Riverside Sheriff Deputies. In our callout message we were informed that we would not have air support. But as I arrived on scene I noticed a CHP helicopter in the air circling the area just southwest of the trail head. "GREAT!" I thought. The CHP bird was not equipped with a winch so they would not be able to execute a pick but they had been able to locate the subject as she was sitting on the trail and relay her coordinates to us.

By this time, Paul Caraher had joined us at base and we began to hash out our plan. Paul and I were both chomping at the bit and, armed with the subject's coordinates, we wanted to take off ASAP to maximize the remaining daylight. We trimmed down our packs, making sure we had enough, but not too much gear so we could move quickly. As the temps had been well into the 90's that day, we made sure not to skimp on water as we were expecting our subject to be dehydrated. We left one radio with Roger, dialed the coordinates into our GPS unit, and headed off up the trail at a healthy pace. We knew we had to cover about 5 miles and we had about an hour and a half of good daylight left.

The trail was nice, straightforward, and had very little serious elevation gain, at least compared to our usual stomping grounds on San Jacinto. We were making a very good pace and were just topping out over the ridge as we heard the batting drone of a helicopter. It sounded bigger than the CHP bird I had seen earlier. Just then, Cal Fire's big helicopter came ripping up over the ridge and back down toward the trail head. We had been under the impression that we were on our own on this mission but at some point Cal Fire had gotten contacted as well. They had flown in and picked up the subject along with two civilians who had stopped to help her as well.

Paul called back to base, where Glenn, Gwenda, and Mike had gathered to act as support if we had needed, and was informed by Gwenda that our subject was indeed out and safe.

So with that, Paul and I shook hands, turned, and began hiking back down at a somewhat more leisurely pace. Along the way, the day light yielded to the night and the headlamps were dug out of our packs. We arrived back at base just after 8 p.m. that evening feeling quite refreshed from our nice hike. We chatted with our teammates for a few minutes, and then headed off back home.

As always, I left the mission with a feeling of pride and respect for our team and the other agencies that are always willing to help where they can. Thanks to all who made it out, were on their way, and were supporting our efforts in spirit!

RMRU team members present: Paul Caraher, Michael George, Donny Goetz, Glenn Henderson, Roger May, 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.