



## Dehydrated Hiker San Juan Loop Trail

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Elsinore Area  
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Written by Steve Bryant

Some RMRU missions are fairly long – the search for Mark Vasquez in the Soboba Hills many years ago lasted nearly a week. Other missions are short – this is one of them. Saturday RMRU was on training about trails and road heads in the Cleveland National Forest – an area in the Santa Ana Mountains shared by Riverside, Orange and San Diego Counties. RMRU’s primary search and rescue area in these mountains is the San Mateo Wilderness. The areas includes the Tenaja Falls, a pretty cascade (in a wet year, anyway) at the end of a short hike, but also an area of algae-covered rocks which are very slippery – we have had to recover the bodies of people who slipped on these rocks and drowned in the pools at the bottom. Fisherman’s Camp is also a popular destination in the San Mateo Wilderness; it is by San Mateo Creek a relatively short distance in from the road. We have had lost hikers in this area get turned around and end up in Camp Pendleton; rumor has it that this is a dangerous thing to do because of unexploded ordnance. A map of this area can be found by searching for “San Mateo Wilderness Map” on the web.

I had come early to the training, and decided to reconnoiter a road which shows on maps as going from Decker Canyon to the South Main Divide road. This route led to many dead ends in private land. I finally ran into a resident who told me that the road had been closed. So instead of being early, I was now late to meet the rest of RMRU at the Candy Store on the Ortega Highway (which runs from Lake Elsinore to San Juan Capistrano). So I decided to drive the South Main Divide from Hwy 74 to the Tenaja Trailhead near Clinton Keith Road to familiarize myself with the area, mark all the trailheads on my GPS unit, and presumably run into the rest of RMRU. I got to the trailhead, but still hadn’t run into the rest of RMRU, so I turned around and was going back to the Ortega Hwy on the South Main Divide when I did run into the rest of RMRU. They were going to finish driving the South Main Divide, then go back to the Candy Store via Hwy 74. I continued back to the Candy Store on the South Main Divide, double checking my GPS points and taking mileages between trailheads.

I arrived back at the Candy Store about noon and started waiting for the rest of RMRU. I backed into a parking space at the trailhead parking lot across from the Candy Store,

opened the back of my pickup, and rested in the shade of my camper shell. Due to the heat, about every half-hour, I would go get an ice cream bar from the Candy Store. I noticed a woman with two elementary-school age children and a dog in a car next to me; they were apparently waiting for someone to finish a hike. Eventually, the woman drove away. Then, perhaps 10-15 minutes after she drove back, she walked up to me and said that her husband was with his mother (I think it was his mother) a little ways down the trail. The mother couldn't hike anymore, and did I know what to do. This was close to 1:30 PM, about the hottest part of the day. I told the woman that I was with Mountain Rescue, and that she should send someone to the Candy Store to call the Fire Department (about 3 miles away) while I got dressed to help. She said that her mother-in-law was almost to the parking lot, and she soon found out that the Candy Store would call 911 if she wished (cell service is practically non-existent at this location). I quickly put on my daypack, orange shirt, and hiking shoes, and went to help.

From the edge of the parking lot, I could see that the hiker in distress, Cathy Karstens, was sitting on a cooler under a tree, talking with her son, and that it didn't seem to be a medical emergency. I went down, talked to Cathy, who was fully conscious, sitting up without help, and apparently suffering from moderate heat exhaustion, but not heat stroke. Cathy's son and I were able to pretty much carry Cathy back to the parking lot, the car was driven over, and we helped her into the car. I recommended that they take her to the Fire Station up the road for a more thorough evaluation. After they left, I paced the distance to where Cathy had been – 76 yards. (911 was not called, though I was ready to have that done immediately if Cathy had been in worse circumstances)

About 2 PM, the rest of RMRU arrived at the Candy Store, where we ate lunch. We saw Cathy's daughter-in-law at the store; she said that the Fire Department had given Cathy some half-strength electrolyte drink, and that Cathy was OK. Another successful training and mission for RMRU!

**RMRU team members present:** Steve Bryant.

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.