



Dripping Springs Lost Hiker

July 21, 2019
Cleveland National Forest
2019-040

Written by Vinay Rao

At approximately 10:00 pm on Sunday night the RMRU Team received call about a lost person near the Dripping Springs Campground which is approximately 15 miles east of Temecula on Hwy 79. Responding team members were Vinay Rao and Derek Donovan. Vinay grabbed the team vehicle from the Hemet Sheriff (“SO”) sub-station and met Derek who had driven directly to the command post (“CP”).

The deputy at the CP indicated the initial report was that the subject – approx. 65-year-old male – was camping and had decided to go for a hike with minimal water/food and on Saturday afternoon. On Sunday at around 10:00am determining that he was lost he called a friend stating such and that he thought he could see a structure and that he was going to go off trail to bushwhack to the structure. He also stated that his cell phone battery was very low.

The friend went to the campground and did his own unsuccessful search before calling 911 in the afternoon. After the initial contact with his friend the subject was not heard from again. The Sheriff’s Office (“SO”) conducted a search of the subject’s camp where they found his vehicle. Based on the registration of the vehicle the SO visited his address but the residents there stated that the subject has not lived there for over a year. His cell phone was pinged but the area where the call could have come from was rather large (approx. 20 square miles).

After an initial briefing with the on-site SO deputy the team surveyed the subject’s campsite where several footprints were visible. Based on a brief description of the area from the campground host, the team determined the best option was to begin the search by hiking on Wild Horse Peak Trail, not the Dripping Springs Trail. Also, given that there were only two team members and one deputy running base, a consensus was reached that the team would return to the CP at approximately 4:00 am.

The team walked the trail for just over 3 miles, tracking footprints similar the ones at the campsite as well as seeing towels on the trail which could have been the subjects. At 2:20 am the team reached a turnaround point. The team conducted multiple shout-outs with the subject’s name and identifying ourselves as search and rescue; no response was received. After returning to the CP, and having a discussion with the RMRU call captain, the search was temporarily suspended till morning.

Written by Eric Holden

The call went out for more searchers needed in the morning as the 1st operation didn't yield any clues to the subject's whereabouts. I met with James and Glenn, and Sharon with DSSAR at the dripping springs trailhead. We were able to find a good solid boot print in the subject's camp site. With this information Glenn and Sharon would hike up the Dripping Trail and James and I would be inserted via a Forest Service's vehicle about 8 miles up the Wild Horse trail and look for any sign. The temps were in the mid-90s with a very high humidity making the hiking conditions not good. On our way down the Wild Horse trail James and I found nothing other than a lot of poison oak. About halfway down we found out Cameron had started back up the wild horse trail and had found the same boot print in the camp site and was following it up towards us.

Cameron eventually lost the print and met up with us about 2 miles from the trailhead. While were talking about the next course of action another hiker passed us. As we stopped to talk with him it turns out he was the subject's friend who had initially dialed 911. We got more information about the subject and listened to his call for help. We thanked him for the information and the subject's friend started hiking up the trail more. Keen-Eye-Cameron quickly called for him to stop and let us see his boot. Turns out, the prints we were looking for, the prints Cameron was following were the subject's friend's boot and not his. He had gone out the night before we got called out and search all over the campsite and then up the trails.

We hiked back down to base to cool off and figure out the next plan of action. As it was late in the day it was decided to call off the search for the night and get this mission rolling OES as additional searchers would be needed. We left for the day with a deputy waiting at the campsite in case he returned. About 30 minutes after we all left, the subject walked back to camp, uninjured.

RMRU Members Involved: Cameron Dickinson, Derek Donovan, James Eckhardt, Glenn Henderson, Eric Holden, and Vinay Rao.

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.