

Search for lost hunter

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North Mountain, Riverside County
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By

Mark Vasquez went hunting alone on Monday October 12th. He left his home at 4:00am and was to start hunting for deer at about 6:00am. At about 11:00am he was supposed to return to his truck so he could drive home to meet his wife for lunch. Mark never made his lunch appointment.

That evening, his family began to search for his truck on the North Mountain Truck Trails between San Jacinto and Banning. By the early hours of Tuesday morning they had located his truck. After doing a quick search of the area, they drove down the mountain and contacted authorities. All RMRU members were paged out for the search at 4:08am.

RMRU soon located tracks leading from the truck heading north along a ridgeline. Additional search and rescue teams from Riverside County and the surrounding counties were asked to respond. Using scent articles found in the truck that Mark had touched, search dogs were able to follow his scent in an easterly direction. Hunting partners, who had hunted with him many times before, provided information about Mark's usual hunting routes and habits in the



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Ray Hussey discusses plans for the search.

area.

At about 9:40am on Friday, October 15th, Steve Florian and Mike Myers from China Lake Mountain Rescue came across a single line of tracks that matched Mark's boot. They followed the tracks until they found a blood stain on a rock above a narrow canyon. They found Mark a short time after locating the deer that he had shot about 1.25 miles north of his truck where he fell five days earlier. He had apparently fallen down the steep canyon while trying to reach the deer. He was in serious condition due to the injuries and the amount of time spent in the elements.

He was shivering and dehydrated when he was found near an area that his hunting partners refer to as "the yellow grass". Rescue workers refer to that area as north of peak 3377. Rescuers hugged Mark to warm him up until the helicopter arrived.

Mark was able to exchange a few words with his wife Trish before being placed in a helicopter and flown to Loma Linda University Medical Center. There he was treated for dehydration, a broken hip, lacerations on the back of his head, a skull fracture, a concussion, and partial kidney failure. His rifle was found in the canyon close to where he fell. It was broken in half from the 70-foot fall. Mark wanted to know if they had found the deer that he had shot.



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San Bernardino Sheriff's helicopter carries observers during an arial search.



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Hunting partners and friends discuss Mark's usual hunting routes.



Ernie Cowan, The Press-Enterprise
Rescuers giving aid to Mark



Mark in a litter set down near base



DeeAnn Bradley, Hemet News

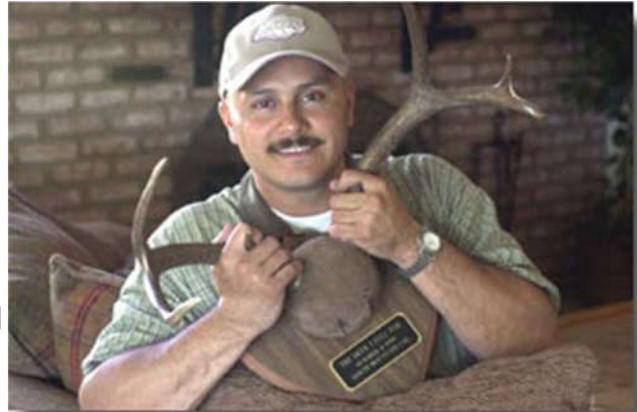
Mark Vasquez is greeted by his wife Trish

Follow-up Article

One year later, lost hiker recounts near-fatal fall

By Jose Arballo Jr.
The Press-Enterprise

It was just a few months ago, while poring over newspaper clippings and watching television news accounts, that it hit Mark Vasquez. "I came very close to dying," said Vasquez, recalling his five-day ordeal that started a year ago when he fell into a ravine during a hunting trip near San Jacinto. Indeed, Vasquez suffered a concussion and internal injuries during his fall. His kidneys shut down as he lay on damp ground for several days while rescue teams scoured the rugged hills between Gilman Hot Springs and Beaumont, east of Lamb Canyon. A Grand Terrace resident, Vasquez was found by a team from China Lake, one of several search groups involved in the massive hunt. Vasquez, 32, spent more than a week in the hospital, and doctors said he faced a long recovery. A year after his ordeal, Vasquez has recovered enough to return to the sport -- and the spot -- that nearly took his life. The grocery store manager spent weeks recovering from his injuries. His kidneys and internal organs appeared to have suffered no long-term damage. He did lose his sense of smell and taste because of nerve damage to his head. One foot still gives him problems, but Vasquez said it has not stopped him from heading back to the wilderness. "I'm feeling pretty good," said Vasquez, who now oversees an Albertson's store in the desert area. "I can get around fine." Vasquez does not remember most of what happened after he fell into the narrow ravine while chasing a deer he had shot. The animal's carcass and a broken rifle were found near the spot where Vasquez came to rest. Vasquez was well enough to return last month to the rugged area near North Mountain for the opening day of hunting season. Vasquez said he got close to the spot where he fell, but stayed away because another hunter was there first. "It was kind of weird," he said. "I did not recognize it at first." He then headed to Colorado for another hunting trip with his 13-year-old stepson, Kenny. His wife, Trish, stayed behind and worried. They kept in touch with daily cellular telephone calls from camp. Vasquez said he sometimes thinks about how close he came to dying. "I don't know how much longer I could have stayed there," he said. "Not long I think." Walt Walker, one of the founders of the Riverside Mountain Rescue Unit, which helped coordinate search efforts, said organizers were talking about scaling back operations when Vasquez was found. "I bet he would not have lasted through the weekend," Walker said. "He was just incredibly fortunate that it was relatively cool. If it had been hot and he was out in the open, then I'm pretty sure he would not have made it." Daytime temperatures were in the upper 90s, but Vasquez was at the bottom of a ravine that remained cool because the floor did not



Steven Medd, The Press-Enterprise

Mark Vasquez of Grand Terrace got the deer but almost lost his life after falling into a ravine during a hunting trip north of San Jacinto last year.

receive much direct sunlight. Vasquez, however, had no water for several days. "It's pretty interesting that he has done as well as he did," Walker said. "It's pretty amazing." When search teams found Vasquez, they were looking in an area that had already been explored. One searcher saw some blood -- they believe it was from the deer Vasquez had shot -- then heard his moans in the distance. "Things came together," Walker said. "It was a lot of hard work. There was some luck involved, too." Vasquez said he has returned to a normal life for the most part. For a few weeks after he was found, Vasquez said, people recognized him on the street and asked if he was the lost hunter. He got to meet some of the dozens of people involved in the search and rescue. There were calls from television shows and writers who wanted to tell his story, but nothing has panned out. A national tabloid newspaper gave an account of his ordeal, but Vasquez said he did not recognize many of the details in the story. "Things are pretty boring compared to that," he said. "That's OK."

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.