

24-year-old man overdue

December 17, 2000
Dark Canyon
2000-030

By Gene Baune

At 8:45pm RMRU was called out to search for 24 year old Federico Chaves Jr. who was reported missing by his friend Jason Vega. The pair had hiked Marion Mountain Trail to San Jacinto Peak starting out at 8:30 am, reaching the peak at about 3:00 pm. Wanting to hike at different speeds, Jason and Fred separated near Little Round Valley. Jason reached their vehicle at about 5:30pm but Fred was nowhere to be found. Jason honked the horn of the vehicle and yelled for his friend but no response. Finding a pay phone, Jason tried to call Fred's cell phone but there got no response. Jason then contacted authorities who alerted RMRU.



The first search team from RMRU started up the Marion Mountain Trail by 10:00 pm and the second team was dispatched to the Seven Pines Trail around 11:00. Teams searched throughout the night on the steep and icy trails. Due to the urgency of the situation, Desert Sheriff Search and Rescue (DSSAR) from Palm Desert was contacted for additional personnel and a helicopter was scheduled for 7:30am.

Shortly after 4:00 am a mixed RMRU/DSSAR Team started up the Deer Springs Trail with an RMRU Team heading down. A second DSSAR member was held in reserve to act as an aerial observer when the helicopter arrived but was used as a radio relay instead.



Darrell Bell

Jason Vega provides details to searchers who are looking for his missing friend Federico Chaves.

At 7:12 am RMRU Team 1 established voice contact with Fred and within a few minutes made physical contact with him in a ravine approximately 1/2 mile off the trail.

Reaching the Marion Mountain Trail and Pacific Crest/Deer Springs Trail intersection, Fred had made a common mistake and turned south instead of continuing west on the Marion Mountain Trail. Not realizing his mistake he continued several miles down Deer Springs Trail until losing the trail.

Fred then decided to go straight down the mountain and "headed for the lights" of Hemet, after falling several times he wisely decided to stop for the night. Fred had a lighter and lit a fire to melt snow and for warmth. He was reasonably warm, dressed in a fleece jacket and long pants.

RMRU Members responding: Darrell Bell (support), Mona Landfield, Travis Henderson, Lee Arnsen, Kurt Sullivan, Gene Baune, and Mike Wimbrow (operations leader)

DSSAR members responding:
Sharon Ollenburger and Barbara Miller

Riverside Sheriff's Department: Deputy Lutz

American Red Cross volunteers provided hot coffee and food



Darrell Bell

Desert Search and Rescue are briefed and given assignments.



Gene Baune

Searchers from RMRU and DSAR gather around Fred (second from left) along with Deputy Lutz.

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.