



Two Missing Hikers

September 5, 2003
Hills above Lake Hemet
2003-021

Well, it's 22:30, September 5. As I'm getting into bed I'm smiling about the next day's planned activities. The month's training will be at 08:00 at the Fuller Ridge trailhead. We are going to do a familiarization hike to the Bedsprings campsite, spend the night and then return the next day. At least that's what my wife, Robin, thinks. September 6 is her 50th birthday so my son Travis and I have "forgotten" her birthday because we can't miss training. Really, we are going to hike with the team for half the day then turn back for a surprise party for her at my sister's cabin in Idyllwild. We have 20 to 30 people planning to be there. Ahh, it's 23:00 now and just as I drift off to sleep the PAGER GOES OFF!!! I'm thinking, no way! This can't be happening! But, yes, dispatch says that there are two missing hikers in the mountains above Lake Hemet. We are to meet at the Lake Hemet Sheriff's substation. Travis packs up and leaves to get the rescue van. I get Robin up and while she pages the team out I retrieve messages from the rescue recorder to find out who will be responding to the mission.

Travis and I arrive at Lake Hemet at the same time and meet deputies there that tell us that the sheriff's helicopter has located the missing hikers but the terrain is too rugged to be able to get them out. Travis and I walk over to the helicopter crew, Star 91. As we arrive they tell us that they want one team member to fly in with them to be lowered on their cable winch, get them into a harness and winch them up unto the helicopter. Travis and I both raise our hand as ready to go and I am ready to let Travis go when the pilot says he wants the lighter of the two of us. Ouch, that hurt, as I am substantially lighter than my son. Sorry Travis.

The rescue went pretty much as planned from there. I got my harness and helmet on, put two more harnesses into my pack and we took off. Star 91 already had a GPS position on them so it only took a few minutes to locate our missing subjects. Using Star 91's night vision goggles and their night sunlight, they lowered me down 140 feet to our subjects. While Star 91 hovered above and kept the night sun on me I got both subjects into a harness and ready to be hoisted up. Our two subjects were 19 and 20-year-old boys that got separated from a group that was hiking from the Zen retreat camp. Boy were they excited about getting a lift into the helicopter! Both were hoisted one at a time into the helicopter. As planned, once we had both onboard Star 91 flew them back to Lake Hemet and would return for me.

With the noise, wind, and light of the helicopter gone it was pleasantly quiet with a million stars to light up the sky. Unfortunately it was short lived as a herd of mosquitoes found that dinner was about to be served, meaning me. Fortunately Star 91 quickly returned, hoisted me up and flew me back to Lake Hemet. While I was gone, Brenda DeLuna, Will Carlson, and Rick Maschek and also arrived. We put out a "mission over" signal while we did a short debrief with Star 91's crew.

Since we were all going to go on training the next day I took the liberty of inviting everyone over to my sister's cabin for a few hours of sleep. We got there and every one bedded down in their vehicles at 03:00. My sisters Kathy and Nancy were certainly surprised when they got up the next morning to find cars all over there front yard. They and their husbands Jim and Larry cooked us breakfast. It was great!!. Everyone left for training except Travis and I. Since we were already there we stayed and helped get ready for Robin's BD party. By the way, she was surprised and now Travis and I don't have to sleep in a doghouse for the rest of the year.

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.