



Two Families Stranded by Sudden Snow Storm

November 22nd, 2004
Santa Rosa Mountain
2004-031

by Ray Hussey

Our second callout Tuesday afternoon for 9 stranded car campers on top of Santa Rosa Mountain which is 8,046 feet high. The family group had driven up Saturday in 4 vehicles for an overnight camping experience but the first winter storm began to fall that night. By morning, Sunday, the snow was nearly 12 inches deep with even higher drifts. Their cars and trucks were stuck and foot travel was cold and difficult. Fortunately they had a cell phone and around noon Monday finally hiked to a reception area and began calling 911. The temperature was below freezing and intense cloud cover prevented any helicopter evacuation. They were able to keep warm by staying in their vehicles, and running their engines with the heaters on periodically during the intense cold at night.

The Pinyon CDF station was contacted on Monday and was first on scene. After appraising the situation the Riverside County Sheriff was notified and RMRU re-tasked from another rescue. RMRU members were preparing for a difficult winter rescue, not knowing the subjects conditions and noting the possible multiple carry outs. Multiple agencies were consulted and they determined that the best & safest method would be to plow the entire snow covered dirt road. A caterpillar was available for refueling the relay towers and it was commandeered by the Sheriff's Department for assistance. The Sheriff was also able to obtain a snow cat vehicle from San Bernardino in case of drifts. The caterpillar made it to the top of Toro peak but was stopped by huge drifts at the top. The caterpillar had taken four hours to reach Toro Peak. In about one hour the snow cat made it easily through the drifts passing the caterpillar all the way to the top camp ground with me, a USFS route finder and 2 fireman drivers from San Bernardino. On reaching the many subjects, all were examined and in remarkably good condition considering the circumstances. All were hastily driven down the mountain in nice warm vehicles. However I was forced once again to descend in the snow cat which is not designed for traveling over a bumpy, rutted, freshly plowed dirt road. The bumping and bouncing were so severe, they popped off my seat belt once, turned off my cell phone and made radio communication with base impossible.

All personnel were back in base by 0200 and then we began the long and difficult drive back home in snow and icy conditions in the dark. Responding RMRU members were 14.

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.