



Missing PCT Through-Hiker: John Donovan

May 26 & 28, 2005

Most of the San Jacinto Wilderness

2005-017 and 2005-018

4/11/2006: RMRU members continue to search on their own for John Donovan and the team continues to get encouraging emails from his friends and loved ones. Below (at the bottom of the page) are some pictures sent to us by friends Heidi Henderson and Chris Hook, of Richmond, Virginia.

October 2005: RMRU continues to hear from family and friends of John Donovan. We want everyone to know that we don't consider the search over. As described below, we had two days of official searching, being activated by the Sheriff's Office. We have since spent several training weekends searching for John and know of members of other Southern California teams that have searched on their own. RMRU members continue to look, both on and off trail, whenever we hike anywhere in the San Jacintos. Several team members have made it a personal goal to find John. Again, we don't consider this search over and will not quit searching until John is found.

by Patrick McCurdy

On May 3rd, John Donovan, a Pacific Crest Trail thru-hiker who had started at the Mexican border, picked up a cache of food near Anza on Highway 74. He intended to pick up his next food cache in Cabazon after having hiked north through the San Jacinto Mountains. He never made it to Cabazon. He was last seen May 4th south of Saddle Junction, having trouble with his footing in the snow and seeming somewhat ill-prepared for the cold conditions brought on by the late spring snow pack.

Jim Fairchild, Glenn Henderson, Dr. Ray Hussey, Jim & Grace Manues, Patrick McCurdy, Bruce Sanny, and Phil Thompson met at Keenwild Heliport to coordinate with the aircrew from the Sheriff's Star 92 Helicopter. The objective was to search the Fuller Ridge Trail, but access to it was limited due to snow. Glenn, Phil, and I were flown to about a mile below the Fuller Ridge trail head at Black Mountain Road and hiked up (south) on the trail. Jim M., Bruce, and Ray were flown to near the upper end of the trail and hiked down (north) on it towards my team. Jim F. and

Grace worked base to stay in touch with us via radio.

It was a beautiful day and the trail offered some magnificent views of the north face of San Jacinto to the east, as well as the valley to the west, but our main focus was to find John Donovan, or evidence that he had passed that way. Neither team had any luck. The two teams hiked towards each other all day and met later in the afternoon near Castle Rocks, at about 8,400 feet, where we were winched out by the crew of Star 92 and flown, two at a time, back to Keenwild.

In spite of the length of time since John had last been seen, Riverside Sheriff's Office took this case very seriously and, over dinner that night in Idyllwild, planning took place for an extended search starting Saturday, with other search teams from out of county augmenting RMRU.

by Jeri Sanchez

RMRU was called to assist in the search for John Donovan. John is a 60 year old man who was hiking the Pacific Crest Trail in the San Jacinto Mountains. John started his hike in Mexico and reached the Saddle Junction area of the San Jacinto Mountains on May 3rd, 2005. He was last seen in this area by another hiker who had spoken to him. John said, "he was taking a long lunch break". John was hiking alone but he had friends who were expecting to see him in another 3-5 days and resupply him at that time... John never picked up his supplies in Cabazon and his friends never heard from him. Other hikers had noticed that John was traveling with an ultra light pack and minimal gear, especially for cold weather. We heard that he was using extra socks for his gloves and his tarp tent as a poncho.

This year the Idyllwild area has had its highest snow fall in 40 years, and the area John was last seen in had approximately 3 ft. of snow and the weather report, (which John knew about) for that night was that a storm was coming in. Other PCT hikers came into Idyllwild for shelter from the storm. Our search was 3 weeks after he was last seen, so there was a lot of melt off and snow was at higher elevations and patchy. OES had called for alpine teams but as it turned out, most teams did not run into any significant snow areas.

Teams came from San Bernardino SAR, San Bernardino Cave Team, Rim of the world SAR, San Diego SAR, and RMRU. RMRU coordinated the search for Riverside County Sheriff Department. We had over 30 searchers. We know the most frustrating part of SAR work is waiting to get an assignment and get into the field. In an effort to get teams into the field expeditiously Jim Fairchild, a senior member of the team with an in-depth knowledge of the mountain, had prepared maps and search areas the night before. As teams checked in they were given subject information and a flyer with John's picture and info we knew about him. They then moved on to assignments by Jim Fairchild and Glenn Henderson where

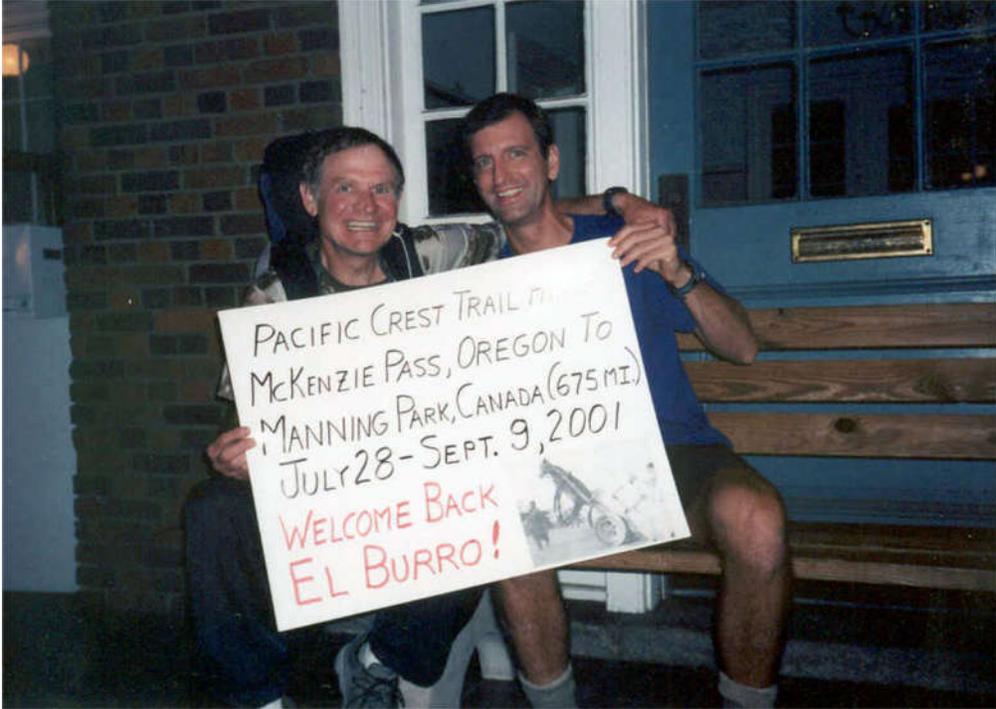
they could explain details of the assigned areas. Pre-designated search areas greatly expedited getting teams in the field.

After all the other teams were dispatched, there was plenty of time for Glenn Henderson and myself to take an assignment. We followed the Devil's Slide Trail to Saddle Junction. We headed North up Angel's Glide Trail to the Strawberry Campground area. This would have been a possible route that John could have taken to continue on the PCT. The trail contours the mountain and has steep drop-offs with many possibilities for a slipped step and mishaps. We continued down Deer Springs Trail to Hwy 243 and needed transportation back to base camp, covering more than 10 miles, but with no sign of John or any of his belongings. No teams found any sign of John Donovan.

As a SAR member I take all the info about the subject and try and figure out what they might have done. John Donovan knew there was a storm blowing into Idyllwild on the afternoon of May 3rd, 2005.

After his rest did he press on north, ill equipped for foul weather? Did he reevaluate after sometime and head for shelter? He had a history of a mild heart attack. Did heart disease contribute to his disappearance? At this point we don't know. The search continues as more hikers become aware of John's disappearance. We will continue looking and try and figure out what John might have done and where he may have ended up on "our Mountain."

Photos sent to RMRU by friends of John.



Taken at the train station when John returned from his 2001 PCT hike.



On the Appalachian Trail.



On Mount Katahdin, after completing the Appalachian Trail.

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.