

RMRU

November 18, 2006
L.A. County near Wrightwood
2006-024

by Patrick McCurdy

On Veteran's Day, Saturday, November 11th, 25-year-old hunter Eladio Gamez failed to return to the camp he shared with his friends at Lupine Campground just outside the Sheep Mountain Wilderness on the far eastern edge of Los Angeles County. Several Los Angeles County search teams, including Sierra Madre Search and Rescue, searched for two days before expanding the search to include out of county teams.

On Wednesday, RMRU members John Dempsey and Will Carlson, with Jim and Grace Manues, participated in the search. While their search assignment was fairly close to the campground where the missing man had been staying, the rugged terrain made it a tiring experience.

With subfreezing nighttime temperatures every night, hope was diminishing for a successful outcome to the search, but a big push was made on Saturday, November 18th, with numerous teams from several adjacent counties bringing the number of searchers to somewhere near seventy. RMRU was again asked to join the search effort with Jim and Grace again responding, accompanied by Rick Maschek, Glenn Henderson, and myself.



Photo: Patrick McCurdy

Rick Maschek exits the Black Bird on Dawson Peak with Mount Baldy visible in the background.

After the 6:30 A.M. group briefing, Glenn checked with Operations for our team assignment. He shortly came back grinning with a "sweet" search assignment (translation: we would be flown into extremely rugged terrain and would be doing some strenuous hiking and searching.)

Though there were some delays in getting air support, 8 A.M. found the entire RMRU team of five taking off in an Army National Guard Black Hawk from the parking lot of Mountain High Ski Area. We were flown in to Dawson peak where we split into two groups. Jim and Grace searched along the ridge that runs east from Dawson, covering as far down the north and south sides of the ridge as safety allowed, then returned to the peak late in the afternoon.

Rick, Glenn, and I worked our way down the canyon to the southwest, then back to the saddle between Dawson and Baldy (San Antonio). We then headed up the extremely steep trail to the summit of Baldy before turning and retracing our steps back to the saddle, finally arriving back at Dawson to meet up with Grace and Jim.

A fire blew up in a nearby canyon as we waiting for transport back to base camp and we were all contemplating spending the night in the field. Just before the Black Hawk arrived to fly us back out word came that a field team from Sierra Madre had found the body of the hunter in a very steep, narrow canyon.

It was a beautiful day, gorgeous weather and views, with the chance to ride in a big military helicopter. Our heartfelt condolences, however, to the family and friends of Mr. Gamez. We hope the discovery of his remains will provide some measure of closure to his untimely death.



Photo: Patrick McCurdy

Grace, Jim, and Glenn wait on Dawson Peak for the helicopter back to Base Camp.

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.