



Hiker Lost in Early Spring Storm

April 11-12, 2010
Black Mountain Camp Ground
2010-005

Written by Lee Arnson

The rescue team had not been out on a search for almost three months, so when the text went out at 9:00pm. to respond to Black Mountain Camp Ground, an area close to my house, I was pretty pumped up. I gathered my gear, said goodnight to my family, and headed out into the night, about to embark on the worst mission of my life, but I didn't know it yet.

I met up with Les Walker and Chuck Springer at Black Mountain Camp Ground and that is where we set up a primitive base camp. It was just the three of us so we were doing all we could to get this mission underway. It was determined that Les and myself would go into the field while Chuck was operations leader at base.

Before we were called out on this search, team member Glenn Henderson had been flying the area with the Sheriff's Aviation Unit. The subject was actually spotted, but a hoist rescue was too risky due to the incoming storm. However, the latitude and longitude of the subject were noted and those coordinates were passed on to Les and me. With these coordinates in our G.P.S, they were showing the subject to be ONLY 1.6 miles from the campground. We made a comment that it was probably a Pacific Crest Trail hiker and we should be able to get this over with without too much effort...big mistake.

As more information was starting to trickle in, we were told we would be looking for a 45 year old male with no injuries. He had some warm clothes with him and was told by Aviation to stay put. That was good to hear because it was starting to snow and the wind was getting very strong. Visibility was down to about 30 feet and by now we are totally relying on our G.P.S. to guide us to our subject. This was the first time I put all of my faith in technology to find someone. Les took point on this part of the search and did an excellent job of navigating thru completely unfamiliar territory.

As I mentioned before, we only had to go 1.6 miles to our subject. Well, three hours have passed and we think we are getting close. The terrain has gotten so miserable

that we have been crawling on our hands and knees for the last hour, the snow has turned to driving rain, and we keep running into massive boulders that we have to go around and then get back onto our G.P.S. track. We end up in a fairly large drainage with 20 foot waterfalls and we know we have to get out of it if we are to make voice contact with anyone. After scrambling up the bank for about a hundred feet, we call out for the subject, and sure enough we can hear him returning our calls, but because of the large canyon we are in and the sound of running water, we are having a hard time determining which direction the calls are coming from. We call out some more, and we think he is to the East of us on the other side of the drainage. Once again we find ourselves on our hands and knees scrambling up the other side and the subjects calls are becoming louder. We can hear him quite clearly by now, but we can't get to him because of the crazy brush and boulders. He is calling out to us so much that Les and I share a laugh together because he is only about 50 feet from us but we still can't see him. Finally we blast thru the last bit of brush and there stands our subject, happy to see us and in good spirits.

It's now 1:00am and we have to make the decision of going out the way we came in or should we continue down to Twin Pines Ranch, which we can clearly see because of the all the lights at the camp. Les tells me it is 1.5 miles to the camp per his G.P.S. and that continuing to go down makes sense. We phone Chuck and ask him to relocate base to Twin Pines Ranch. Chad Marler has joined up with Chuck and they start heading out, while Les and I get some hot liquids going and take a break to eat and get our subject ready to hike out. Our subject is actually a Major in the United States Air Force, and in pretty good shape; he just got lost on a day hike and here we are together.

By now, Chuck and Chad have made it to Twin Pines Ranch and have found a dirt road going out of the camp that ends up being only six tenths of a mile from where we are . This is good news, so we head out. Six tenths of a mile - we can see where we need to go - only six tenths of a mile. Long story short, it took us 7 hours to go .6 miles. The brush became almost impassable, the rain and wind made us totally soaked to the bone and if you stood still for more than 5 minutes you started shivering uncontrollably, so the best thing to do was to fight the brush just to stay warm. It was all our subject could do to put one foot in front of the other. Nobody wanted to eat or drink anymore, we just wanted OUT of there. The lights of Twin Pines Camp just never got any closer. We would drop into a drainage and crawl our way back up and the damn lights just never got any closer. Les eventually called for Chuck and Chad to try to get to us with some warm and dry clothes, but they had the same conditions on their end.

It's now 8:00am in the morning and we are just about out; Chuck and Chad are able to meet up with us and walk us to the cars. Cal-Fire (Squad 63 from Poppet Flats) is

also on scene to offer medical assistance to our subject, who is in the early stages of hypothermia. In fact, we all are, but the subject agrees to be taken to the hospital while Les and I warm up in the vehicles.

Members present: Lee Arnson, Glen Henderson, Chad Marler, Chuck Springer, Les Walker.

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.