



Missing Skier San Jacinto Peak

February 19-21, 2011
San Jacinto Peak
2011-004

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Saturday night, February 19 - written by Editor with input from members:

We received a call at 8:30 p.m. that earlier a skier had gone to San Jacinto Peak via the Palm Springs Tramway and that he had not returned. It was snowing, the wind was blowing, and visibility was not very good. By 11:00 p.m. four RMRU members were at the Upper Tramway Station and setting up. Bob Bakos was going to remain at the station and run base, while Lee, Paul, and Donny would head up to the peak. Heading up the Sid Davis Trail was slow going in the snow storm and even wearing snow shoes the members were sinking up to their knees in the deep snow. Around 3:30 a.m. the three decided to bivvy above Tamarack Valley until morning.

At 6:30 a.m. after only three hours of rest Lee and Paul again headed towards San Jacinto Peak and Donny, who had a bad cough, went back down to base. Even on snow shoes Lee and Paul were having a really difficult time - as the slope got steeper they sank up to their thighs into the fresh, soft snow. Progress was a snail's pace and by noon they were still 200 feet below the Miller Saddle. At this point they were so tired they knew if they continued to the summit they would have to spend another night out and both had commitments on Monday. They turned back and returned to base.

Note: Donny was one of the first members to report to the Tramway and in spite of his cough he stayed until the end of the mission on Monday, helping out at base camp.

Sunday, February 20 - written by Patrick McCurdy

The search continued Sunday morning. Riverside Sheriff's Office set up its mobile command post and moved planning and operations from our usual room at the top of the Palm Springs Tramway. Team 1 was still in the field from the previous night and we sent teams to check Wellman Divide and Hidden Divide, but conditions made for slow progress. Realizing that a skier could potentially cover a huge distance, and that we had no solid clue where he was, the request was made for assistance from out-of-county teams. We asked for "Type 1" (winter alpine certified) personnel only, equipped for severe winter conditions. Our teams from the field were reporting ferocious winds and

they were post-holing even while wearing snowshoes in 2-3 feet of fresh powder.



**RMRU member Rob May breaks trail
Photo by Dana Potts (RMRU)**

We were unable to deploy teams into the field via helicopter due to the extreme winds on the mountain. Los Angeles County's Air Rescue 5 was asked to assist with the search and was able to “clear” the hut near San Jacinto Peak as well as do some visual searching from the air. As the day wore on with no sign of our subject, Brian Carrico, we began drawing up plans for team assignments for Sunday night and Monday morning. Within a few hours we had about 15 assignment packets ready for field teams.

By mid-afternoon the first mutual aid team, Sierra Madre Search and Rescue Team, arrived with three vehicles and nine members. As they arrived within about two hours of the call, I teased SMSRT's Art Fortini by asking him if their team sat around all the time in their vehicles all geared up and waiting for a mission. He immediately said "Sure. Don't you?" Sierra Madre's team took an assignment and headed out at dusk, knowing they would be spending the night in the field. Within an hour or two more teams started arriving and we began to deploy them to the top of the tram for an early start the next morning. Yet more mutual aid teams were due in at 6 a.m. Monday morning, and we had plenty of field assignments for them.

It should be noted that the fresh snow made this an extremely busy day for the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway and that they bent over backwards to accommodate mountain rescue teams, laden with bulky gear, riding the tram and bumping paying customers. We always get tremendous cooperation from the tram and very much appreciate their help

on rescue missions. As a round the clock operation, Gwenda Yates, Donny Goetz, several sheriff deputies, and Art Fortini stayed at the command post all night, while another Sierra Madre member manned the radio at the top of the tram to maintain radio contact with the teams that spent the night in the field, continuing to search all night long.

Monday, February 21 - written by Pete Carlson

At 5:30 a.m. teams were signing in at base camp at the lower Tramway and getting ready to ride the 6 a.m. tram car to the upper station to begin searching. About 15 SAR members rode to the Upper Station and there met up with another 10 SAR members who had spent the night in the Upper Station. By 7 a.m. all teams were in the field starting their assignments. More SAR teams arrived at base and by 9 a.m. 12 different SAR teams with over 40 members were in the field searching for our subject, Brian Carrico. The assignments all required breaking trail in the new snow and we were sinking in up to 2 feet eve with snow shoes on. Going up hill was not an easy task for anyone.

As the day went on several times we thought we had tracks, but they turned out to be animal tracks. Then around 11:30 a.m. the call came over the radio from Team 14 (China Lake) that they had found a snow cave and SOS marked out on the ground next to it. They had a set of tracks and started following them uphill towards Wellman Divide.



China Lake members ascend to subject

Photo courtesy of Bob Huey (China Lake)

Helicopter STAR-9 flew over, saw the tracks, and then saw a man waving from a small clearing. Team 16 (Malibu) was positioned above our subject at Wellman Divide and started down toward him. STAR-9 circled over the subject while the two ground teams closed in on him. Malibu reached the subject first and confirmed it was Brian, the missing skier. Shortly afterward the China Lake team reached the subject from below and the two teams worked together to care for the subject while STAR-9 went for fuel.

The subject was then hoisted out of the clearing into STAR-9 and flown to base, where he was put into an ambulance and taken to the hospital to be evaluated. Also, helicopter AIR-5 from Los Angeles County had just arrived at base. AIR-5 then took off and helped pick up SAR members from all over the mountain and fly them back to base. STAR-9 also picked up SAR members and brought them back. This saved searchers hours of hiking, although any teams who were within 1 hour or so of the Upper Tramway hiked back on foot and then rode the tram car down to base camp.



**Subject Brian Carrico and Donny Goetz (RMRU) at Base
photo by Matt Jordan (RMRU)**

This was a major search and the Riverside Sheriff's Office personnel did a great job of helping us manage the search. It is a big job keeping track of 40 members in the field and making sure we know where everyone is and that each team is safe. A big thanks from RMRU to all SAR teams who sent members to help on this search; we could not have done it without you.

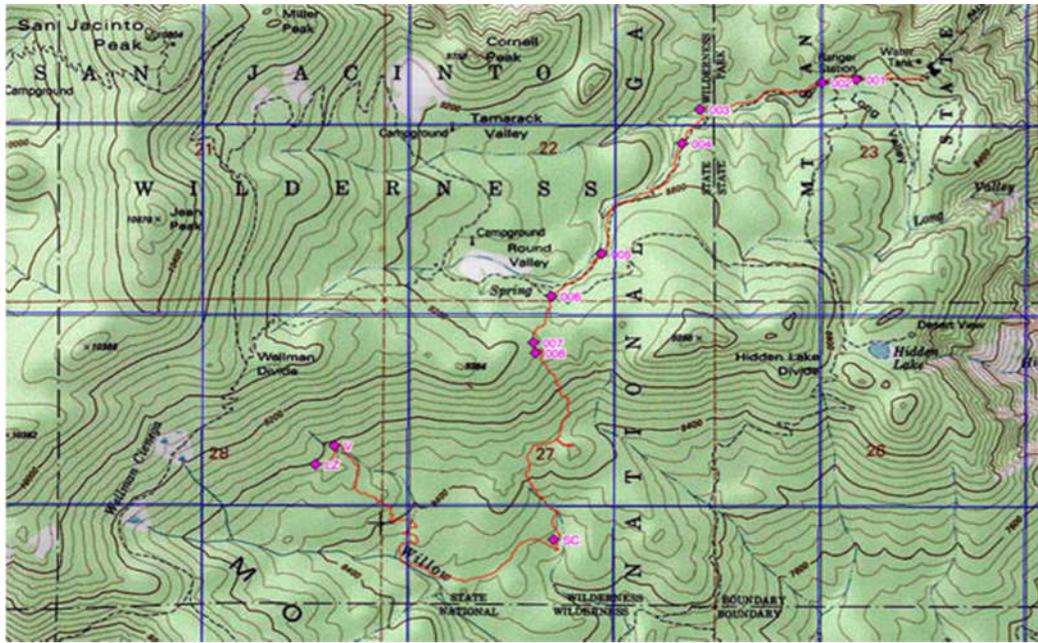
Written by other SAR Team Members:

He [the subject] did say that the cave we found was from his first night (Saturday, Feb.

19) and that he could not find his skis buried in the snow the next morning. Yes, the snow cave was very small. He did not have a lot of snow to work with on that south-facing slope before the blizzard hit. It looked more like a badger hole. He walked around making an “SOS” and “XXX” in the snow near the cave. He then traveled on foot, sinking in 2-3 feet every step during the day on Sunday. - David Miles, China Lake Mountain Rescue Group



Saturday Night Snow Cave
Photo courtesy of Bob Huey (China Lake)



Team 14 (China Lake) GPS way points
Legend: SC=Saturday Cave; V=subject found; LZ=hoist point
Topo map courtesy of China Lake Mountain Rescue Group

Basically, he [the subject] said that on Sunday he was trying to head to the Tram area and eventually had to dig another snow cave on Sunday night. The snow cave on Sunday night was basically between two trees that acted as walls. Monday morning he continued to try to seek anything: tram area, trails, people, etc. and that's when he heard, then eventually saw the helicopter.

When John and I got to Brian, he was walking towards the helicopter. After I verified he was our subject (via DMV photo and him spelling his last name), I confirmed he was alert and oriented and without any life-threatening injuries/conditions. He was weak and jittery from being without food and water for three days. No other chief complaints. - Erik Franco, Malibu Mountain Rescue Team



China Lake and Malibu rescuers warm up the subject prior to air lift
Photo courtesy of Bob Huey (China Lake)

RMRU Team members present: Lee Arnson, Bob Bakos, Steve Bryant, Paul Caraher, Pete Carlson, Kirk Cloyd, Joe Erickson, Donny Goetz, Matt Jordon, Patrick McCurdy, Rob May, Roger May, Tom Meyers, Nick Nixon, Dana Potts, Jeri Sanchez, and Gwenda Yates.

Aviation assets: Riverside Sheriff's Star 9, Los Angeles Sheriff's Air Rescue 5

Out-of-county teams assisting: China Lake Mountain Rescue Group, Inyo County Sheriff's Posse, Malibu Mountain Rescue Team, Montrose Search and Rescue, San Diego Mountain Rescue, Sierra Madre Search and Rescue Team, San Bernardino Co. West Valley Search and Rescue, San Bernardino Central, San Bernardino Rim of the World Search and Rescue, San Bernardino Co. Sheriff's Cave and Technical Rescue, San Jacinto State Park Rangers, and Victor Valley Search and Rescue.

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.