

Three Missing Deer Springs Trail Hikers

May 21, 2011
Deer Springs Trail
2011-011

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Written by Ralph Hoetger

On Saturday night a heads-up went out via text to members of RMRU. There were three lost hikers in the high country. The hikers' original plan was to hike up Marion Mountain Trail, bag San Jacinto Peak, and hike back down Deer Springs Trail all on Saturday. Originally four hikers had started out. One of the hikers was faster, left the group, summited, and started back down the mountain. He crossed the others' paths on the way down from the summit. They said they were fine, just hiking slowly. He continued down the mountain on the Deer Springs Trail and exited the forest.

Eventually the faster hiker became concerned for his friends because they did not make it out of the forest by late afternoon. He thought they may have become lost. The faster hiker became the reporting party.

The call went out to RMRU at about 9 p.m. It was a mild evening and there were no reported injuries so the decision was made to start the search on Sunday morning, May 22, at 6 a.m.

By morning another mission and callout had also been issued for the Tramway side of the mountain for two lost hikers ([Mission 2011-012](#)). The decision was made for Doug Kelbert and myself (Ralph Hoetger) to hike up the Deer Springs Trail and see if we could find the three subjects. Gwenda Yates dropped off radios, then headed for the Tramway mission while Les Walker ran base.

We had been given GPS coordinates that were sent to us from the subjects via text. The coordinates indicated that our subjects were at Strawberry Junction. Based on this information, Doug and I thought the search would be quickly over. We expected to run into the subjects between Strawberry Junction and the Suicide Rock Junction.

Doug and I hiked the 4.1 miles to Strawberry Junction but did not make contact with the subjects. While we were taking a short break two hikers came down the trail. We asked the hikers if they had seen three East Indian men. Their response was

affirmative - the men were hiking down the trail about 45 minutes to an hour back.

Doug and I conferred with Les Walker at base and made the decision to hold at Strawberry Junction for about a half-hour and then start hiking further up Deer Springs to meet them and then bring them back down. We did not want to use our legs up in case we had to go assist the search on the Tramway side of the mountain.

We made contact with the subjects at about 9:30 a.m. We hiked down the mountain with them and got out at the Deer Springs trailhead at about 11:45 a.m. At that point we sent out a 90 (everyone was out and safe).

RMRU team members present: Ralph Hoetger, Doug Kelbert, and Les Walker, and Gwenda Yates.

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.