



Missing Hunter Thomas Mountain

October 1, 2011

**Thomas Mountain, Garner Valley
2011-024**

Written by Chad Marler

At 9 p.m. Saturday, October 1, 2011, a search was requested from the Sheriff's Department to find a missing hunter in the Thomas Mountain area near Garner Valley. According to our call captain, Gwenda Yates, the subject was down in a canyon, dehydrated and cold.

Earlier in the day another hunter in the Thomas Mountain area had heard a voice yelling, "call 911, I need help". This hunter was able to call 911 and inform the Sheriff approximately where he had heard the calls of distress, thus activating the search from RMRU.

Our command post was set up on Rouse Hill Rd. approximately one mile west of Thomas Mountain Rd. The 30 minute drive up the graded dirt roads to the command post was best suited for 4-wheel-drive vehicles. We were briefed by the Sheriff that the subject was believed to be below our location in thick vegetation. Nick Nixon and Paul Caraher stayed at the command post while Lee and I dropped over the ridge into thick, sometimes impassible, vegetation to find our missing hunter.

Although it was a clear night and the temperature was in the high 50's, the terrain was very challenging. Lee and I had to create our own trail through head-high brush that offered surprise drops and sharp thorns. At times we would come to brush so thick that we had to turn back and try to find another route.

Finally, after about an hour of hiking and bush-whacking, we established voice contact with our subject. Our subject had a light that proved to be very valuable for Lee and me to gain our orientation. The subject also fired a round from his hunting rifle to signal his location. After another 30 minutes of pushing through the bushes, Lee and I arrived to our subject, Zack, who was very thirsty and thankful to see us. We provided him fluids, snacks, and assessed his health. Zack informed us that he had ran out of water earlier that morning and had been throwing up in the mid-day sun. He wasn't sure how to get back to his car and was lost, tired, and thirsty.

Realizing that a helicopter wasn't available, we knew the quickest way out was back up the same way we came down. Zack seemed ready for the challenge and we "punched it in face" as Lee likes to say. Nick and Paul were very helpful at the command post, not only on the radio during the mission, but also to provide a light source for us to orientate to coming up the challenging terrain. The hike up the mountain went as smoothly as possible considering the terrain. As we reached the summit, Nick, Paul, and the Sheriff showed us the best way out of the maze of bushes.

Zack was very thankful and gave each of us a sincere handshake of gratitude. We wrapped everything up by 1 a.m.

I learned a lesson on this mission...**always wear gators and a long sleeved shirt on a mission.** The next day I had bruised shins and Lee had cut-up arms from the thick vegetation.

RMRU team members present: Lee Arnson, Paul Caraher, Chad Marler, Nick Nixon, 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.