



Trabuco Peak Search

May 29, 2012
Ortega Mountains
2012-017

Written by Michael George

After just unpacking from a Boy Scout overnight trip and actually getting a 2 hour nap, I got a cell phone text. "SEARCH FOR MISSING HIKER". My sons both looked at me and said "REALLY?" Every week there is a call-out dad." I responded, ' I know, but I don't go to very many of them, now do I? Someone needs help now and I have time, so begrudgingly, they let me go.

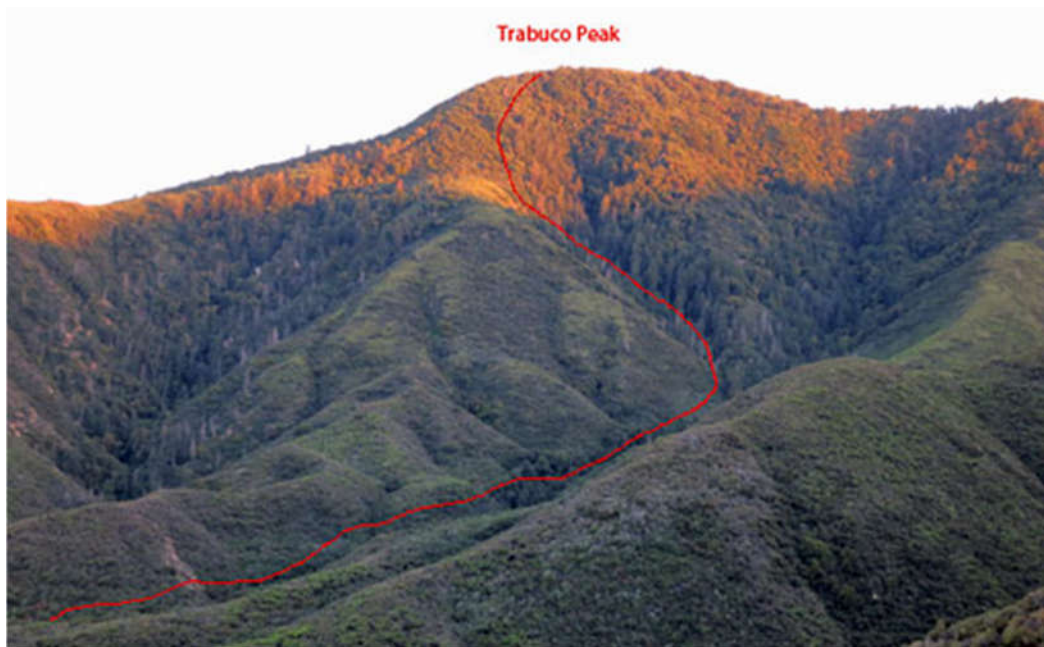
I hurriedly packed and raced out to the Corona hills where I met Glenn, Lew, and Roger May. The Riverside County Sheriff's SERT Team was already there and set up with their huge Command Post RV. RMRU had 1 team in the field, comprised of Patrick, Nick, and Paul. I walked up to the Command Post and Glenn said, "glad you're here, now gear up, and you're going out with Roger. " We have a missing hiker, somewhere out there. Glenn is pointing out the door in the direction of two peaks, and three canyons. Awe some, four square miles of nooks and cranny's, not to mention impenetrable brush. I suppose it could be bigger.

After packing our equipment and plugging co-ordinates into our GPS's, Roger and I informed Glenn we were ready to go. Where is our ride? Uh, hang on Mike, the chopper is now arriving and maybe they will find the subject. Great, robbed again of another fun hike. These days, missions are the only time I get to come out and play. The Helicopter from Cal Fire searches, and searches, and searches some more. What started out at a comfortable 5:30pm with plenty of daylight to see, has dwindled.

We had the subject's last cell-phone co-ordinates, but the Helicopter crew still couldn't find him, and now they have 10 minutes of fuel left. So about 75 minutes before dusk, Roger and I have a go from Glenn to start hiking. Glenn will take us quickly up this 'maintained' road and drop us off, with the instructions to go to his last known position and work down the canyon. After 10 minutes on this bone-jarring road, we realized that in no shape or matter could this be considered a 'maintained' road. After 20 minutes we were close to our drop off point.

As we were surveying how to down climb the steep shrubs from the truck to our starting

point, we started calling out. I yelled out Kevin's name, and heard my echo as it bounced off the many canyon walls and disappeared into oblivion. I thought I heard something, but just attributed to me hearing things. I tried again and heard nothing. Oh well, I called out a third time and thought I heard something again. This time Glenn heard something too. The sound was coming from way, way down there in the canyon, behind this grove of trees. It wasn't until a few more minutes of spirited exchange that his voice became much clearer. He had climbed up the river bank to where we could see him. I could see his White ball cap, just faintly, amongst this jungle of 6 foot tall shrubs. It was not going to be easy getting to him. After confirming his name, we radioed base and let them know we were in voice contact with the subject. Roger and I summed up our trepidation about reaching the subject unscathed. 'This will be interesting'.



Subjects Route Down From Peak
Photo by Patrick McCurdy

Roger and I let base know we were heading down the hill to reach the subject. At this moment Team 1, returning from their assignment, arrived at our location and offered to help. Paul joined Roger and I, and we started down, literally bush whacking through this 5-7 foot tall shrubs. Sometimes we were able to climb over it, sometimes able to crash through it, and several times we had to crawl under it. Doing this left a trail of shred clothes and packs, and a blood trail that we could follow on our way back. We keep in contact with Kevin, making sure he wasn't going to move, so we could zero in on him. He told us not to worry, he wasn't going anywhere.

When we finally reached him, my first thought was, WOW, I thought we looked bad. He was scratched up, and torn up from down climbing over 1000 feet to the river bed.

He was in great spirits. This was the FIRST PERSON I have actually found, on a mission, in the 17 years I have been on the team. I had always been on a supporting field team before. He was good condition, having had access to water most of the day, and was raring to go. We informed base of his condition, and our intention of hiking him back up the hill. It was a race to get him up to the roadside before it was completely dark. Yes, each of us was carrying at least 2 headlamps, apiece, but the intensity and viciousness of the shrubs, precluded us from using them. I lost count the number of times the shrubs tore my glasses off as we were climbing back up through it. We made it too the road and our truck, no worse for wear, and headed back to base, (Tired, Torn up, and Exhilarated).



Mike, Subject, Roger, and Paul
Photo by Patrick McCurdy

RMRU team members present: Paul Caraher, Mike George, Glenn Henderson, Lew Kingman, Roger May, Patrick McCurdy, Nick Nixon, and Dana Potts.

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.