



Search South Ridge Trail

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Idyllwild

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Written by Helene Lohr

I look down at the text, sigh and kick off the high heels I had just slipped on. Dinner down in the desert can wait; I have a call out. 15 minutes later my heels and dress have been exchanged for an orange shirt and hiking boots. I'm sitting in the passenger seat of Lee's truck as we bounce up the rutted dirt road leading to South Ridge Trailhead.

It's a search. Out from the East coast for a relaxing time camping in the mountains, the subject (Herb) had wandered off to the south to meditate, became disoriented and used his cell to call his friend back at camp. As Herb told his friend he was became increasingly lost, his friend hung up and made the call to contact 911. We see the red and blue flashers ahead and pull up parallel to the Sheriff's car. Mark Young is the Riverside Sheriff Officer deputy on scene. He's in contact with the subject by cell and already has a good handle on the situation.

Young uses his previous military experience to help pinpoint Herb's location. "Point your chest to the setting sun and describe what you can see in front of you." Having the subject turn in a circle and relate what he sees at each 90 degree angle gives Young a good idea of Herb's location. This helps him guide the Sheriff's helicopter Star 9 rapidly to the spot. Star 9 hovers above Herb for several minutes, allowing us to get a bead on the direction and distance we'll need to go.

We get the news that several members of the team from off the hill are on their way. Gwenda is bringing our RMRU Rescue Truck, Dana is heading up the mountain and Paul is already on the way out from Orange County. Good to know- if anything goes wrong we may need additional people. Since we still have daylight, Lee and I make the call to head out as a hasty team and see if we can locate the subject before nightfall complicates the matter. After a quick cross-check of our gear, we swing on our packs and head out cross country through the heavy brush. Thick stands of Manzanita, Chinquapin, and various other thorny and spiky obstacles have us swerving off course more than once. We note landmarks along the way to keep us on track for our way back.

Once the helicopter peels away and the forest becomes quiet again, we yell ahead to

establish voice contact. "1...2...3... Hello!" Herb responds loudly and boisterously "Hey, Hey, Hey! I'm over here! I'm here!" His voice is coming from a few hundred yards directly ahead. "Stay put! We'll come to you!" We start out again, picking our way through the brush and calling out once in a while to make sure we stay on course. Within a matter of minutes we crest a hill and come across a thankful Herb. He's dressed in tattered blue sweat shorts, his arms and legs covered with scratches from forcing his way through the sharp foliage. After shaking our hands, he gratefully guzzles the Nalgene bottle of water Lee passes his way. "Man, I'm soooo glad to see you! I was waving at the helicopter, but then he flew away. If the deputy wouldn't have kept telling me to stay put, I would have definitely moved!"

After giving Herb a few minutes to drink and eat, we make the call to head back quickly. We might still be able to beat the sunset. Herb certainly isn't dressed for nighttime in the mountains and the temperature will be dropping quickly. Lee is familiar with the area, and after a few minutes of hiking he locates an unofficial mountain bike trail. Having a nice, smooth, brush-free trail makes the going much easier for our exhausted subject. We reach the truck and load Herb into the back seat. We pull up next to Deputy Young as the last fading rays of the sun disappeared in the west. Mission accomplished.



Lee, Subject, Helene, and Deputy Young at Base
Photo by Gwenda Yates

RMRU team members present: Lee Arson, Paul Caraher, Helene Lohr, Dana Potts, 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.