



Search Two Missing Hikers

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Orange County
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Written by - Helene Lohr

RMRU was called out to assist in the search for two teens missing since Sunday from near Holy Jim trailhead. We were requested to clear the Riverside county side of the mountain range in case the teens had wandered to the East. This being one of the few times we actually had more than a few minutes to prepare, I packed my backpack the night before and texted Les to see if he wanted to carpool. We left before it was light in order to give us a little breathing room in case there was trouble on the way. With Les driving, being late was decidedly not an issue! Coffees in hand, we watched as DSSAR and RMRU Teams trickled in until 7:30 meeting time.

After checking in at Base and reviewing the topographic maps to construct a plan, we divided up in 3 teams and headed out in vehicles along Indian Truck Trail to penetrate more deeply into the steep canyons and near impenetrable brush. Each vehicle drove slowly looking for any signs of the subject's passage alongside the road, repeatedly stopping at key junctures in the canyons to call out.



Rescuers Listening after Calling Out for Subjects
Photo by Helene Lohr

With terrain so hostile to travel it was thought likely that the teens would most likely take the path of least resistance and stay on the road, if they had encountered it. Les slowed the vehicle to a crawl near potential track traps. We stopped and examined the road for any tracks matching the size and description of our subjects. No such luck.

The truck trail wound its way up to join with Main Divide Road on the Orange County side and then proceeded up to the antenna bristled peak. Looking out from the peak a visual reading of terrain combined with info from the topographic map revealed another hiking trail to clear- this time by foot. Coldwater Trail, one of the far less popular of trails in area, is used mainly by mountain bikers and the occasional intrepid hiker. It winds its way down from just short of the peak to the eastern valley below.

Les radioed in to confer with the other teams. It was decided that the other teams would continue sweeping the truck trails, while we would send a contingent out to hike Coldwater. Les dropped Justin and I off at the trailhead for what was to be a long hot hike down. As we swung our way onto the trail I noticed that it was largely untraveled. The only recent traces were that of a couple hiking together. The prints were about the size of our subjects, but rough gravel and manzanita leaves covering the trail prevented us from getting a clear track for confirmation. Well, at least this was something to go on!



**Rescuer Decending Steep Slope
Photo by Helene Lohr**

About half way down the tracks we were following peeled off of the main trail onto an unofficial side trail. The trail narrowed and over time got steeper and steeper- so steep that the rough gravel surface acted as ball bearings, leading to us more inelegantly sliding downhill than stepping. The floor of valley seemed tantalizingly near, but the state of trail has us moving with slow caution- the last thing we need is to break an ankle out here and divert resources from the main rescue. The side trail feeds us down into thickly brushed foothills and finally spits us out onto a gravel road at the back of a large operating quarry. A quick radio back to base has Les on his way to pick us up empty handed. Our long hike was done with nothing to show for it but a photo of few gravelly footprints on my cellphone.

The search continued on both sides of the coastal range the following day and eventually the two teens were found separately, dehydrated and with various injuries. They had

become disoriented in the thick brush, lost, became separated and severely dehydrated. They were found several hours apart, each within a mile of their car.

RMRU team members present: Paul Caraher, Lew Kingman, Helene Lohr, Roger May, Dana Potts, Frank Snyder, Les Walker, and Gwenda Yates.

Assisting agencies: Desert Search and Rescue (DSAR).

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.