



Two Missing Boy Scouts

June 20, 2014

San Jacinto Mountains Saddle Junction

2014-026

Written by Helene Lohr

It's Friday, 7:30 pm. I'm in the middle of giving my report at a Forest Service Volunteer board meeting when I get the call out: Two boys lost hiking in the High Country. Since I'm already conveniently at the Ranger Station I use my time wisely. Jana Desrocher from the front desk gathers up the permits for the day for me and we single out the backpacking group in question. Great! Now I have contact info- names, phone numbers and route. In another stroke of luck, the reporting parties are our volunteers manning the Forest Service Fire Lookout. Wilderness Ranger Coordinator Rick Wilkerson (sitting next to me at the meeting) gives me their cell phone number.

Despite intermittent cell service, I quickly have a lot more information: Two boys rushed ahead of their backpacking group, with instructions to wait for the rest at the Saddle. When the group reached the Saddle, no-one was there to greet them. The group wisely waited there as one of the boy's fathers hiked up to the Tahquitz Peak lookout tower to look for his son and report him missing. Unfortunately his worry had made him take dangerous risks. He reached the tower without any warm clothes, food, water or a headlamp and had to be convinced not to hike onwards down the South Ridge trail in the fading twilight. The lookout crew gave him a water, food and headlamp and contacted the Sheriff, who activated RMRU. Since then, the Lookout crew has spotted some unusual lights midway up Angel's Glide Trail.

Armed with information, Lee, Les and I headed to Keenwild for a helicopter pickup, while Lew and Carlos headed towards Humber park to man base and potentially hike in. After a quick pick up by Star-9, we fly over the high country searching for lights. As reported, we spy lights along Angels Glide. As we hover near the group and they violently wave us off. "Well, I guess that must not be them". With no luck finding our subjects from the air, we make our plan: Star-9 will insert us into Skunk Cabbage Meadow. From there we will head towards the Saddle to interview the group, then use their information spread out in a search pattern. We're out of radio range until we reach the Saddle, so we'll be on our own till then. We hoof it at top speed to the Saddle, only to

be confronted with... nothing! There's no-one here!

We are finally back where our radios work. With a quick radio call to Base we get our anti-climactic answer, the boys are already back safe with their group! As suspected, they had blown past the Saddle. They kept going until they realized, then stopped along the trail and stayed put. While some of the backpackers had waited at the Saddle, part of their group had kept searching up Angels Glide and had run into the boys. It was this group that had been waving our helicopter off- they wanted to let us know the boys were safe, but had no way to communicate. After realizing the miscommunication, they sent down a runner to Humber Park to let us know. In the end, the group has been reunited and has decided to stay the night and stay on track for their hike to San Jacinto peak in the morning.

We all grin at each other. "Well, it was a nice night for a helicopter ride!" A short mission with a happy ending and as bonus we can still get almost a full night's sleep!

Lessons learned:

1. Lead and Sweep: every larger hiking group (especially one with kids!) should have both a lead and a sweep. A good leader keeps control of the group, they navigate and set the pace for the group and don't let anyone rush ahead and potentially get separated. The Sweep follows along behind the group on the trail, making sure that everyone in your party is accounted for. If someone stops for a bathroom break, the Sweep person stays back to wait, so they are always last on the trail. No more "Hey, where's George?" at the peak.
2. Don't make a bad situation worse: His worry made the boys' father take potentially dangerous risks- heading out without adequate gear (food, water, warm clothes, and a headlamp) that easily could have made him into another victim.

RMRU Members Involved: Lee Arnson, Carlos Carter, Lew Kingman, Helene Lohr, and Les Walker.

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.