

## **Lost Couple San Jacinto Peak**

**December 13, 2014**  
**Saddle Junction Area**  
**2014-049**

Written by Eric Holden

The team was just wrapping up a great day of Helitac training with the Riverside Sheriff's Office's Aviation unit when we got word that we have lost hikers up on San Jacinto Peak. As some members finished their rotation in the training we pulled out maps and GPS units to trace their cell phone ping coordinates. Unfortunately cell phone pings are not always accurate and the ping either put them in either Glendale, or the Pacific Ocean. It looks like we will be doing a search tonight.

After some debate the team's president requested two volunteers. I quickly raise my hand along with Donny. We both had all of our winter gear ready to go. After putting on our warm jackets and harnesses we hopped on the helicopter with pilot Chad and Technical Flight Officer (TFO) Eric... a lot of Eric's on this bird.



**Donny and Eric ready to go at Helitac**  
**Photo by Carlos Carter.**

A few minute later and we were circling San Jacinto Peak checking all of the normal places that people get funneled into. We could see all of the State Park Rangers searching Round and Tamarack valleys, but no sign of our subjects. On one of the final passes pilot Chad spotted their cell phone light about a mile south east of Wellman's divide. In order to drop someone off at their location we would need to lose some weight so either Donny or I would need to be dropped off at Round Valley. I had the med-pack and stove so Donny got dropped off at Round Valley. It was 20 degrees as we dropped off Donny. The Aviation team did some great flying and got me to a point I could jump down onto the snow slopes about 300 feet above the subject's location. With the helicopter making their way back to Donny I headed downhill. Snow was 2-3' deep in some of the drifts, which made for some fun travel.

I reach the subjects, John and Kathy, and they are in good shape. They had an emergency bivy setup and had warm clothing, food, water, map and compass, just no light to see with. They had summited San Jacinto Peak and on the way back down missed the turn off at Wellman's Divide. After introductions all around we start heading back up the slopes to my drop-in point to prepare for aviation's return from fueling and dropping Donny back off at Hemet-Ryan. Chad and Eric held the helicopter perfectly still a few feet above the ground and both Kathy and John climb aboard.

While waiting for their return I get to watch the Geminids meteor shower from the slopes of San Jacinto. SPECTACULAR!!! During the entire mission I saw about 40 meteors streak across the sky. Aviation returns and as I am handing my pack to Eric we get electrostatic shocked about 7 times. I am an electrical engineering tech in my day job and the shocks felt just like sticking your finger into an 115V electrical socket. I chuck my bag into the helicopter as Eric can't grab it without getting electrified and grab the skid for one final burst of electricity. Now at the same electrical potential as the helicopter I am able to safely grab Eric's hand as he pulls me inside for a return home. Quite the..... shocking..... experience.

Turns out that John and Kathy are a new couple and this is one of their first dates! If they can get through this smiling hopefully it's a long and happy relationship.

**RMRU Members Involved:** Kirk Cloyd, Glenn Henderson, Eric Holden, Donny Goetz Matt Jordan, and Rob May.

**Sheriff's Aviation:** (Pilot - Chad Marlett) (TFO - Eric Hannum)

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