



Hoist Missing Hiker

June 19, 2015

Seven Pines Trail, San Jacinto Mts.

2015-036

Written by Raymond Weden

Around 7:30pm we receive a call for a missing hiker who was separated from their group near the Seven Pines Trail. Our missing subject, Gopaul of San Diego, was able to call the Riverside Sheriff's Office on his cell phone requesting assistance. Sheriff's Aviation flying in Star 9 were able to locate him while RMRU had a team on their way to the Seven Pines Trailhead. The weather conditions were perfect for a hoist so as Eric and I neared the Sheriff's station in Hemet, we were informed by Kirk (who was the Call out Person) that we were to be redirected to Hemet/Ryan Airport to assist in a hoist. The other team members who were on their way (Cameron & Tony) were asked to stand down and be prepared to assist if needed.

Eric and I loaded up our gear and lifted off to the last known location of Gopaul. Hovering at his last known location, we were unable to find him. With four guys and a bunch of gear in an A-Star helicopter, the fuel burns rather quickly. Unable to initiate a search with that much weight on board, I was dropped off at nearby Keenwild Forestry Service Station just outside of Idyllwild. With Eric on board, the helicopter headed back up and was able to locate our missing subject. Eric was dropped in via a hoist in a relatively steep area near Gopaul. I was contacted by a Deputy asking me to contact Eric on the radio as his entry looked rough from the helicopter and they were unable to get ahold of him. I tried calling him on his cell phone and on our radio but was unable to make contact. I did have Gopaul's cell number but my earlier attempts to contact him were unsuccessful but it was worth a try. He did answer and after I inquired about his status, I asked if he had made contact with Eric yet. He confirmed they were in voice contact but not at the same location. Shortly after that I was contacted by Eric and he confirmed he did have a rough entry; sliding off a small cliff and landing in a bush prior to releasing from the hoist. He let me know he was uninjured.

Shortly after my call with Eric Star 9 picked me back up and we headed back to the same entry point. Eric had climbed up to some higher, flatter ground which made my entry less eventful than his. Aviation confirmed they would return to the same spot I was dropped at in 60 minutes. We headed down hill to the sound of Gopaul's voice. We found

ourselves at his location relatively quickly. It was only a 15 minute down-climb and he was no more than 200 feet below us.

Back at our hoist location, we had some time before our pickup so we asked Gopaul the obvious question - how did you get lost? He joined a “Meet Up” group formed on the internet. The other people in the group were much faster hikers than he was and basically left him behind. The Seven Pines Trail is a lightly traveled trail and can be hard to follow in places which ultimately led to his getting lost. We were all hoisted up one at a time. I went up first and was dropped off at Keenwild. While I was in the air, Eric found an abandoned campsite. It was pretty obvious that it had not been used in quite a while. The problem was that there was backpack, water bottles, and other gear still there. With weird circumstances, we thought this might be our next search. Eric grabbed the backpack and sent it up in the helicopter with Gopaul.



Subject Gopaul and Ray waiting to be Hoisted

Photo by Eric Holden.

As I was waiting for Gopaul at Keenwild, people from his meet up group were waiting for him as they all carpooled up from San Diego. They confirmed there were NOT hiking the Seven Pines Trail but rather the Fuller Ridge Trail to San Jacinto Peak and back. Gopaul, clearly unfamiliar with the area, pick up the wrong trail. I assisted him off the helicopter at the Keenwild station and jumped back in when Eric arrived shortly thereafter.

We lifted off from Keenwild and headed back to Hemet/Ryan Airport right around midnight. As we were landed, we heard over the Sheriff's radio that there was another hiker in the Pinion Pines area needing assistance. Pinion Pines was too far out to be related to our newly acquired backpack. It was determined only one of us would be needed for the next hoist. The thought of my pillow sounded good as the night turned into the next morning, so I told Eric he could have this one; no rock, paper, scissors needed.

There are many things that went wrong that caused this situation. As an individual hiker, carry a GPS and know how to use it. Gopaul had food, water, flashlight and adequate clothing but a GPS could have prevented a rescue situation. As an organized group, you should NEVER leave anyone to hike alone. Gopaul was not familiar with the trail, nor was he prepared to hike alone. This whole situation would never have had happened if they just stuck together. Lucky for Gopaul, his cell phone had service and battery which is very rare in these mountains.

The next day Eric let me know that the backpack he found belonged to a PCT hiker that was rescued about 5 months prior. His camp has been sitting there undisturbed until Eric stumbled across it.

RMRU Members Involved: Kirk Cloyd, Cameron Dickinson, Eric Holden, Tony Hughes, and Raymond Weden.

Sheriff's Aviation: (Pilot – Chad Marlett) (TFO – Raymond Hiers).

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.