



Two Lost Hikers

March 19, 2017

Tenaja Falls Trail, Cleveland National Forest

2017-015

Written by Shani Pynn

At roughly 10:30 PM on Sunday the team was called out to help two missing hikers lost in the Tenaja Falls trail area in the Cleveland National Forest and we were directed to meet at the Tenaja trailhead. As I was driving to the trailhead I realized the directions I had initially picked would lead me to an access point to Tenaja Falls Trail off of Ortega Highway which was not specifically the Tenaja trailhead. I adjusted my route to go to the Tenaja trailhead and arrived at roughly 12:05 AM. When I arrived Eric and Kevin were already there, along with the Deputy and the subjects' families. I learned that more team members were on their way and that some had initially headed toward the Ortega side of the trail as well. Eric informed me that the young couple had been located by helicopter and were waiting at their location for us to come and guide them back to the trailhead. He also said the subjects were cold and in need of warm clothing and some family members provided us with additional clothing to bring to them. Kevin, Eric, and I looked at a map of the area and with the subjects' location and it was decided that Eric and I would drive to Fisherman's Camp and then follow the trail on foot to get to their location.

In order to get warm clothing to the subjects as soon as possible, Eric and I headed to Fisherman's Camp to begin hiking to the subjects. Kevin stayed behind to establish base and wait for additional team members to arrive. Eric and I were to radio in when we set off on foot. When we left the vehicle to begin hiking Eric attempted to contact base and we discovered we didn't have clear communication at that location. Since base knew our intended route we continued hiking in and attempted radio contact every few minutes. According to Eric's GPS unit we were roughly 2 miles from the subjects location as the crow flies so we set off at a brisk pace. In case the subjects had moved we stopped to call out to them roughly every 0.25 miles and when we rounded the edges of major slopes. When we were roughly 0.29 miles from the subjects' location our radio communication was reestablished as Kevin had moved his vehicle to near Fisherman's Camp. Eric gave an update of our location and Kevin said the other team members were standing by. Eric and I continued on the trail and lost communications again after another bend so we made a note of the location so we would know where we could talk to Kevin on the radio.

When we reached the portion of the trail closest to the subjects' last known location we called out to them and were able to make verbal contact. The only light source the subjects had was a lighter which we could not see from the trail so we headed uphill, off trail, toward the sound of their voices. When we reached them the subjects were cold and we gave them warm clothes. As they put the clothes on they relaxed and their shivering slowed. They said they had not eaten since the morning and we gave them some snacks and water to give them more energy to keep warm. Eric was able to contact base and reported that the subjects were located and we were providing food, water, and warmth, and we would be hiking out with them shortly. The subjects reported that they had been hiking and gotten lost and tried to follow the water to find their way out. Eventually they hiked to higher ground to get a cell signal and called for help. They said the helicopter had found them at about 9PM and told them to stay at that location, which they did. Later, as their phone was running out of power, they called dispatch and were told that ground units were being sent in for them.

While the subjects ate and warmed up Eric broke a trail of roughly 80 feet back to the main trail to make hiking out easier. After a few minutes the subjects were ready to hike out and we were able to get back to the trail and hike back to the vehicles without incident. When we arrived at the vehicles, Kevin had his car running and warm and took the subjects back to the trailhead while Eric and I followed in Eric's car. By shortly before 3:00 AM everyone was back at the trailhead and the subjects were reunited with their families.



**Subjects and Shani (right, background) Hiking Out
Photo by Eric Holden.**

RMRU Members Involved: Cameron Dickinson, Corey Ellison, Eric Holden, Kevin Kern, Shani Pynn, and Tyler Shumway.

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.