



OES Mt. Waterman

June 22-29, 2019
Angles National Forest
2019-034

Written by Blake Douglas

This mission, an OES for a missing 70-year-old in the mountains of Los Angeles County, posed an unusual problem that I haven't encountered in Riverside County; specifically, cultural barriers. Typically, when we observe any nervousness or hesitation among subjects, or their relatives, it's because people are uncertain of our authority and relationship with the Riverside Sheriff's Office. Basically, people assume that they're going to get into trouble for having to ask for help. We always dispel these worries to the best of our ability, and we usually get reliable information and cooperation that helps us to complete our mission.

In this case, the combination of cultural barriers, as well as what seemed to be insurmountable anxiety from the subject's friends and family, led to sparse, conflicting, or missing information about our subject. We were uncertain of almost everything about this person except his name and age, but we were assured that all attempts were being made to change this. This uncertainty caused the search area to cover almost the entire northern and southern drainages of Mt. Waterman, as well as some regions to the southeast; an area of over six square miles with only a single major trail. None of these regions had very high visibility or easy access, but with calm weather and relatively little off-trail use, we were confident that we would be able to see signs of someone having gone off-trail within the last few days, and callouts would be highly effective.

Kevin Kearn and I were the only RMRU members able to respond at 7am on a Monday June 24th. We were assigned a steep, lightly forested hillside just south of a fire road that ran along one of the ridges; unfortunately, after extensively searching our area for several hours, we found no signs of any significance. We returned to the command post at the Newcomb's Ranch restaurant, where Kevin had to depart, but was replaced by Cameron Dickenson. Cameron and I put in for another assignment, and were given a larger, much denser region on the north face of Waterman, near one of the abandoned ski routes. This was even more removed from our previous search area, but it needed to be checked off because it provided easy access to a main road. Once again, no sign of our subject.

Written by Cameron Dickinson

On the following day, June 25th, I returned to the area to search for our missing male hiker. This day I would be joined by fellow team member Glenn Henderson. Glenn and I

would be teamed up and would be given a search area by the command's search coordinator that would place us just south of the hiking trail where our missing hiker and his family members were known to have hiked several days before.

The terrain we would search was moderately steep, with sections that were dense with vegetation, large bolder outcroppings; however, some areas were more open with light vegetation. After thoroughly searching this area, we found no sign of our subject. Several other mutual aid search teams were out that day as well searching in their designated areas. The search would continue...

On Saturday, June 29th, one week after he went missing, was found alive. He was located several miles south from his last known location, in a steep ravine in the Devils Canyon area. He was spotted by Altadena Search & Rescue team, as they located him down next to a creek. He was able to communicate and walk, but very weak as a result from not eating any substantial food for 5 days, other than some surrounding mountain berries and frogs. Weather was in his favor, with moderate temperatures during that period, and having a jacket in his possession. Drinking water from the flowing creek was critical in his survival, thanks to a winter with a higher precipitation and snowpack.

RMRU Members Involved: Cameron Dickinson, Blake Douglas, Glenn Henderson, and Kevin Kearn.

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.