



THE TRACKER

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Bad Times on Baldy

Shirley Keebaugh, Robert Gattas, and Eric Spaeth, West Valley SAR



trail at the bottom of the bowl, while the men continued to the summit. According to his friend, somewhere along the trail near the summit, Mr. Koh decided to cache his pack so as to make the last leg of his journey to the summit easier, and he planned to retrieve it on the way down. Mr. Koh and his friend successfully reached the summit. He was wearing instep crampons and using his two ski poles. The two men returned down the same trail that they had just come up and Mr. Koh was in the lead. When they had almost reached the point where Mr. Koh had left his pack, his friend witnessed Mr. Koh slip on the ice and off the trail into Goode Canyon. He stated that he could not see Mr. Koh and called out to him for about 15 minutes. When he got no response, he decided to go to the Sierra Hut to seek help. Both the West Valley (WVSAR) and San Dimas Mountain Rescue Teams (SDMRT) were called out. A member of the Baldy Fire Department was sent up to the Sierra Hut to escort the wife and her two friends down the trail. Upon leaving the Sierra Hut and a few minutes later from another location down the trail, Mrs. Koh claimed that she could hear her husband calling to her from across the canyon.

When Mrs. Koh and her two friends were escorted off the mountain, they were brought to the command post to be interviewed by the operations staff. WVSAR is kindly allowed to use the Mt. Baldy Fire Station as a command post during operations in the Mt. Baldy area. After being interviewed, Mrs. Koh and her

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Charles Koh, a 53-year-old, was hiking to the top of Mt. Baldy on the Sierra Hut Trail with a male friend and their wives on January 1, 2004. The Sierra Hut Trail follows along the east slope of San Antonio Canyon until it reaches the bottom of Baldy Bowl. It turns to the west skirting the bottom of the bowl and then heads in a northwest direction to the summit. The day was overcast and a storm was predicted for the next morning. The two wives decided to wait at the Sierra Hut, which is on the

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Baldy

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friends sat at the table in the CP. Operations suggested that they be moved to another site but the only other site, the U.S. Forest Service Visitors' Center, which is a quarter of a mile down the road, was not open. The Koh's adult children arrived and the CP became a very crowded space. Blankets and extra chairs and tables were found in the fire station and the family and friends were moved to the second bay. Added to the pressure of dealing with the field decisions and communications, was the pressure of having the family within earshot. They were very inquisitive and would come back into the CP bay periodically and retell their story or ask very specific questions about operations, and of course, they were emotionally distraught. Operations planned to have the family moved to the U.S. Forest Service Visitor Center as soon as it opened the next morning.

Due to the New Year's holiday there was a small response from the WVSAR and SDMRT teams. Two members from WVSAR, who were Wilderness Emergency Medical Technicians (WMTs), and 4 members from the San Dimas team were sent up the Sierra Hut Trail. All team members were snow and ice qualified, as the trail was icy above the 7500-foot level. Their goal was to reach the point last scene (PLS). They carried a medical pack to be used by the WMTs when they reached Mr. Koh. A team of two who were not snow and ice certified was placed as a block at the bottom of Goode Canyon as that was one of the most probable routes that Mr. Koh might take if he was ambulatory and was trying to descend the mountain. They were later moved to block the mouth of San Antonio Canyon after a WVSAR team of three was sent up Goode Canyon. The team ascending Goode Canyon had only

one snow and ice certified member, and they were told to stop their ascent of the canyon when they reached the snow level. Another team of SDMRT members was then sent to search San Antonio Canyon west of the Sierra Hut trail because of Mrs. Koh hearing voices from that area. All three teams called out to Mr. Koh and used their whistles as they ascended San Antonio and Goode Canyons and received no response.

When the first team reached the PLS at the top of Goode Canyon, they found some blood and Mr. Koh's ski poles. They located his track that lead back up the canyon. It looked as if Mr. Koh was using bushes to belay himself, and his tracks lead into the bushes and were no longer visible. The team continued to search a wide area back towards the Sierra Hut both on and off trail until they were fatigued and the conditions became unbearable because of the storm coming in. They returned to the Sierra Hut to seek shelter for a couple of hours.

While the initial three teams and the trail block were out on their assignments, the CP personnel and sheriff's department coordinators were attempting to call out more personnel from San Bernardino and Los Angeles Counties. When it was determined that there was minimal response due to the fact that the callout required snow and ice certified personnel, it was determined that OES should be contacted to make a call for assistance to the other Mountain Rescue Association (MRA) teams in California.

With the beginning of the second operational period, no new clues had been found, and the storm had arrived. Mrs. Koh and her children were moved to the U.S. Forest Visitor Center and a chaplain had been called to stay with them. The

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Dude, Where's My Pack?

Mike Coggins, Central/West Valley SAR

Where is your pack? An ostensibly simple question, yet there comes a time when the wrong answer is realized. Of course we would all like to say that our pack is right beside or near us. One credo of the SAR technician is "keep your pack with you at all times." Isn't this what our instructors and/or teammates continue to drill into us? Unfortunately, mistakes do happen and at times just when you may not be able to afford it.

On 25 January 2004, myself and four other teammates received our helicopter briefing by the aviation crew at the lower landing zone just below the staging area prior to searching for Eugene Kumm. My teammates were Jack Nelson (Central/Valley of the Falls), David Metzler (West Valley), Bob (Rim) and Eric (Rim). We were airlifted in two batches to the upper landing zone, on a large rock among a field of manzanita, just east of the Mill Creek Jump Off. Our mission on that

clear and picturesque day was to have two members, Bob and Eric, search the ridgeline above the Mill Creek Jump Off area in the direction of the South Fork. In addition, the three others would cut over to the South Fork and search a bit up canyon. Unfortunately, our mission was cut short



due to a new search starting up in another area. Thus, the command post ordered us back to the landing zone.

While at the landing zone, four members located themselves on the rock with all of our packs. Our team leader, Jack Nelson, requested that three members go up on the first flight. The first three members, in order, would be David, I and Bob. Thus, the first three packs were placed near us.

While the incoming clouds ebbed and flowed about us, the helicopter soon appeared on final to this pebble amongst a sea of manzanita. While on short final, the crew chief gave a hand single indicating that only two members would go on the first flight. Thus, David and I would be the first out. As the pilot, Brian Miller, expertly maintained a one foot hover above the edge of the rock, David gingerly stepped aboard. I was then ordered to hand the crew chief the first pack. After I



Eric (Rim SAR), Bob (Rim SAR), David (WVSAR), Jack (Central), and Mike (Central/WVSAR)

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Baldy

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Koh's two hiking friends had left the scene.

Friday, 1/2/04

The teams that were on the mountain were experiencing very bad weather conditions. Their clothes and radio microphones were covered with a quarter-inch of ice. Additional MRA teams finally arrived in the late afternoon and were given assignments on the mountain through the night.

Saturday, 1/3/04

On this day, approximately 80 searchers were on the mountain. It was the first day that the weather was clear enough to transport searchers to the top of the mountain and to conduct an air search.

The searchers were briefed that due to the low temperatures, their electronic equipment, i.e. radios and GPSs should be kept next to their bodies to keep them from freezing up. The CP staff had prior experience with incorrect GPS

readings and radio malfunctions due to low temperatures and wanted to avoid these problems during this search due to the severe weather conditions. Also due to a local ambulance company's overpowered repeater, the CP chose to use the MRA frequency with a toned transmit and receive so that the ambulance company's traffic would not be heard. The searchers were briefed on the frequency and tone to be used and radios with this frequency and tone were available for checkout in the CP, however, once the teams were fielded, the CP lost communications with a few teams because they were not using the assigned frequency. The CP had to revert to using the non-toned frequency to communicate with all the teams, which made communications difficult because the search had to compete with the ambulance company for airtime.

"Their clothes and radio microphones were covered with a quarter-inch of ice"

Search dogs were used for the first time on this day. Three teams of alpine certified dogs, their handlers, and another SAR member were airlifted to the top of the mountain to search the PLS area, the top of the mountain, the bowl area, and the Mr. Koh's possible route back to the Sierra Hut. The dog handlers and their partners reported during debriefing that the dogs were slipping so much on the ice and dealing with the conditions and elements that their ability to concentrate on searching wasn't what it would normally be. An air scent dog and two handlers were also sent up the Sierra Hut Trail with negative results. During debriefing, the air scent dog's handler said that the trail was very busy with regular traffic and searchers on the trail and in the canyon next to it which may have affected the dog's search.

Sunday, 1/4/04

On this day, the dog teams and other SAR personnel concentrated on areas below the canyons that lead down from where Mr. Koh fell off the Sierra Hut Trail. They also concentrated on ridges and canyons to the west of the point last seen.

Saturday, 1/10/04

The search continued on this day with the usual check in of approximately 50 searchers. The normal routine was followed of briefing the teams on the shift's objectives, making sure communications was established, assigning them to their appropriate assignments, providing food, transporting the teams into the field both by vehicle and air, and then beginning tracking the progress of the teams. The usual fight for airtime on the MRA frequency with the ambulance company and the Koh family's needs were being dealt with.

The CP then became a bit hectic. A call came from Ontario dispatch that a 911 call had been received from a woman that had taken a fall roughly in the same location as the search victim and she had a

serious leg injury. The CP had to divert 10 SAR personnel away from the search to aid this woman and direct Air Rescue 7 towards her while continuing to manage the search. When the diverted group was



Baldy Summit

within ¼ mile from the woman, Air Rescue 7 came on scene and was able to rescue the woman and transport her to a hospital. The 10 searchers who had been diverted for this rescue had used up a lot of energy to hike to their position but returned to their original assignment.

Just when things had calmed down a little, another call for help came in, but this time it is one of our searchers who had taken a nasty fall down an ice chute. The CP again called for Air Rescue 7, but they were on another call. LA Air 5 was dispatched, but they were going to be delayed also. The CP started the Rescue Group, a team that is kept on standby at the CP in reserve for these situations, up Sierra Hut Trail.

A lot of very emotional radio traffic was now being heard. The field teams were responding to rescue the injured searcher,

and then in attempting to do so, another searcher falls down the same chute. There was chaos on the mountain, and the CP was struggling to sort it out. The CP called in a LA Fire rescue helicopter to back up LA Air 5. Reports were now filtering in that the two injured searchers were alive but had possible broken bones. The LA Air 5 and LA Fire helicopters were now on scene and began the extractions. LA Air 5 lifted the first searcher and LA Fire lifted the second. Both were taken to the Cow Canyon Saddle LZ. The CP had an AMR ambulance waiting at the LZ for transport to San Antonio Community Hospital. At this point, the Rescue Group had hiked ¾ of the way up to the Sierra Hut Trail and was told to return to the CP.

The CP was now trying to regroup and get the search back on track. However, the CP had to now take into consideration that the conditions were too dangerous if two of the searchers had fallen, and decided to have the remainder of their team return to the Sierra Hut for reassignment. Also, another team that had been working another more remote area but would be caught by icy conditions at dusk had to be airlifted out.

Then another crisis occurred. A Hispanic woman was carried into the CP by her family. She was obviously altered but no one at the CP spoke Spanish and to find out what had happened. One of the CP staff, who is a Wilderness Medical Technician (WMT), performed an assessment on her and found that she had taken a hit to the head in a fall. It was decided to move the woman into the operations/ planning room of the Koh Search for more warmth and to better assess her. At this point, the CP was attempting to demobilize the search. The CP was calling for the Rescue Group to return as quickly as possible from the trailhead back to the CP to bring the trauma kit so the woman could be treated. The WMT started an IV on the woman and she was now on a backboard on the floor, laying at the edge of the planning table where the CP staff

“The WMT started an IV on the woman and she was now on a backboard on the floor...”

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had to literally step over her to do the task of running the search. AMR was called to get an ambulance for her, and she was eventually air lifted from Cow Canyon Saddle to Arrowhead Regional.

Sunday, 1/11/04

There was a good turnout of SAR teams that covered many areas the mountain and recovered areas to bring the probability of detection (POD) up in high probability areas. During this operational period two Advanced Rope Technicians were dispatched to the Devore area to assist Central SAR with their technical rope rescue. No clues were found this day and the search went to a Limited Continuous Operation (LCO).

Saturday, 1/17/04

The WVSAR team training for this day to cover areas that needed to be recovered or finish up areas that didn't hadn't been completed during previous operational periods. This information was ascertained from looking at all the team assignments and from debriefing all the teams. Four teams were dispatched on the mountain and aviation assisted in putting one of the team's in high up on the mountain. One of the teams found Mr. Koh around noon in the bottom of an ice chute. Aviation was contacted along with the coroner, and air rescue came in and hoisted the subject out. The family was hiking in the area so one of the teams intercepted them, brought them to the CP, and advised them that the subject had been found. They were very appreciative of all the work that was put into the search and very surprised that so much time and effort that was expended.

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Dude, Where's My Pack?

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boarded, Bob gave the second pack to the crew chief. And off we flew to the lower landing zone.

Soon after the helicopter departed for the second pick up, I noticed something different about my pack. Actually, I noticed one minor thing, that this was not my pack. I had mistakenly set Bob's pack in the wrong order at the upper landing zone. Thus, my pack and car keys were up there. But, I was not worried, because they would be down soon, right?

Well, after hearing the pilot state that he could not make the upper landing zone due to the cloud cover over the Mill Creek Jump Off area, I began to feel quite guilty. My thoughts now turned very serious. Did I have something of Bob's which he may need or want? Maybe he would want his crampons? David and I began to worry about their welfare, not only because of the crampon issue, but also due to their possible egress from the icy and steep Mill Creek Jump Off.

Fortunately, the clouds did clear up allowing the helicopter to make another try. The second team was successfully airlifted out. Within a few moments after Bob stepped off of the helicopter, he and I performed our last, absolutely last pack exchange.

This experience is now burned in my memory. Our team was fortunate to have been airlifted out since one member could have been without proper equipment in a landscape requiring nothing less than crampons. In addition, Bob could have been stuck up there with clothing which did not fit him. What if he required certain medications located in his pack? Was he the person designated to carry the team stove? There are numerous permutations which we could go into. But, let's not. Let us in the future learn from this mistake and not repeat it. Just always be able to provide the proper answer to "*Where is your pack?*" Confidently answer "*It is with me!*"

D

Calendar

For information or to submit an event, contact the editor at editor@thetracker.info. Appearance of items in this section does not necessarily imply endorsement by the SAR Council or the County of San Bernardino. Call if you have any questions about a particular listing. To save space, persons to contact and numbers for multiple listings of *Department-approved training providers* are consolidated in one place at the bottom of this page.

February

Feb. 21—West Valley SAR Snow Training
Contact Bob Gattas at rgattas@earthlink.net.

March

1st and 3rd Weekends in March—BSAR
Contact VFU for more information.

Mar 17—Inland Empire SAR Council
19:00 in the Main Conference Room at SBSB HQ

April

TBA—Technical Rescue Basics Course (TRBC)
Sontact Don Welch (760-244-7340) for more information.

May

**May 15–16—National Cave Rescue Commission (NCRC)
Basic Cave Rescue Orientation Course**
Contact Mark Kinsey (mkinsey@caverescue.net) for details.

May 15–16—West Valley SAR Rope Training
At Hole-in-the-Wall. Contact Bob Gattas at rgattas@earthlink.net for more information.

May 19—Inland Empire SAR Council
19:00 in the Main Conference Room at SBSB HQ

June

June TBD—Y.E.S. Camp
Camp Laurel Pines, Contact VFU for more information.

June 2–5—NASAR '04 Conference & Expo
“Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Lost People”, Lansdowne, VA. Visit www.nasar.org for more information.

June 5—West Valley SAR ELT Training
Night operation. Contact Bob Gattas (rgattas@earthlink.net) for more information.

June 19—West Valley SAR Rope Training
Contact Bob Gattas (rgattas@earthlink.net) for more information.

July

July 21—Inland Empire SAR Council
19:00 in the Main Conference Room at SBSB HQ

August

Aug. 21—Rope Training
Contact Bob Gattas (rgattas@earthlink.net) for more information.

September

Sep. 15—Inland Empire SAR Council
19:00 in the main conference room at SBSB HQ.

Sep. 18—West Valley SAR Search Scenario
Contact Bob Gattas (rgattas@earthlink.net) for more information.

October

**Oct. 16–23—National Cave Rescue Commission (NCRC)
Level I and Level II Cave Rescue Seminar**
Week-long NCRC seminar at California Caverns, CA. Contact Mark Kinsey (mkinsey@caverescue.net) for more information.

Oct. 16–17—West Valley SAR Map & Compass Training
Contact Bob Gattas (rgattas@earthlink.net) for more information.

November

Nov. 17—Inland Empire SAR Council
19:00 in the main conference room at SBSB HQ.

Nov. 20—West Valley SAR Night Scenario
Contact Bob Gattas (rgattas@earthlink.net) for more information.

*Course / Provider

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Baldy

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Ali Search

1/12/04-1/14/04

Ali Aminian was reported by his friend to be a creature of habit. He always hiked up Bear Flats Trail and he would always call his wife when he reached the summit. Then he would head down the Sierra Hut Trail and stop in at the Sierra Hut before hiking down the trail and into Baldy Village where he parked his car. On Sunday, January 18, 2004, Mr. Aminian parked his car in the village and was reported overdue by his wife at 4:00 in the afternoon. He made no calls from his cell phone, and he did not stop in at the Sierra Hut.

An OES callout was made on Monday since there was a poor response from county SAR personnel. We combined assignments and advised all SAR members that they might find Koh out there as well as Ali since they were both lost in the same area. Dog teams and ground personnel were scouring the mountain on Monday and Tuesday. The Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department provided great support. Their air ships did great work searching and inserting teams on the mountain. With some information that came in from the family on Tuesday and from the debriefing sessions on Tuesday, the search efforts were concentrated on searching the Bear Flats Trail near the summit. It paid off as the subject was found at the bottom of an ice chute about noon. Since the subject was found in Los Angeles County, the investigation was handed over to that county's personnel. Again, West Valley Search and Rescue would like to thank all the teams in and out-of-county that came to our assistance in the search for the two overdue hikers. Your help was and is very much appreciated by our Station Commander and the Sheriff.

Classified Section

Contact the Editor at to place or remove any item.

SBSD Commuter cups with star and motto. \$16. Features generous 16 oz. capacity, stainless steel construction, double-walled insulation and fits virtually all auto cup or mug holders.



SAR Tech patches. NASAR-approved, straight version of the standard SAR Tech I/II/III patches. Send check made out to IESARC for \$3 each and a SASE to: IESARC, PO Box 108, Barstow, CA 92311.

SBSD Search and Rescue decals. \$5. The decals are 3.5" X 3.5" and can be stuck on the outside of just about anything or on the inside of a window. The price is \$5.00 each and can be purchased by contacting SarDesertRun@aol.com or calling 760-369-9999.



Earrings (1/2") \$10 and Lapel Pin/Tie Tacks (5/8") \$8. Fund-raiser for Morongo Mounted SAR Team. For ordering info contact Kim Miller at millerkm@29palms.usmc.mil or call Kim at (760) 367-1148 or (760) 367-1148 evenings.

SBSD Coffee cups \$5. High-gloss ivory coffee cups with gold-colored SBSD star on the side is microwavable. Available at Volunteer Forces.



SBSD SAR Pens \$10. High-quality, refillable ink pens with SBSD star and "Search & Rescue" on side. Great gift idea! Available at Volunteer Forces.

Custom SAR/Expedition Topo maps. \$14.95. See the web site for full details!

Granite Gear Nimbus Ozone Backpack. Size regular. Highly adjustable, and brand new. Comes with large shoulder straps, but Granite Gear will swap them for one your size is they don't fit. \$105. Contact Jeff Lehman at jlehman@caverescue.net.

Garmin Offers NASAR Members Discounts. NASAR has an agreement with Garmin to distribute its entire line of consumer GPS products and a handful of its aviation products to the SAR community. Join NASAR at www.nasar.org, and shop the store at www.nasar.org/garmin/default.php.

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