



THE TRACKER

Monthly Newsletter of the Inland Empire Search and Rescue Council

April 2005

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Stranded and Evacuated

Jim Lyon, Bear Valley SAR

It was about 8:30 AM on Saturday, January 8th when we got the page. It read, "Stranded motorists on Highway 18. They've been there all night." Eight members of the BVSAR Team



re-
sponded
and
headed
to the
Big Bear
dam
which
was just
about as
far a

vehicle could go. The snowstorm through the night had built up into four foot drifts and higher and cars were basically "strewn" all along the highway. This section is better known as "the Arctic Circle," the portion of Highway 18 that runs from the Big Bear dam over to Lakeview Point, a mile east of the Snow Valley Ski Area.

On Friday night a storm had developed and caught just about everyone unprepared. Although there were "chain control" signs out at Snow Valley, the control point was not manned by Caltrans or the CHP and many motorists thought they could "beat the system." Well, they didn't and the result was the largest traffic tieup that locals could ever remember.

Many of the stranded motorists were not that well prepared for winter weather and were forced to huddle together in their cars while the storm roared around them. As some cars would run out of gas,

thus losing engine heat, they'd double up with other vehicle occupants in order to keep warm. Many were stranded in the freezing cold for twelve hours or more.

When the Team arrived at the scene, along with fire departments, USFS workers, CHP's and Caltrans, it was evident the only possible way to evacuate these motorists would be by snow mobile. Plows, 4-wheelers and even snowcats were unable to access the road. While several Team members handled traffic control at the Big Bear dam, two others headed into the center of the tie-up on sno-mos. The four mile stretch of stranded vehicles was effectively divided into two parts. From the center of the mess, victims were transported by snow mobile west to Lakeview Point where snowcats stood by to take them to Snow Valley Ski Area to warm up and reunite with other family members.

From the center to the east, they were transported by snow mobile to the dam where MARTA bus's were available to take the victims to the Discovery Center or St. Joseph's Catholic Church. The drivers were instructed to leave the keys in their ignitions so CHP personal could move them once they were dug out.

The two snowmobilers spent the entire day taking victims to the awaiting snowcats. They'd come to a car, wipe the snow off the windows, find a "frozen" family huddled together inside and take them out one at a time. Some of the children didn't have jackets, shoes or gloves! The Snowmobilers would try to shelter

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What's New in Volunteer Forces?

Last month, the Emergency Operations/Volunteer Forces Division received a new lieutenant. Glenn Grabiec, who was previously assigned as a sergeant in Barstow, was promoted to Lieutenant and assigned to this division. He replaces Virgil Merrett, who was promoted to captain and assigned to the Adelanto Corrections Facility project. Glenn has been a department member for 21 years starting as a reserve deputy in 1984. He has worked many assignments including West End, Chino Hills, Advanced Officer, Barstow, Victor Valley and Colorado River Station.

Glenn's personal background includes extensive experience in sport rock climbing. At an early age, he was a climbing instructor for the Sierra Club and also guided rock climbing

adventures for a private company. His professional experience related to this position includes being the SAR coordinator for the West Valley SAR Team from 1990 to 1993. He has also been involved in many SAR operations including the Negrette search (lost Boy Scout on San G), and the Prior/Pines search (two lost skiers on Baldy).

Glenn tells me he is looking forward to working with the great team of people in Volunteer Forces. He wants to continue to improve the divisions' ability to provide the best possible support to the SAR teams. He is looking for suggestions from all of the SAR teams on how to accomplish this goal. If you have suggestions, please email him at ggrabiec@sbcasd.org.

Hug-A-Tree

NASAR has taken over the Hug-A-Tree program, and they are in the process of updating the program. They are interested in contacting any past presenters. If you are a past presenter, or are interested in becoming a presenter please contact NASAR at :

hugatree@nasar.org

LOST, SUICIDE, OR ABDUCTED?

Cpl. Jim Mahan, Volunteer Forces Unit

There are many theories as to why Susan Russum is missing. Russum a 51 year old nurse from Cathedral City was in the City of La Quinta on Wednesday April 6th 2005 heading to the residence of one of her patients when she

became lost. From interviews and cell phone records investigators were able determine that Russum called her patient in the afternoon hours stating she was lost in the area of Avenue 54 near Madison St, which is near the Lake Cahuilla County Park. The following day hikers found Russum's vehicle in

the open desert area near a dirt hiking trail approximately 3 miles south of the lake.

Her vehicle a Mitsubishi Montero was found down an embankment off the trail high centered on a large rock. It appeared that whoever drove the vehicle there and got it stuck made several attempts to free the vehicle by placing sticks, rocks, and items from the car under the wheels. Inside the vehicle hikers found Russum's purse, wallet, and cell phone, but there was no sign of Russum or anyone else nearby. Thursday evening, SAR teams from Riverside County Sheriff Desert Search and Rescue were called in to conduct a hasty search. As the search began the weather turned bad. High winds blasted the area to the point where all foot and tire tracks were being erased including the tracks of the searchers themselves. The winds were reportedly so bad that searchers had to wear protective goggles to keep the blowing

sand out of their eyes. These conditions prevented Riverside County Sheriff's Aviation Unit from assisting in the search Thursday and parts of Friday.

On Friday the all call went out when Riverside County called OES and made a request for more searchers. The resource request included asking for Ground pounders, ATV/motorcycle units, Mounted Posse units, search dogs, and 4x4s. As the request was being filled for the Saturday morning operational period, Riverside Units continued to search throughout the day. Unfortunately they were still unable to locate Russum or turn up any clues.

Saturday morning came and SAR units from San Diego, Imperial, and San Bernardino County answered the call. At briefing time San Bernardino County SAR had over 40 SAR team members at the scene to aid in the search. The teams included members from Central/Mountain SAR, West Valley Posse, Morongo Mounted SAR, Morongo SAR, Search Dog team, San Gorgonio SAR, East Valley Posse and Valley of the Falls SAR. The teams were immediately deployed and were given some very rough areas to search. Some teams search areas were so bad and so dense with brush they stayed out all day searching. To give you a brief description of the area, the "flat" areas were extremely rocky, the hills went straight up, and there was so much brush you felt like you could walk across it. Other teams that finished their assigned areas sooner came back to the CP and gladly accepted another search assignment. The wind again played a factor, but was weaker than on Thursday and at times low enough that CHP's airship could assist. After an all day search Saturday Russum was still not found and units were asked to return on Sunday.




Lost

Sunday arrived and again San Bernardino County SAR units showed up in force. Sunday's numbers were once again around 40 searchers. This time the teams included members of the Cave team, West Valley SAR, Victor Valley SAR, Wrightwood/Phelan SAR, Oak Glen SAR, Search Dog team, Morongo Mounted SAR, and Morongo SAR. By Sunday the winds had almost completely died down and Riverside Sheriff's Helicopter spent a good portion of the day aiding in the search. The search Sunday lasted all day. Some new areas were searched and some repeat high probability areas. Unfortunately after all that hard work Russum was not located nor were any clues found. This was not a good sign. After a total of four days searching Riverside County Sheriff officials decided to suspend the desert search. This was based on the belief that the area near the vehicle was thoroughly searched and the lack of clues giving any leads.

Riverside Sheriff is not however stopping the investigation. After speaking with the family they are now investigating

the belief Russum may have been abducted and that one of her kidnappers may have dumped the vehicle in the desert. The family said Russum wears "a lot" of jewelry all the time and this may have been a robbery. The family insists that Russum was in no way suicidal and would not drive to the open desert to harm herself. They also said Russum had a recent ankle injury and was periodically using crutches. The family said if Russum had driven the vehicle to where it was found she would not have been able to hike very far from it and would have been found by searchers.

So the question remains, lost? Suicide? Or Abducted? Hopefully in time we will have our answer.

I do however want to take this time to thank all of our SAR members who were called up and came out to help. Not once did you complain about the working conditions, the assignments, or even the food. For that I truly mean **Thank You!** 

SAR "Finds"

John Amrhein, Volunteer Forces

Ok, so you worked a little overtime and have an extra couple of *ducats* to spend on a bivy bag to protect that nice new down bag you got for Christmas. The problem is you can't decide between the Bibler, the Feathered Friends, the Mountain Hardwear or the OR. You've canvassed your fellow SAR members for their favorites, but would still like a little more info before spending the hard earned bucks. Well here's an internet site for you. It's called Outdoor Review.com and can be found at www.outdoorreview.com. The site is divided into four main categories: Outdoors, Skiing, Snowboarding, and Fly Fishing. The Outdoors and Skiing sections are the most relevant to SAR and include consumer reviews on everything from hand held altimeters to XC skis. The site also has an outdoors forum, classified ads and a Hot Deals section.

Now, here's a site for all you cave lovers out there. It's called Karst Sports and

can be found at: <http://store.karstsports.com/index.html>. They carry the basic SAR backpacking, climbing stuff but also carry some of the specialized gear for cavers including over 37 books related to caving. They have discounted prices and offer free shipping with orders over \$100.00. So if you like dark, dank, cold, wet, muddy, tight places (my hats off to you) check it out.

I know there are many readers of *The Tracker* outside of our county and it's now your turn to kick down some of your secret SAR sites. So, please send them to me so I can make next months article a "Mutual Aid" article and give some publicity to other SAR units around the country. Send them Code 3 to: jamrhein@sbcscd.org

Also drop me a line if any of these sites have been of any help to you or if there are some sites you've found that should be steered clear of. D

An item appearing in this column does not constitute an endorsement by the SBCSD, the IESC, or the Staff of the Tracker. The content of this column is meant to be informational only and the reader should verify all claims, accuracy etc. for themselves.

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.

2005

April

Apr 16—Personal Vertical Skills Check-off

Hosted by West Valley SAR. Contact Bob Gattas (rgattas@earthlink.net) for information.

Apr 30—West Valley SAR 9th Annual Run for Rescue & Safety Fair

Visit www.thetracker.info/calendar/FlyerRun&Fair05.pdf for more information.

May

May 14-15—West Valley SAR Training

Rope Training. Contact Bob Gattas (rgattas@earthlink.net) for information.

May 18—IESARC Meeting

19:00 in the main conference room at SBSB HQ.

June

Jun 4—West Valley SAR Training

Night ELT exercise. Contact Bob Gattas (rgattas@earthlink.net) for more information.

July

Jul 16—West Valley SAR Training

Rope rescue training. Contact Bob Gattas (rgattas@earthlink.net) for more information.

Jul 16-17 & 23-24—Technical Rescue Basics Course

Contact Mike Schlax at VFU (msclax@sbcscd.org) to sign up. A \$50 deposit is required.

Jul 20—IESARC Meeting

19:00 in the main conference room at SBSB HQ.

August

Aug 20—West Valley SAR Training

Rope rescue training. Contact Bob Gattas (rgattas@earthlink.net) for more information.

September

Sep 17—West Valley SAR Training

Search exercise. Contact Bob Gattas (rgattas@earthlink.net) for more information.

Sep 21—IESARC Meeting

19:00 in the main conference room at SBSB HQ.

October

Oct 14-16—West Valley SAR Training

Map & Compass training. Contact Bob Gattas (rgattas@earthlink.net) for more information.

Oct 15—Personal Vertical Skills Check-off

Hosted by the Cave Rescue Team. Sheriff's Aviation in Rialto. Contact Mark Kinsey (mkinsey@caverescue.net) for more information.

November

Nov 19—West Valley SAR Training

Night scenario. Contact Bob Gattas (rgattas@earthlink.net) for more information.

December

*Course / Provider

BSAR / Vol Forces
CMC Rescue School
On Rope1
Rigging For Rescue
Ropes That Rescue
TRBC, PVSC, NCRC / Vol Forces
Mountaineering / Vol Forces
West Valley SAR Training

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www.ropesthatrescue.com/
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boobali@gte.net

Snow

them from the driving snow under their jackets but to no avail.

Meanwhile, at the dam, Team Commander Mike Saderup had arrived at the scene in his company's front end loader. He spent the day taking bucket after bucket of snow off the highway and dumping it over the side. His and Caltrans front end loaders were the only way to successfully remove the snow.

Team members Pat Burns, Summer Jones, Mike Westover, Roman Chruszez and Scott Williams handled traffic issues at the dam. Meanwhile Bruce Harter and Jim Lyon continued to remove victims by snowmobiles.


Just about the time that Harter and Lyon were wishing the team had more than just two working snowmobiles, (as it was taking forever to evacuate so many victims,) they observed three snowmobiles coming up from the west.

As Harter later said, "It was a sight for sore eyes!"

Led by Donna Newland, Commander of the Rim of the World SAR Team, but acting today as Patrol Leader of the Snow Valley Ski Patrol, she and two other patrollers immediately pitched in and began transported victims to the snowcats. When every one had been evacuated, Ms. Newland invited Harter and Lyon to Snow Valley to gas up for the ride home and get a cup of hot chocolate.

On the way back to Big Bear, every vehicle was double checked and flagged to alert the CHP and Caltrans that everyone was removed.

It was a long day but a good one. No one was seriously injured and everyone got out. Ironically, two days later, there were rockslides that closed the highway. Fortunately, all the cars had been removed by then.

In all, the evacuation demonstrated how well the many agencies involved could work together. It was truly a team effort and BVSAR was right in the middle of it. 

Classifieds

Contact the Editor 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.



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 SBSBD star on the side is microwavable. Available at Volunteer Forces.

SBSD SAR Pens \$10. High-quality, refillable ink pens with SBSBD 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!

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.

Air Rescue Team. The Air Rescue Team is selling T-shirts and baseball caps. To purchase them contact Diana at VFU (909-387-0641) or Helen at Aviation (909-356-3800). Go to www.cafepress.com/helicopter2classifieds to purchase these items.

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