

# China Lake Mountain Rescue Group

## Talus Pile November 2004, #133

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### TRAINING SCHEDULE

Nov 3 Wed First Aid Topic A First Aid Committee  
Nov 5-7 Fri-Sun Robinson Rockwell  
Nov 10 Wed First Aid Topic A First Aid Committee  
Nov 11-14 Thu-Sun OPEN  
**Nov 8 Mon Meeting Renta, Finco, Waters**  
Nov 17 Wed CPR First Aid Committee  
Nov 19-21 Fri-Sun Black, Diamond, Mary Austin Hinman  
Nov 25-28 Thu-Sun OPEN (Thanksgiving Day)  
Dec 3-5 Fri-Sun Langley East Ridge Hinman  
Dec 8 Wed CPR First Aid Committee  
Dec 11-12 Sat-Sun Desert Peak Finco  
**Dec 13 Mon Meeting Huey, Riendeau, Botham**  
**Dec 15 Wed Christmas Party Westbrook**  
Dec 17-19 Fri-Sun N. Palisade from Palisade Glacier Bishop  
Dec 25-26 Sat-Sun OPEN (Christmas Day)  
Dec 30-Jan 2 Thu-Sun Whitney Area Rockwell  
Jan 8-9 Sat-Sun OPEN  
**Jan 10 Mon Meeting C. Burge, Breitenstein, Myers**  
Jan 10-Feb 4 Mon-Fri Aconcagua, Argentina Rockwell  
Jan 14-17 Fri-Mon University Peak Huey  
Jan 22-23 Sat-Sun OPEN  
Jan-Feb TBD TBD Pear Lake Hut Roseman  
Jan 28-30 Fri-Sun Joshua Tree Roseman  
SUNDAY ROCK CLIMBING coordinated by Tom Roseman

*Gray skies shed gray tears;  
Summer, autumn gone, leaving  
Winter's icy stare.*

--Lura Osgood  
Pleasant Hill, California

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## OPERATION REPORTS

### **2004-09 17 July 2004 Search Joshua Tree National Park** Tom Roseman

We received a call on Saturday, 17 July from Sgt. Kirkland to help in a Joshua Tree search for Eric Sears, a 17-year-old male missing since Thursday. We were asked to be on site at Jumbo Rocks Campground at 0600 the next morning. We were also informed that two members of the San Geronimo team, Scott Johnson and Phil Calvert, had been killed in a head on crash Saturday morning in route to the search. Sheila Rockwell was the coordinator and made the callout. We met Sunday morning at 0300 at the donut shop to drive to Joshua Tree. Al Green, Daryl Hinman, Curtis Davis, Bud Gates, Tom Sakai, and I (Tom Roseman) made up the team. We arrived on time, parked, and went for breakfast. After breakfast, we got our gear together and waited for the morning briefing.

The search had grown to a large affair run by the National Park Service assisted by San Bernardino County and Riverside County. Nearly 100 people were at the morning brief. We were assigned to work with a member of the Joshua Tree Search and Rescue (JOSAR) team to search area B, a large pile of rocks. We were in the field and searching around 0900 that morning. We finished our assignment just after 1200 and took a break for lunch. After lunch, we were assigned to search area C, an adjacent large pile of rocks. We finished that assignment around 1600, and after debriefing, we left for Ridgecrest.

Eric was subsequently found, dead, several miles away from the main search area several days later. Al and I attended a memorial service for Scott Johnson the next Friday in Redlands. A service was also held that Saturday for Phil Calvert.

### **2004-10 (2004-OES-0423) 2 August 2004 Search Fawnskin Area** Linda Finco

Sgt. Mike Kirkland contacted our team president, Debbie Breitenstein, around 1400 on Sunday,

1 August. Debbie called the pager to find an operations leader, and I (Linda Finco) took the operation. San Bernardino County was requesting assistance in a search for 9-year-old David Gonzales. Sheila Rockwell coordinated the callout. Dennis Burge, Mike Renta, Mike Franklin, Bob Rockwell, Paul DeRuiter, Bob Huey, and Dan Bishop committed to the search.

David was camping with his family at the Hanna Flats Campground north of Big Bear Lake. He was last seen on Saturday, 31 July around 0800. We were requested to be at the command post at the Fawnskin Fire Station at 0700 the next morning.

We met at the rescue hut at 0400 and arrived at base camp at 0650. We signed in and got our gear together while we waited for our assignment. We received our assignment around 0900. The search areas were laid out in about 300-acre segments. The search area on Monday concentrated on the areas south and east of the

campground where David was camping with his family. Our search area started about a mile to the northwest of the town of Fawnskin. For part of our search area, our northern boundary was a road and our southern boundary was the road we drove in on to start our assignment. We were able to maintain our southern boundary for about 3/8 of a mile, but homes and fence lines forced us up and away from the road. We tracked our search area using GPS. We did two sweeps in our search area (basically splitting the area in half and searching down one half and back up the other half--but in reality, it was a lot of up and down in both directions). We did not search part of our quadrant because of the number of homes and fence lines in the area. We returned to the command post, and during the debrief, we discussed the areas we searched and the areas that we did not search or felt we may have missed in our segment.

The search was to continue on Tuesday, and San Bernardino County was requesting additional resources. The search would concentrate in the areas to the north and west of the campground on Tuesday. We left at 1600 and arrived back in Ridgecrest around 1845.

The search continued through Friday, 6 August with no clues and no sign of David. Expert trackers from the US Border Patrol were brought in, and they thought they found David's track leaving the campsite, but the track looped back to the campsite. It was determined that the prints were from the day previous to the day David went missing when he was walking around the campground with his family.

*Comments:*

1. San Bernardino County provided meals, which is never required but always appreciated.
2. The command post was unable to download our GPS tracks from our Rinos. We provided the cable, but their software did not recognize the Rino. Luckily, we had one eTrex Summit on our search assignment, so they were able to download those tracks to get a general idea of our search area. If we use the Rinos out of county we may want to check first to see whether their software will recognize the units. Otherwise, we should be prepared to use our other Garmin GPS units.
3. Every member had a TalkAbout or Rino, which made communications a lot easier (versus yelling all the time).
4. We need to ensure that the routes and tracks from past operations and training exercises are deleted after each use. We spent about 30 minutes prior to our search assignment getting the Rinos cleared of all past waypoints. Individuals also need to practice with the Rinos and other GPS units to become familiar with the menus and inputting waypoints.

**2004-11 9 August 2004 Search Frazier Park Tom Roseman**

I (Tom Roseman) received a call from Sgt. Mike Kirkland on Monday morning, 9 August, looking for support in an ongoing operation in the Frazier Park area. I paged for a coordinator. Carol Burge responded, and Sheila Rockwell assisted in the callout.

I asked people to meet at the hut by 0800 or as close to that as possible. Al Green, Bud Gates, Dave Doerr, Mike Franklin, Dave Miles, and I left the hut before 0900. We arrived near the Cherry Creek Campground around 1030. The search had been underway since the previous evening. Sgt. J.C. Plank was relieving Sgt. Kirkland as operations leader. Shirley, a 23-year-old female had wandered away during a rave party early on Sunday morning. Members of the Southern Kern team had located several tracks that were good leads but had lost the tracks in heavy ground cover-- mostly pine needles.

We were assigned a ridgeline to search along with five members of the Bakersfield team led by Mike Rogers. After inspecting the assigned area and discussing the probability of the subject being in the area, Rogers and I decided to leave two China Lake teams and a Bakersfield team in the assigned area and take a China Lake team and a Bakersfield team to the area of the possible tracks. We stopped by base operations, discussed our change in plans, and picked up a guide from the Southern Kern team to take us to the site. The tracks were located near a hilltop, so we decided to spread out and contour around the hill to try to find the tracks again leading away from the hill. After about 1/2 hour of looking, Miles found a good track matching the tracks at the top of the hill. I called the Bakersfield team over to attempt to jump track because the tracking was difficult in places. Miles and I lost the tracks. While we were trying to find the tracks again, Rogers and his teammate found Shirley's body several hundred yards down the hill in the direction of travel.

Shirley appeared to have died early Sunday morning of unknown causes. Sgt. Plank came to the site to verify the body and document the conditions in the area. Two Bakersfield members remained with the body to await the coroner while the rest of us returned to base operations. We debriefed with Sgt. Plank and the other teams and left for home. We arrived home around 1930 that evening.

#### **2004-12 (2004-OES-0445) 20 August 2004 Transit Yosemite Linda Finco**

CLMRG received a page from Sgt. Norm Simon, Kern County Sheriff's Office, around 1620 on Friday, 20 August. Our assistance was requested for a search for a missing female hiker in Yosemite National Park. They wanted teams to meet at the SAR cache in Yosemite Valley at 0700 on Saturday. They would be fielding teams via helicopters into the backcountry for 8- to 10-mile search areas.

The report was that Michael B. Virga, or Michael Treut-Virga, a 57-year-old woman from Bakersfield started a hike of the John Muir Trail (JMT) in Yosemite Valley on 12 August heading for Mt. Whitney. She was scheduled to pick up food caches at Tuolumne Meadows and Reds Meadow (in the Inyo National Forest) on 15 August and 18 August, respectively. As of 20 August, she had not picked up either cache. Rangers were notified that Virga was overdue on 19 August and began an initial search of the JMT and neighboring trails. They also posted trail blocks at all critical trailheads.

Carol Burge coordinated the callout, and Janet Westbrook assisted with the telephoning. Mike Franklin, Dan Bishop, Tom Sakai, Ellen Schafhauser, and I (Linda Finco) committed to the search. Franklin, Bishop, and I met at the rescue hut at 2000 and left around 2100. Schafhauser was going to leave a little later in the evening, and we would pick up Sakai at his condo in Mammoth. The plan was to drive to Mammoth and stay at Sakai's condo, then get up the next morning and drive to the SAR cache in Yosemite Valley. At 2045, we received a call that searchers had voice contact with Virga, and we were requested to return home. We arrived back in Ridgecrest at 2130.

As reported later on <http://www.nps.gov/yose/news/>, searchers from Fresno County Search and Rescue made voice contact with a female hiker at approximately 2030. Following her voice, they reached the Virga around 2100. They were able to confirm that it was Virga and that she was in good health. She was found near Moraine Dome. She had lost the trail, set up a camp, and attempted to contact rangers using smoke signals. Searchers were able to focus on that area after Mono County Search and Rescue interviewed a hiker who had seen her in that vicinity.

#### **2004-13 16 October 2004 Recovery Canebrake (Kern County) Linda Finco**

CLMRG received a page from the sheriff around 1410 on Saturday, 16 October. The request was to assist the sheriff in the recovery of human remains in the Canebrake area. Sgt. Plank stated he was receiving the information third hand, but hunters had found a duffle bag on the top of a cliff. Looking off the cliff, they saw bones. The terrain was steep, and at the time, it was reported that it might be too steep to hike down to the bones. So it was decided that we would bring technical gear to rappel off the cliff and to raise the remains if required.

Mary Schmierer coordinated the callout, and Debbie Breitenstein helped with the telephoning. Bud Gates, Dan Bishop, Mike Franklin, and I (Linda Finco) met at the hut at 1500, loaded up the vehicle with the technical gear, and headed for the Canebrake area. When we arrived, sheriff's vehicles were parked along the road, so it was obvious where to stop. The coroner met us and stated that two members from Kern Valley had hiked back in with the hunters and were at the site. The bones could be reached from below, so no technical gear would be required.

We left the vehicles at 1545 and arrived at the site around 1620. After confirming with Kern Valley that they had documented the scene for the coroner, we started to collect the bones. Gates and Bishop went to the top of the cliff to collect the gear that was in the duffle bag. The duffle bag had rotted from the weather and could not be used to carry out the gear. We arrived back at the vehicles at 1730.

The sheriff offered to buy us dinner in Ridgecrest, so we dropped our gear off at the hut and went to Nickoletti's for dinner.

Coroner's investigators said subsequently that the remains have been identified as those of a Salinas man, Peter William (Bill) Atkinson, who disappeared while vacationing in 1992.

*I was too shy to socialize, and I didn't know how to drink, so I went camping.*

--David Drake

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## **TRIP REPORT**

Mt. Whitney

18-19 September 2004

By Eric Toler

Bob Rockwell, guest Sue Faris, and I left Ridgecrest Saturday morning about 0800, stopped in Lone Pine for the permit, and started this scheduled hike around 1030. The weather was clear and sunny with only an occasional light breeze. By the time we reached Mirror Lake, however, clouds were beginning to appear from the north-northwest, and a very cold wind began to blow, gusting to around 30 mph. Mirror Lake actually had white caps on it!

Just below Trailside Meadow, we ran into a group of four ladies who asked me where they could camp to get out of the wind. I told them that our group had the same discussion a little while earlier. Then I suggested to them that we ask "this guy" because Bob was almost to where we were standing. One of the ladies asked me, "Has he climbed Whitney before?" I said, "Oh, yeah, a couple of times." She seemed excited (and a little impressed) and exclaimed to one of her friends, "Hey, this guy has climbed Whitney a couple of times!" Bob informed them that we were going to take a look at Consultation Lake before checking Trail Camp for sheltered camping sites. They seemed interested, and he invited them to follow us up the shortcut from Trailside Meadow. They didn't seem to be comfortable on the terrain and fell behind quickly. We checked out a nice site at Consultation Lake but decided to go on to Trail Camp, where we found "home" for the night just above the solar toilets. Bob went back to check on the four ladies but didn't see them.

The clouds were covering us now, and the winds were not quite sustained but seemed close to it. Beautiful lenticular cloud formations were to the east over the valley. We fixed dinner and were zipped up in our bivy sacks by about 1830. The wind continued all night making it difficult to sleep and even included some snow flurries. The temperature dipped to about 25 degrees. Morning for us came about 0630. I wasn't feeling so good, which was surprising because I felt GREAT the day and night before. But after the immortal words "There's hot water" one hears on an overnight with Bob that break the morning silence like a bird's song signifying the start of a new day, I drank my cup of coffee and felt better. We packed for the day, stashed our gear, left

camp about 0730, and headed for the Trail Camp lake inlet to get water. Wind and cold were to be the order of the day. We wound our way up the switchbacks and arrived at Trail Crest around 1000 to be greeted by ~40-mph winds and 15-degree temperatures. Keeping water in its liquid state was going to be key in getting to the summit and back. During the first few hundred feet of travel after leaving Trail Crest, Sue decided it was just too cold and headed back down. Bob and I decided to continue. Quite a few people were turning around along the way because of the conditions. A large cloud bank to the northwest socked in the summit by the time we arrived at 1230. Only a few people were wandering around the summit. Then we opened the door to the hut and found the rest of them--it was packed! There must have been 12-15 people in there. Having no view and lots of cold wind, we headed back. About half-way down the switchbacks I started to feel bad again. When we arrived back at Trail Camp at 1500 to pick up our gear, I felt really bad. Suddenly, that burger and fries I had craved for the past couple of days didn't sound so good anymore. Anyway, we packed up and headed down. Bob and Sue got their burgers, I felt better (but still not hungry), and we were back in Ridgecrest by 2000. PS Sue said she had run into the four ladies we saw the day before. They had stayed at the site we had originally scouted by Consultation Lake. The next morning, however, they decided it was too cold up there, so they went back to the Portal, presumably abandoning their plans of a Whitney climb.

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## **SUMMARY OF PAST TRIPS**

Date Location Participants Notes

18-20 Jun Whitney East Buttress Runkle, Bishop, Huey, Gates

Dan and I (Walter) climbed as one team. Bob and Bud as 2nd team. Hiked in on Friday and spent the night at Iceberg Lake. Most of the snow is gone from the chute so ice axe and crampons were not needed. Started climbing shortly after 0600. Dan & I were topped out at 1300, Bud and Bob a couple of hours later. Spent Saturday night again at the lake and hiked out Sunday morning. Dan & I swung lead for the first five pitches. I led the first, third and fifth and Dan led the second and fourth. After the 5th pitch (ending just below the Pee Wee) I wasn't quite sure of the route so at that point I became a "lead hog" and led the last three pitches in case I led Dan astray. After the eighth pitch we unroped, climbed a short section of 4th class and then climbed mostly 3rd class the rest of the way to the summit. We climbed on a 50 meter rope.

It looked to me like Bob led pitches 1, 3, and 6 while Bud led pitches 2, 4, 5, 7 and 8. Bud and Bob did a few more roped pitches than Dan and I. I'm pretty sure they also used a 50 meter rope.

26-27 Jun NE Ridge Miles and guest

2-4 Jul Meysan Canyon Traverse Rockwell, Bishop, Hinman, Huey, guest Climbed Lone Pine Peak, Peak 13985, LeConte, Mallory, Irvine, and Candlelight.

5 Jul Gould Peak Toler and Doerr

9 Jul White Punks on Dope Runkle and Hinman Great day and a great climb (5.8).

10-11 Jul Summer Class Trips

Trail Peak Breitenstein, Linda, Bud, and Al Had seven students show. Six made it to the summit. Nice easy day.

Dragon Franklin, Renta, Gina, and 5 students Roped everyone across. Good glissading on way down.

Thor Sakai, Runkle, D. Burge, Doerr, and 9 students Everyone made it to the summit.

13 Jul Whitney East Face Hinman, Roseman Grade III, 5.4, 9 pitches in one 14 hour day

16-18 Jul Lone Pine & Whitney Portal.

100th Anniversary

of Whitney Trail. Rockwell, Castro, C.Burge, Doerr, Green, Toler, D.Burge, Riendeau, Finco, Sakai, Schafhauser 11 people assisted, which is 1/3 of roster.

Problem with advertising, so not too many visitors.

19 Jul Iceberg Lake Runkle, Franklin, and guests Clare and Dennis Reda and Barry Niesen

Mike and Barry went over to climb the Fishhook Arête on Russell while Clare and I (Walter) went up to climb the East Buttress of Mt. Whitney. Dennis was going to wait and then go up the mountaineers. Clare & Walter were on summit at 1050 as thunder was starting. Barry & Mike decided to rap off after climbing up 5 pitches.

24-25 Jul Summer Class Overnights

Split Hinman, Franklin, Bishop 3 students and 3 members

Independence & University Roseman, D. Burge, Doerr, Miles

Did Independence on Saturday. Only 2 students went for University on Sunday. One made it with 4 members.

Morgan Finco, Breitenstein, Green, C. Burge, and 5 students All CLMRG members and 3 students made the summit.

Date Location Participants Notes

27-28 Jul Temple Crag Runkle and Hinman

Climbed Moon Goodess Arête (5.8). Hiked in to a spot above Third Lake on Tuesday evening. Wednesday morning we got up at 0430 and roped up at 0650. We swung lead with Daryl taking the odd and me taking the even pitches. It took us 16 pitches on our 50 meter rope. We unroped at the top of the climb just shortly after 1400. By 1620 we were back to our morning stash spot and we got back to the parking lot about 1925.

8 Aug Granite Knob Hinman, Hueber 4 climbs 5.8 to 5.9

11 Aug Temple Crag, Venusian Blind Arête Hinman, Roseman Grade IV, 5.7, 12

pitches

13-15 Aug Merriam & Royce C. Burge, Bishop, Green Climbed Merriam; Need to go back and do Royce

18-23 Aug Granite Peak, Montana Huey, Roseman

We left Ridgecrest on Wednesday and were at the road head by Friday 0900. We hiked 5,330 feet in 8 hours. Up the next morning at 0400. Left site at 0515. We crossed the saddle at Tempest Mountain at around 0600 and followed the ridgeline and slopes DOWN about 700 feet to the saddle between Tempest and Granite. We summited in 3 hours and 45 minutes with a gain of 3,150 feet

Granite Peak in Montana at 12,799 feet is the highest point in Montana. 8480 feet elevation gain and 21 miles round trip. Class 1,2,3,4, and one 5th class move. Drove 19 hours there, hiked one day, climbed the next day, and then out. Drove back through Wyoming and saw Yellowstone Park and the Tetons.

29-31 Aug Fishhook Arête Runkle, Franklin, Hinman, and guest Clare Reda

I (Walter) swung lead with Mike, leading all the odd number pitches. Daryl led all the pitches for himself and Clare. We did the climb in 8 pitches and topped out on summit of Mt Russell. We hiked in on Sunday and camped at Iceberg Lake. We were all on the summit shortly after 1300 on Monday. Made it to the Portal by 1945 and home by 2200.

3-6 Sep Tuolumne Meadows Finco, Roseman, Gates, Franklin, Najera-Niesen, Doerr, Renta, Westbrook, Botham, and 10 guests Beautiful weather. Everyone climbed, hiked, ate, drank, and enjoyed the meadow. Doerr and Renta climbed Dana.

10 Sep Middle Palisade Runkle, Davis, and guests Dan Goriesky and Charles (ESDP) Middle Palisade is a hike of about 15 miles round trip with about 6200 feet of gain. The last 900 feet is some excellent 3rd class climbing. We drove up the night before to Glacier Lodge trail head. In the morning, started around 0500 and summited approximately at 1100. Back to the cars by 1715. Great weather and fun climb with everyone summing.

Lamont Peak Green, Schafhauser, C. Burge Morning and afternoon hike

Whitney Portal Roseman and guest Bill Stronge Climbed until weather hit and then went down to Alabama Hills.

10-12 Sep Palisades from the West Side Huey, Schafhauser, and 2 guests Ellen opted to fish in the lakes. Camped at Thunderbolt Pass.

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## **DONATIONS**

Terri Mitchell

**CLMRG gratefully acknowledges recent gifts from the following friends:**

United Way funds:

2nd Quarter CFC designations

2nd Quarter United Way designations  
2nd Quarter Kern Mono Inyo disbursement  
2nd Quarter Mojave disbursement  
3rd Quarter CFC designations  
3rd Quarter United Way designations  
Cub Scout Pack 321  
Cub Scout Pack 341 For opening the climbing wall on base  
Robert L. Dow, M.D. & Merre-Lyn Dow "To honor Robby's memory and the  
Group's  
extraordinary service to your community.  
Our warmest wishes, Mimi and Bob Dow"

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## **SCREE**

Check our web page at <http://www.clmrg.org>.  
Check the California Region's web page at <http://www.crmra.org>.  
Newsletters from other MRA groups, catalogues, etc. are available in the hut.  
All telephone numbers in The Talus Pile are area code 760 unless noted otherwise.

### **Voice of experience?**

Rockwell's warning regarding stoves: If the canister stove is tipped while burning, liquid fuel goes into the burner and makes a relatively large fireball. In a tent, this is not a good thing.