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**CHINA LAKE MOUNTAIN  
RESCUE GROUP**  
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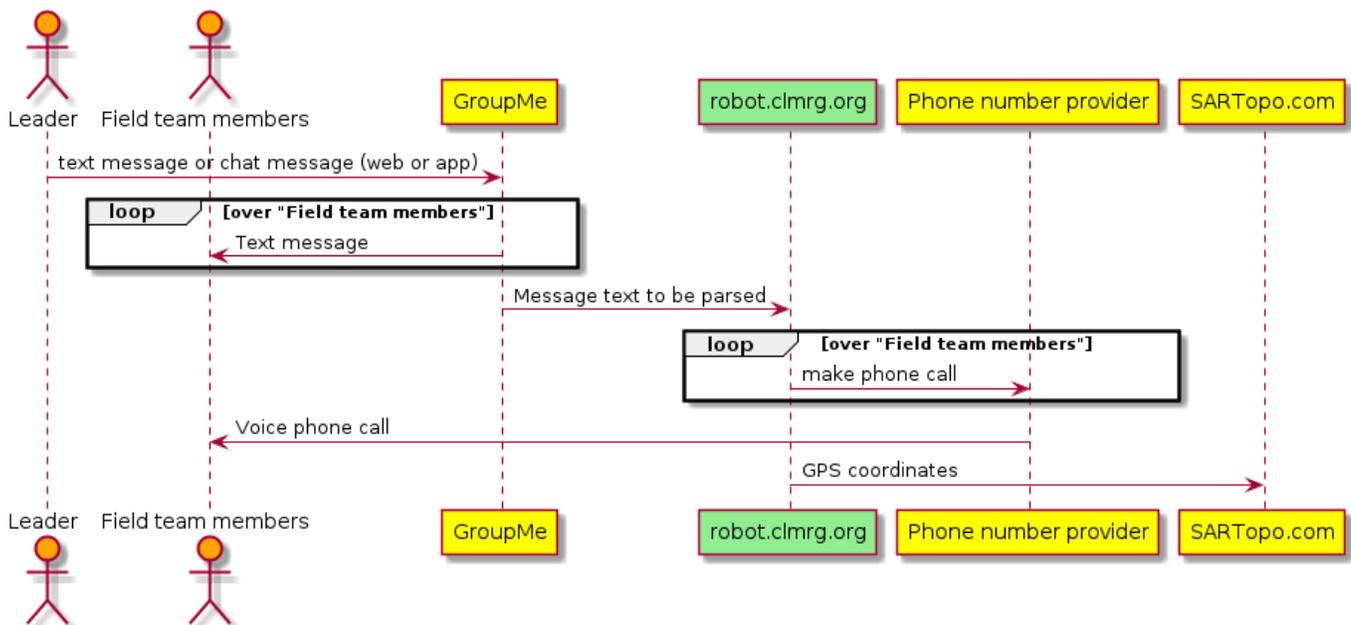
### SCREE

See our newly revised web page at [clmrg.org](http://clmrg.org). and [clmrg.org/members](http://clmrg.org/members)  
Also the California Region's web page at [crmra.org](http://crmra.org).  
Find us on Facebook – China Lake Mountain Rescue Group



**CLMRG is funded in part by United Way of Indian Wells Valley and is a member of the Combined Federal Campaign.  
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**CLMRG Automated Callout system      Simons**



We have a new wonderful Callout system. Nathan Simons, our IT guru, wrote a program that will alert every member's phones with text and voice message for an operation. Members then quickly text an answer "yes" or "no" if they would be available for the operation. The system recognizes the first Leader who answers Yes as OL, Operation Leader, and the first coordinator who answers Yes as Op Coordinator, with 2nd Coordinator as telephoner. It can recognize GPS coordinates and add them to our working online operations map. We get a quick response to let our Sheriff know if we can field a team or not. It was Beta tested last year, but now it is the way we operate. Saves many phone calls, and we have a written record right away. It will plot GPS coordinates on a SARTopo map.

We have been meeting by web video conferencing bridged with a phone number. It's handy for sharing documents and screens. It is convenient for everyone including our Sheriff who can call from Bakersfield and keeps meetings short and efficient, but we don't get to see each other. Most of the team has been vaccinated, so we'll soon be trying in-person meetings, carefully!

## **Operations January – May, 2021**

### **2021-01 Search, Missing Children, Silver Saddle Ranch, California City, Kern Co. Finco**

On Tuesday evening, 12 January 2021, around 1730 we received a request from the Kern County Sheriff (KCSO) to support a search the following day. Dave Miles sent out the CLMRG callout text Linda Finco accepted to be the Operations Leader and Terry Mitchell would be the coordinator. Sheila Rockwell assisted with the callout. Miles, Dan Bishop, Tom Roseman, Tom Sakai, Phil Cash, David Jensen, Nick Pio, Andrew Cammenga, Matt Kubik and Scott Paniccia committed to the search.

We met at the hut at 0800 on 13 January. The Command Post was at the entry gate for the Silver Saddle Ranch near California City. On the way there Sakai's vehicle got a flat tire. We rearranged vehicles and left Sakai to replace the tire (he had AAA) and then to return home. We were going to be on dirt roads for the next 25 miles and a spare donut tire was not suited for the terrain. We arrived at the muster point around 0900 where we met Sgt. Bittle (KCSO). Members from the Bakersfield team were already fielded and the Desert team were getting their off-road vehicles ready. Our search for the day was related to an on-going missing person case. Back on 21 December 2020, the adoptive parents of a 4 year old and 3 year old reported them missing from their backyard. A tip had been received that a vehicle similar to the family's was seen at the Ranch around that time. The Bakersfield team was searching the pond on the premises, and the Desert team and CLMRG would be searching the rest of the grounds. The Bakersfield Police Department was also on site and they searched the facilities (building, barns, etc.). We completed the search around 1130. Nothing was found. We were released and returned home via California City and secured at the hut at 1250.

### **2021-02 Search, Missing Motorcyclists, Dove Springs, Kern Co. Miles**

Saturday night, 13 February 2021, at 2200, Linda Finco received a call from Sgt. Kimmel with the Kern County Sheriff (KCSO). Sgt. Kimmel requested our assistance in a search in the Dove Springs area. Missing were a 45 year old father and his 16 year old son. It was reported the two left their dirt bikes somewhere and headed off on foot. It was very windy. The Desert team was on site and had been searching for about 6 hours, but had not found the abandoned bikes nor the father and son. Sgt. Kimmel requested

we meet him at the Command Post on SC 103 at 0700, Sunday, 14 February. Finco initiated the callout using our CLMRG callout calling system. Dave Miles responded to be the operation leader. Terry Mitchell coordinated the callout and Debbie Breitenstein assisted with the callout. Finco, Nick Pio, Phil Cash, Scott Paniccia, and Joe Kromphardt committed to the operation.

Members met at the hut at 0600. We split into 3 two-man teams taking 3 vehicles. We arrived at the CP just a little before 0700. Sgt. Kimmel arrived shortly after and started collecting information for the search. Sgt. McNeil drove to the family's campsite in Jawbone Canyon to gather information. It was reported that the father and son left yesterday morning to ride the Regulator Trail Loop. Mid-morning they texted they had a problem with one of their bikes, so they left the bikes in a canyon and were going to try to hike to a location to flag someone down. It also appeared the son may have some injury, but was OK to walk.

As a search plan was being initiated Sgt. Kimmel was contacted by dispatch at 0752 that the father and son had made contact again and were OK and gave an approximation to their location. They were at road marker MK24 on a ridge and could see the Honda proving track across Highway 14. The Desert team already had searchers in that approximate area, so they were sent to continue on MK24 to locate the father and son. CLMRG fielded our members to drive out to the area to assist as needed. At around 0845 the Desert team had located the father and son and would be assisting them back to the CP. CLMRG returned to the CP to turn in radios and we were released at 0915. The team secured at the hut at 1000.

### **2021-03 Search/Recovery Mt. Waterman, Los Angeles Co. Simons**

An alert went out over our CLMRG callout system on Friday, March 12 at 1250. Los Angeles County was requesting assistance in the search for a woman reported missing when she did not return from a day hike on 7 March. Since the family did not know where the woman went hiking the LA County Sheriff spent almost a week canvassing the various trailheads and finally located her vehicle on March 11<sup>th</sup> at the Buckhorn Trailhead. Nathan Simons accepted as operations leader. Carin Miles coordinated the callout. Nick Pio and Roger Pio committed to the search. The decision was made to drive down Friday night so the team could get good rest for the next morning. The team drove to a Sheriff's station house where we were able to bunk indoors overnight.

The next morning we drove to the Command Post and were briefed on the search effort for the day. The search was for 37 year old Narineh Avakian. Narineh left for a day hike on Sunday, 7 March, but did not leave an itinerary with family or friends. Her vehicle was located on Thursday, 11 March, at the Buckhorn Trailhead. There are numerous trails departing from this trailhead that needed to be searched. Also complicating the search was that heavy snow had fallen in the last few days covering the trails. Our assignment was to be inserted on the summit of Mt. Waterman and then spread out and attempt to cover both sides of the trail from the top of the mountain down to the intersection with the Twin Peaks trail and then do the same with the Twin peaks trail down to the road where we would radio to be picked up. Our team was flown in via helicopter to the summit of Mt. Waterman. The helicopter inserted us via their winch. On the North face of the mountain it was decidedly chilly and fairly snowy. The trail was not discernable for the most part. There was some crust but no ice and snowshoes were a must for the powder we had to travel through. We did not posthole on snowshoes, but still had to work hard going uphill. Once we neared the crossover from North to South aspect of the mountain, the trail became more obvious, the snow cover lessened, and the slopes became steeper. For a good part of our search we had to remain in single file for safety. We met up with the other team that had flown in on the same helicopter flight with us. We encountered cross-country ski tracks. We ate lunch at a trail intersection and then separated from the other team to continue our assignments. From this point, we could manage to straddle the trail and search mounds of snow and under felled trees, but most snow mounds were obvious from visual inspection that they were not the result of a person who was down and covered in snow. As we approached the

intersection with the Twin peaks trail, Nick Pio managed to spot the toe of a boot just sticking out of the snow right next to the trail, underneath a brushy tree. Digging, we found it was a female person. Simons radioed in the location of the subject while Roger and Nick continued to dig. Nick then found a pack matching the description for our subject. Once we confirmed it was our subject by visual inspection of her driver's license in her pack, we confirmed with CP that the subject had been located, deceased. 1312.

The recovery effort took some time since the sheriff's helicopter had to come to the area and record video for the coroner but eventually they had one of their air crew drop in on their winch. He helped Nick and Roger get winched into the helicopter while Simons stayed to help with the recovery. While the helicopter took Nick and Roger back to the CP, the crewman took pictures and videos of the site. We then packaged the subject to be airlifted out. We were all winched out of the area. Once back at the CP our team was debriefed and we drove home. We secured at the hut at 2027.

## **2021-04 Search Huntington Lake, Fresno Co. Finco**

Tuesday evening, 6 April 2021, around 1905, Sgt. Kimmel, Kern County Sheriff (KCSO), contacted Linda Finco with an Office of Emergency Services (OES) mutual aid request for a search in the Huntington Lake area for a missing 85-year old male. They were requesting teams to be at the Command Post at the Huntington Lake Resort at 0700 Wednesday morning for the briefing. No other information was known at that time. Finco started the CLMRG callout for the team. By 1935 it was apparent CLMRG was not going to be able to get a team to respond for the 0700 briefing on Wednesday. However we had a team that could leave Wednesday around 1000 and be available to search Wednesday evening through Friday. Sgt. Kimmel verified with OES that this response was acceptable and once we got the confirmation we continued with our coordination for the operation. Linda Finco was the operation leader and Carin Miles coordinated the callout. Tom Sakai, Nick Pio, Roger Pio and Andrew Cammenga all committed to the operation. Snow was still around the Huntington Lake area at the 7000 foot level. Members were told to include snowshoes, crampons, ice axe, harness and helmet along with their overnight gear.

We met at the hut at 1000 and departed around 1030. We arrived at the CP at 1550 and checked in with the sheriff, Sgt. Scott Weishaar. Assignments were wrapping up for the day, but Sgt Weishaar had an assignment in the area that he wanted us to complete that afternoon. He told us to wait for the dinner coming in and then we could go on our assignment. The assignment was to search all out buildings and unlocked/abandoned vehicles along the lake shore road. We completed our assignment in just over an hour. Camping was available right next to the CP, but the local Fire Captain, Freddie Wienholz, invited us to stay in their fire station just down the road. No fire personnel are in the fire house during the night unless they are responding to a call. The fire station is heated and the Captain told us we could help ourselves to whatever we wanted in water, Gatorade and snacks that were still in the station leftover from the Creek Fire last year. Also a shower and towels were available upstairs. We appreciated the offer and happily accepted.

The briefing for Thursday was at 0700. The search was for Augusto Zarate, 85 years old, who was vacationing with his family in the area. They rented a cabin for the week. Augusto and the family went sledding on Monday, 5 April. Augusto returned toward the cabin on his own. When the family returned to the cabin just a little while later Augusto was not there. The family reported Augusto missing and the Fresno County sheriff did a hasty search that night in the area. Fresno County Search and Rescue members searched the area more thoroughly on Tuesday. During the investigation on Tuesday, surveillance video captured Augusto walking away from the cabin. A witness was found who told the sheriff he gave Augusto a ride down to the basketball courts near the lake shore. Other surveillance video captured Augusto walking along the road near the lake. There were no other clues. Augusto is from Peru,

so although he is 85 years old, he is acclimated to the altitude and is still active. However Augusto is not familiar with the area and could become disoriented. Augusto was also upset about his family not wanting him to return to Peru. There was some concern that maybe Augusto tried to hitchhike back to Fresno. The sheriff was keeping in contact with bus stations and airports and there had been no sightings of Augusto. Our assignment for the day included two areas. We would be transported via snow cat to the Potter trailhead along the Kaiser Pass Road at the 7800 foot level. Our area to search was bounded by the Potter Creek to the west. We were primarily looking for tracks (any track since we did not know the shoeprint), any clues and we called out for Augusto. We departed the CP around 0800. We brought snowshoes since we were not sure of the snow conditions. Searches said they were post holing the previous day on some snow up to their knees and on the north slopes post holing to the waist in some areas. We were dropped off at our start point and began to search our area.



Within the first few minutes of our search, Cammenga's snowshoes broke- the entire binding that holds the boot to the deck of the snowshoe. Finco had one of the straps on her binding break. Nick had some straps to tie gear to his pack, so we were able to make a repairs. Other than the equipment issues, the search assignment went well. We could hear other teams calling out Augusto's name, so we felt confident that if he were able to respond we would hear him. The snow created a nice track trap. We found old ski tracks, but no other tracks. By 1230 we had finished our first assignment and we had our lunch dropped to us from a

helicopter. Around 1300 we started our second assignment. At the start we split into two teams, Nick Pio, Cammenga and Sakai took one side of the Rancheria Creek and Finco and Roger Pio the other side. This search area followed the creek to the Eastwood Visitor Center and then departed the creek to the southwest and ended at the highway. As we ascended out of the creek, the north facing slopes made travelling difficult without snowshoes. We had less than a mile of area to cover, so N. Pio, R. Pio and Cammenga continued to complete the search area, while Finco and Sakai returned to the vehicle and then drove to pick up the team on the highway. We completed our second assignment around 1530 and returned to the CP. After our debrief and dinner, the CP released our team for the night and we returned to the fire station. The Captain brought in cots for our team for the second night.

The briefing for Friday morning was at 0700. There was some hopeful updates from the previous day. We had heard throughout the day, Team 1 and 2 had found possible tracks. A chevron tread which appeared to be a tennis shoe and a post hole mark always nearby that could be a walking stick. The track Team 1 followed left the cabin area heading east consistently along a contour. It appeared the individual was avoiding snow and other obstacles (downed trees, large scrub brush). The track was lost during the night in an area of boulders. Prior to our team being given an assignment I told the sheriff about our equipment failures and only having three members that could be assigned in areas where snowshoes may be required. The sheriff had a good assignment for a team of three. The team would be flown in to their starting point at Potter Pass to search an area and then descend via the Potter Cutoff trail looking for any tracks and hopefully creating an eastern containment boundary. Sakai gave his snowshoes to Cammenga. So the team fielded was N. Pio, R. Pio and Cammenga. The other team was helicoptered to their search area which was located northeast of the last known tracks at the time. During the helo ride the pilot took a

couple passes over the search area giving the us a good “big picture” of the search area. During this time a single set of tracks was observed in the snow continuing east. The helicopter dropped the team off in the middle of the search area on the Potter Pass Cutoff Trail at 0900. There was a decent amount of snow requiring the use of snowshoes. The team proceeded east close to their northern boundary before cutting south toward the tracks that had seen from the air. The tracks were located but it was determined the tracks were fairly old and the stride was too large. The team continued back west and completed the perimeter of their search area. They continued down sweeping the Potter Pass trail. Snow remained fairly deep, post-holing to their knees but became more patchy during the descent. Lunch was air dropped to the team. The team continued until they reached the HWY 168, Kaiser Pass intersection where they were picked up and returned to the CP for debrief at approximately 1430. CLMRG departed the CP at 1510 to head home. CLMRG had a second team arriving later on Friday to continue searching through the weekend (see Operation Report 2021-05). Sheila Rockwell also started the coordination for a third operational period beginning on Monday, 12 April. We stopped in Bakersfield to fill up the sheriff’s vehicle at the KCSO fuel farm, and then stopped to get dinner. We secured at the rescue hut at 2130.

## **2021-05 Search Huntington Lake con’t. Fresno Co. Swanson**

The Office of Emergency Services (OES) sent out another mutual aid request for additional search teams for the on-going search in the Huntington Lake area for Augusto Zarate (see Operation Report 2021-04). On Thursday, 8 April at 1200 Sgt. Kimmel, Kern County Sheriff (KCSO), contacted CLMRG to request additional searchers. The callout went out and Luke Swanson took the Operation and Carin Miles coordinated the callout. Nathan Simons and Mike Derkey also committed to the search. CLMRG left the hut on Friday, April 9, shortly after 1300, with the plan to drive to the Command Post and stay overnight in order to start searching on Saturday morning. The first China Lake team was returning to Ridgecrest on Friday, after searching for multiple days. The Huntington Lake Fire Station extended the invitation to our team to stay indoors as we arrived at night.

After meeting at the CP at 0700, our team, designated team 8, was assigned search area J4. This was the eastern most search area. Jeeps were used to provide transport to the search area, as the roads were difficult to travel due to snow. The team began covering the search area, starting at the south east corner and moving west along the southern border. The terrain was on a hillside with trees, brush, and occasional rocks/cliffs. There was some spotty snow, but not enough for snowshoes to provide any benefit although the team carried them. It took about 2 hours to get to the south west corner of the search area, where the team stopped for lunch. Shortly after lunch around 1200, radio traffic indicated that the subject was found. After several additional confirming radio transmissions, the team returned to the nearby road and walked back to the starting point of the search. Although radio communications were consistently heard by CLMRG, the CP could not copy any communications from our team. However, cell reception was good and enabled communication. The team was picked up by the Jeeps shortly after 1300 and returned to the CP. As expected per radio traffic and confirmed upon returning to the command post, the subject was found deceased. The team returned to Ridgecrest that afternoon/evening, reaching the hut and ending the operation at 2000 Saturday, April 10.

## **2021-06 Alert, Angeles Crest, Los Angeles Co. Finco**

Tuesday afternoon, 14 April 2021, around 1600, Sgt. Kimmel, Kern County Sheriff (KCSO), contacted Linda Finco with an Office of Emergency Services (OES) mutual aid request for a search in the Angeles Crest area for a missing 45 year old male. They were requesting teams to be at the Command Post at Newcombs Ranch at 0730 Wednesday morning for the briefing. Finco started the CLMRG callout for

the team. Sheila Rockwell coordinated and Nick Pio and Roger Pio committed to the operation. At 1630 the call came for the stand down; the subject had been located and airlifted to safety.

## **2021-07 Search, Lost Hiker on Mt. Whitney Inyo Co. Simons**

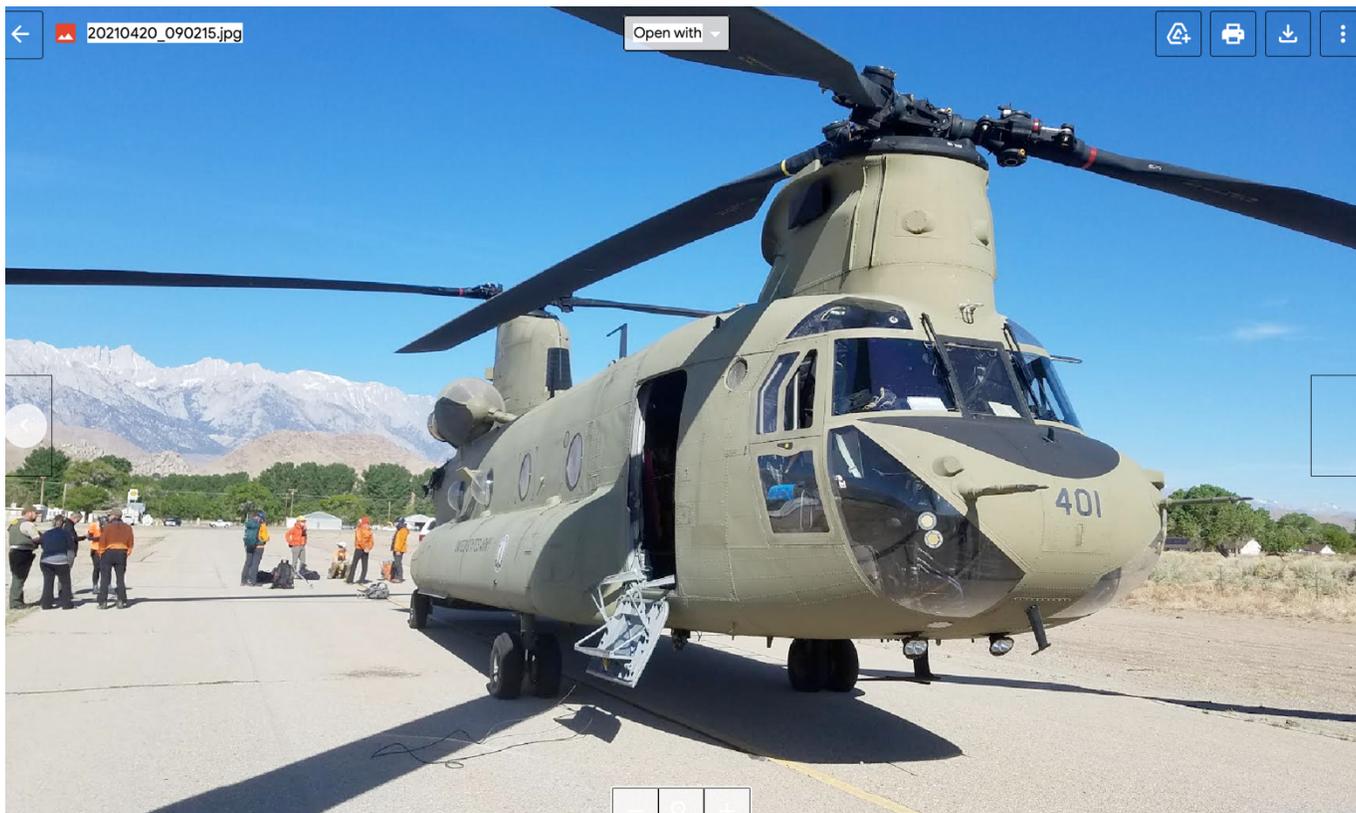
An alert went out over the CLMRG callout system on Tuesday, April 19 at 1156. Inyo County was requesting assistance in a search for an overdue hiker. It was reported that on Thursday, April 15, Saulo Sifuentes Escalante, a 36 year old man from Conroe, Texas had planned on a day hike of Mt. Whitney. He was reported overdue on Sunday, 18 April. Inyo County Search and Rescue searched the area on Monday, April 19 with the assistance of CHP Inland air Operations helicopter H80. Nothing was located so additional searchers were requested. Nathan Simons, accepted as operations leader. Sheila Rockwell accepted the call to be the coordinator, and Janet Westbrook assisted. Roger Pio, Mike Derkey and Nick Pio committed to the operation. CLMRG met at the hut at 0300 Wednesday, April 20 to drive to the Inyo County Sheriff substation in Lone Pine for the brief at 0700. The Inyo County sheriff provided us breakfast (including fresh strawberries!) and briefed us on the search effort for the day. CLMRG broke up into two teams with additional members from the Inyo County SAR. We then transited to the Lone Pine airport for insertion via a Chinook helicopter. Once everyone was loaded on the Chinook, we were transported to the summit of Mt. Whitney where Team one from Inyo County was dropped on the summit to clear the trail down to Trail Camp. Teams two (with Simons, R. Pio and two Inyo County SAR members) and three (with Derkey, N. Pio and two members of Inyo County SAR) were inserted at Mirror lake to cover areas up and down trail from there respectively.

While teams were searching, at 1100, the Inyo county sheriff was notified by Kings Canyon Park officials that they had obtained a search warrant to review cell phone data records for Mr. Escalante and



that cell phone “pings” identified a number of GPS points showing Mr. Escalante apparently heading towards Candlelight Peak. The Chinook came and picked up team two (including Simons and R. Pio) to go and inspect from the area from the air based on the last GPS location from the cell phone pings. We identified a foot sticking out from behind a boulder on a steep slope and the helicopter found a

suitable landing zone below the location where they dropped us off. It was confirmed that the subject, Mr. Escanlante, was deceased. Equipment was not readily available for extraction of the subject. Eventually it was arranged for Team one to be airlifted and retrieve a Sked (a lightweight stretcher) from Bishop, while Team three rendezvoused with Team two below the site. The Chinook refueled during this time. Once the subject was packaged, the Chinook winched the subject into the plane, then came to the previous landing zone to pick up the remainder of the field team members. Inyo SAR held a debrief on the tarmac in Lone Pine, then we packed up and drove back to the hut. We secured at the hut at 1920.



## **2021-08 Rescue, Injured Hiker on PCT, Kern Co. Simons**

At 1041 on Wednesday, April 21, Nathan Simons received a call from Tom Roseman looking for a leader to lead a team to rescue an injured hiker on the PCT in the Chimney Peak Wilderness. Luke Swanson had the details and would send out the alert on our CLMRG callout system. Swanson sent the alert over the system at 1049. The request came from Sgt. McNeill with the Kern County Sheriff (KCSO). The injured hiker, Terry Herdlicka, 65, of Humble TX, had activated her inReach. She had been traveling south on the PCT from Kennedy Meadows when a lower leg/ankle pain prevented her from continuing her trip.

The location was given as approximately 7.5 miles south from Chimney Creek Campground at PCT mile marker 674. Simons accepted as operations leader. Terry Mitchell coordinated, and Sheila Rockwell would assist calling members. Phillip Cash, Andrew Cammenga, Dave Jensen, Katie Kempema, Roger Pio, and Dave Miles committed to the operation. Dan Bishop agreed to lead a second

team after work around 1800. Nick Pio, Mike Derkey, Joe Kromphardt and Tom Sakai committed to be a part of a second team.

Due to the proximity and condition of Ms. Herdlicka, Nathan opted for a quick deployment which was facilitated by having her GPS location from the inReach messages and the phone number of the



inReach center to contact for more details. Dave Miles coordinated to have a KCSO helicopter meet us at Inyokern airport (IYK) for insertion to package Ms. Herdlicka in a stretcher and transport her back to Inyokern airport. Based on this, Nathan accelerated our timeline to have people meet at the hut at noon for transit to IYK.

Sgt. McNeill also coordinated for a Liberty Ambulance/KVSAR paramedic to join us at IYK to be inserted to the location. Due to a limit on the helicopter, Nathan selected Jensen to complete the team of three. On the helicopter we circled the site and visually verified that Ms. Herdlicka and her hiking companion were at the expected coordinates, but we could not locate a suitable landing zone so we returned to IYK. At IYK we reorganized for a carryout and sent out an update over the Callout system, then proceeded to the command post (CP) at the Chimney Creek Campground. Meanwhile, I kept in contact with Ms. Herdlicka, Sgt. McNeill and the inReach emergency center, letting them know our status and strategy going forward. Our plan was to hike in with the stretcher and wheel and handles, then carry Ms. Herdlicka out to our vehicles at the CP.

We hiked in for 2 hours and 48 minutes, keeping in radio contact with our second team as well as multiple Kern Valley SAR (KVSAR) team members sent by Sgt. McNeill to assist us. We reached Ms. Herdlicka at 1814 and found she is a nurse who self-diagnosed her injuries. Apart from her ankle/foot injury that would prevent her walking out, she was OK. Her hiking partner was camped there, and would spend the night at the current location and then in the morning pack up their tent and hike out to Walker Pass. Once we packaged Ms.





Herdlicka in the litter and attached the wheel and handles, we started back down the trail to the CP, all the while picking up more KVSAR personnel as well as our second team lead by Bishop. In all we had 23 people to share the stretcher duty. We arrived back at 2246 at the CP where we left the vehicles and a member from KVSAR who was monitoring the radios and Sheriff McNeill. We unpackaged Ms. Herdlicka and got her into a vehicle for non-medical transport back to Ridgecrest where she stayed with Dave and Carin Miles until they could get her to urgent care the next morning. The rest of the team returned to the hut to unload gear. We secured at the hut at 0030.

Dave and Carin Miles took Ms. Herdlicka to Urgent Care at Ridgecrest Regional Hospital. They were extremely efficient and called the podiatrist who came over to the Urgent Care to look her ankle/foot. The diagnosis was Achilles Tendonitis and Plantar Fasciitis. Dave and Carin also picked up Ms. Herdlicka's hiking partner at Walker pass.

Ms. Herdlicka was unable to put much weight on her foot and had to ambulate on crutches. She and her hiking companion opted to drive home to Texas and take in the sights on the way there.

### Other fun/interesting training things we do....

We've been having "tech nights" to introduce our new Members to the equipment we use. We've had a couple of stretcher practices. Because we're all first aid trained and have a great radio communication network, we get asked to help monitor and stand by for aid for various races in our hills. There is an annual Bike race, several running races, and this is the 2<sup>nd</sup> Run With the Burros race. It's serious – 153 people entered, about 1/3 had a burro partner; lengths were 5 miles, 10 miles, and a full 26 mile marathon. Fun day in the local canyons.

