

**2014**

# **The DISPATCH**

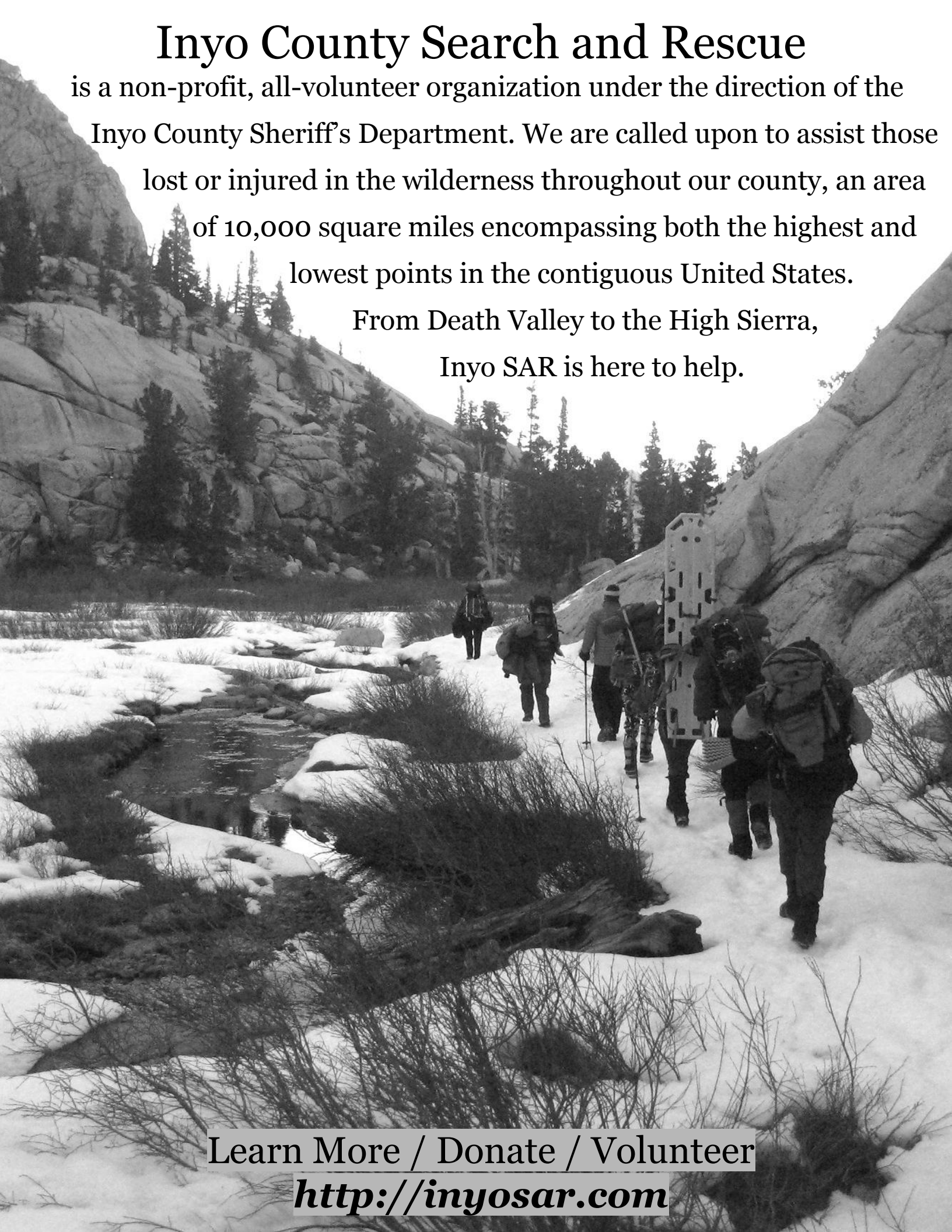
**Inyo County Search + Rescue  
Annual Newsletter**



# Inyo County Search and Rescue

is a non-profit, all-volunteer organization under the direction of the Inyo County Sheriff's Department. We are called upon to assist those lost or injured in the wilderness throughout our county, an area of 10,000 square miles encompassing both the highest and lowest points in the contiguous United States.

From Death Valley to the High Sierra,  
Inyo SAR is here to help.



Learn More / Donate / Volunteer

<http://inyosar.com>



*Over the course of the past year, as Inyo County Search and Rescue has tackled challenges ranging from body recoveries in technical terrain to the coordination of a massive multi-agency search mission to the usual spate of long, cold, overnight medical emergencies at Trail Camp, our team has begun to realize its role not just in responding to disasters, but in working to prevent them. Limited resources make it difficult for our small group to reach the wider public, but we hope that through this newsletter, pamphlets distributed at local visitor centers, and a new informational sign at the Mt. Whitney trailhead, we can begin to have an effect on the mentality of those who venture into our mountains.*

*As call after call makes its way through emergency dispatchers to our automated calling tree, it's easy to pick up on the pattern. **Overdue hiker, party separated, subject not seen since yesterday at 6am. Overdue climber, separated from partner, last seen yesterday at sunset. Patient with AMS, abandoned by party, needs assistance down from Trail Crest.** This is not a coincidence. It's almost become a joke on our team: Oh, there's a callout. Let me guess. They split up?*

Mountaineering alone is a choice that anyone should be free to make, as long as they understand the risks and responsibilities associated with being on their own. Yet traveling with others entails a different set of risks and responsibilities. When you start a hike, climb, or ski with a group, you are accepting a share in the outcome of that adventure. You have a duty to work together, to protect one another, and, in the event of an emergency, to help each other in any way you can. There may be circumstances in which the only way you can help your partners is by temporarily leaving them. But in the vast majority of cases, the safety of your group is greatly diminished when you split up. If your partner is sick, stay with him until he feels better or help him descend. If your partner is slower than you, adjust your pace. Nothing -- not even the summit -- is more important than all of you reaching the trailhead together at the end of the day.

Everyone has heard the old acronym about what to do if you get lost: **Stop, Think, Observe** your surroundings, and make a **Plan**. But there's an equally common-sense tenet of mountain wisdom that seems easier to forget: if you're hiking with a partner, **STAY TOGETHER**. Please spread the word.

-- Julia Runcie, 2014 Team Captain



#### 2014 Board of Directors

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# Trainings and Recertification

## Rigging for Rescue

There is a certain cachet to the technical rescue. When many people think of Search and Rescue, the first image in their minds is an orange-shirted attendant guiding a litter down a steep rock face, innumerable pulleys and pieces of cord dangling from his harness. In reality, technical missions form a minority of all SAR calls. Here in Inyo County we classify about 10% of our annual rescues as technical, or about 5 missions a year. Yet we all remember these technical rescues when they happen because they tend to be the most difficult, complex, exhausting, and dangerous calls we run. This May, in an effort to maintain a cadre of highly-trained technical rescuers on our team, we brought in elite instructors from Rigging for Rescue to present a week-long seminar in advanced rope rescue techniques.

The course combined lectures and fieldwork, covering principles of rope rescue physics and their practical applications. Eleven Inyo SAR members built anchors and assessed the forces applied to them, calculated the mechanical advantage of various pulley systems, and practiced ascending and descending with and without a litter and with different rigging configurations. Each day we worked in teams to solve the challenges of a particular scenario in a particular place, designing the most efficient, safe, and practical system given the constraints of terrain and patient condition (and sometimes weather!). This kind of intensive learning was an incredible opportunity for everyone involved. By the end of the week, many daunting

concepts had become routine and we all felt a much-increased confidence in our knowledge, skill, and efficiency as a technical rescue team.



## Search and Tracking Recert

Every spring, California's Mountain Rescue Association

(MRA) teams get together and test to recertify in one of three SAR disciplines: technical rock rescue, snow and ice rescue, or search management and tracking. This year, teams had to perform a mock search for a downed airplane and then track a patient from the crash site.

Eighteen members of Inyo SAR traveled to Los Angeles County on May 2nd to take our test. As we ventured down Highway 2, we were surprised by the ruggedness of the Los Angeles National Forest and started looking forward to meeting our proctors and getting out in the field the next morning at 0800. The MRA provided us with a patient and 4 proctors who set up the scenario, alerted us to mock clues, and also acted as observers, judging our performance.

Field teams spent the next 6 hours using radio telemetry to search for an emergency beacon inside a "downed aircraft," tracking a missing subject from the crash site, providing emergency care and evacuating the patient. Meanwhile, a full Incident Command team collected information and doled out assignments to the field from a big picture perspective, using mapping software and collective experience to guide the operation.

With taxed bodies and brains from dealing with 90° heat, rugged terrain, communication hiccups and complex mapping problems, we came out the other side with a renewed MRA membership and a passing grade! Our proctors were particularly impressed with our tracking skills, excellent medical care, and swift evacuation of the patient.

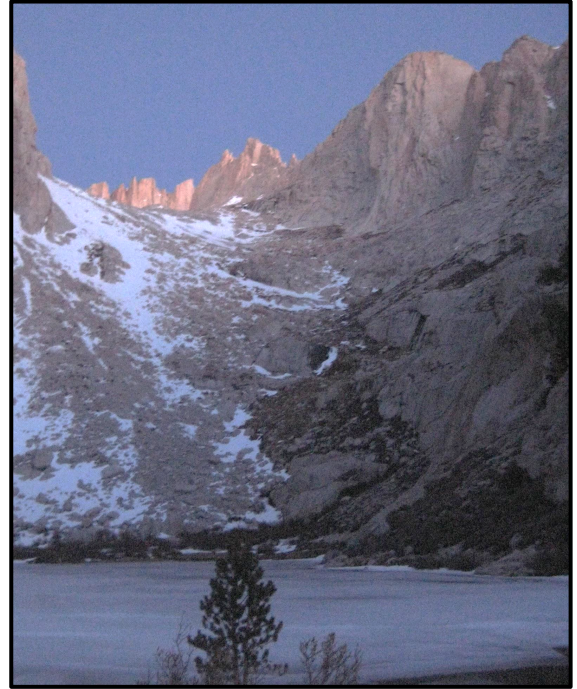
# Mission Reports

A small selection of stories from our rescues this year

## **Winter Search and Recovery on Whitney Trail**

**January 11**

- Report of an 18-year-old male who had become separated from his hiking partner early the day before.
- An Incident Command team assembled at 0600 to plan search assignments.
- Searchers started their routes at 0900 and located the subject at 1300 on a snow slope above Outpost Camp. He was deceased.
- The team assembled at the location and litter-carried the subject down to the trailhead, where the coroner took custody.



## **Severe Shoulder Injury on Mountaineer's Route**

**February 24**

- A 50-year-old female was ascending the Mountaineer's Route on Mt. Whitney with her guide when she dislodged a large boulder which struck her in the shoulder, tearing her trapezius muscle.
- A team of six Inyo SAR members hiked through snow and darkness to reach the party's camp above Iceberg Lake by 2300.
- Because the subject presented with symptoms characteristic of a spinal injury, the team decided to maintain spinal control throughout the night and call for a helicopter at first light.
- The next morning the team executed a belayed litter carry down 300ft of steep snow to the waiting helicopter, and the patient was flown to safety.

## **Bicyclist with AMS on White Mountain Road**

**January 27**

- The male subject had started biking at Badwater Basin, 282ft below sea level, and intended to reach the summit of White Mountain Peak at 14,252ft. At about 11,000 ft he began to suffer from dehydration, hypothermia, and AMS, and called for help.
- Three Inyo SAR members and a Sheriff's Deputy drove up Silver Canyon Road and located the barely-conscious subject.
- Oxygen therapy dramatically improved the subject's condition and the SAR team transported him to a waiting ambulance.

## **Nighttime Technical Rescue Below Sea Level April 18**

- The female subject became cliffed out while hiking in Golden Canyon in Death Valley National Park.
- Five Inyo SAR members drove to the scene immediately, arriving just after midnight.
- The SAR team assessed the situation and decided to rig two anchors as securely as possible in the loose rock, and send a single rescuer down to the subject.
- The rescuer tied the subject in and assisted her in climbing up to the anchors, as this would put less stress on the system than lowering two people to the canyon floor. Two rescuers then transferred the subject to a short rope and guided her to the road, where her family was waiting.



## **Multiple Seizures at 12,000 feet June 20**

- A 29-year-old male began seizing after descending from the summit of Mt. Whitney.
- A team of three hiked up to the patient as quickly as possible and administered oxygen throughout the night, focusing on keeping the patient's airway clear while he seized six more times.
- The patient was evacuated by helicopter at 0800 the next morning. Doctors determined that the seizures may have been caused by low sodium levels combined with altitude.

## **Fatal Fall on Temple Crag August 6**

- On July 30, the 27-year-old male subject hiked into the backcountry with a plan to climb unroped from Temple Crag to Thunderbolt Peak in a day.
- After a local packer noticed the subject's abandoned camp on August 6, Inyo SAR mobilized to search this vast area of technical terrain for the missing climber.
- During an initial helicopter pass over the beginning of the route, an Inyo SAR member spotted the subject above the base of Temple Crag.
- SAR members climbed for two hours to reach the subject's body. They determined that he had fallen nearly 500ft and sustained fatal injuries.
- A helicopter assisted in recovering the subject via long line. Four rappels and seven miles of hiking remained for the SAR team, who reached the trailhead at 2230.

## **Unintentional Soloist Stranded on Whitney's East Face August 28**

-The 55-year-old female subject intended to ascend the Mountaineer's Gully, but route-finding errors and unusual persistence led her about halfway up the technical East Face route. With darkness approaching, she did not feel comfortable continuing up or down, and so she called for help, indicating that she was prepared to stay out overnight.

-Early the next morning, a team of three Inyo SAR members hiked to Iceberg Lake and climbed to the subject's location, then assisted her down to the lake via two rappels and two belayed pitches.



## **Broken Ankle Carryout from Lamarck Peak August 31**

-A 58-year-old female and her husband were hiking up Lamarck Peak when they dislodged a boulder which rolled onto her ankle, breaking several bones.

-An Inyo SAR team of three encountered the party at 1830 and the medical lead assessed and resplinted the ankle.

-The patient was most comfortable "scooting" down the steep sections of the trail and through some of the creek crossings. On smoother sections she allowed team members to carry her piggy-back.

-The team had stashed a litter below the steepest part of the trail; with the help of the subject's husband they litter-carried her the rest of the way to the trailhead, reaching their vehicles at midnight.

# Massive Search Tests Inyo SAR's Incident Command System

by Julie Vargo



My first mission with Inyo SAR was a major search in Death Valley. I was excited to be the boots on the ground during three days of desert camping and wandering, covering ground first loosely and then thoroughly as the assignments dictated. Several years later, I found myself at the Lone Pine Airport setting up an Incident Command Post and pulling information together to develop my own search plan.

The subject of the search had just summited Mt. Whitney with friends for the third time in his life. On the way down the trail, his friends got ahead but kept an eye on him through binoculars until the final descent to their tents at Outpost Camp. The subject was among others on the trail, but after this "point last seen," no one could report seeing him again. After a night of searching the first team of rescuers returned to the airport with no new clues, but in every search, knowing where the subject is NOT is crucial to figuring out where the subject IS. So a puzzle begins to take shape.

The urgency of the mission was clear to all from the beginning. A situation like this is the worst nightmare of anyone who travels in the mountains. We could imagine the anguish of the subject's family as they waited for word, and my purpose here is to explain in detail the steps we took to ensure that we would find an answer for them.

Our team spent many days last winter training for just such a mission. As members of the Mountain Rescue Association (MRA), we are required to prove our capabilities in each of three main subject areas: winter skills, rock rescue, and search. The most recent test was in this last discipline, and while it was a new concept for many of us, we worked hard and learned fast. The search function can be complicated and trying for a team, but it can also promote team-building since members are required to put away their own skills or desires and work for the big picture.

Many tools are available to the command team of a large search. First, there is the structure of the Incident Command System (ICS). This system can be expanded and contracted as the mission requires. The primary roles are Incident Commander, Logistics Chief, Planning Chief, and Operations Chief. Within the system, each unit has additional tools available. In Planning and Operations (PLOPS, as it often became on our team), a mapping tool that allows the input of data gathered from the field is critical.

It creates a visual of work completed as teams bring back GPS data, giving the Planning team an idea of what areas have been covered and to what extent. This information can be used to develop new search assignments that can then be printed and given to teams for the next operational period. A mapping tool allows smooth transitions between operational periods and between the people filling the planning role.



During this mission we were able to compare two different mapping programs, MapSAR and SARTopo. MapSAR is an incredibly powerful tool, but it requires extensive training. SARTopo, a free online program developed by SAR member Matt Jacobs from the Bay Area, is simpler and easier to use. As the mission grew each day, we made adjustments to our IC system to accommodate. Communications between base and

field teams have always been a problem for us on missions in the Mt. Whitney area. Our in-house GIS expert, Mike Hay, was able to create a visualization of line-of-sight radio signals between the valley and the mountain. We placed a relay in the valley in one of these locations and a repeater on top of a high point near the search area, all but eliminating our IC-to-field communications problems.

Each day we added more and more resources: by the third full day, we had sixty searchers from eleven counties and four helicopters in service. On the fourth day we added three canine teams to the mix. The combination of our training and the resources available made it possible for us to direct so many moving pieces toward a single goal.

A second adjustment that we made also significantly improved our efficiency. With so many resources in the field, we decided to add another layer of command between the field teams and IC. Searchers were split into four divisions, and Division Chiefs from our own team were responsible for the oversight of two to eight ground teams. With the help of a Chinook helicopter we were able to put nearly thirty people in the field at one time.

The third day of searching yielded no new clues as to the subject's whereabouts, but we were getting a very good picture of where he was not. By putting all of the searchers' GPS tracks into Google Earth we were able to create a 3D, navigable picture of the areas we had covered and what the terrain was like in the areas that were not yet covered.



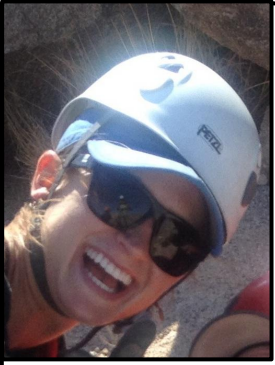
It was near the end of the fourth day that one of the helicopters found the subject. The Sequoia-Kings Canyon helitak team was heading home for the night and had some extra fuel, so they asked for any specific areas to look at more closely. This is where all the detailed mapping of the week really paid off. There was one small spot left between all of the search areas the IC had assigned in several ways over the course of the week. It was basically a sheer cliff, and while teams had made their best effort to survey it through binoculars, we had never checked it off as being thoroughly searched. As soon as the helicopter got a good look at that spot, they located the missing hiker and determined that he had taken a fatal fall. The following day, a team of Inyo SAR's technical rescue members were flown to the top of the cliff. Two team members rappelled the cliff face to the subject and prepared him to be helicoptered out via long line.

Many people deserve thanks for their work on this mission. A grand thank you goes to the Inyo SAR members who took days out of their busy summer to aid in the search, to the teams from distant counties who traveled all the way to our remote area, and to the helicopter pilots and crews from Sequoia-Kings, California Highway Patrol, China Lake, and the California Army National Guard who amplified our efforts from the air. We are particularly grateful to everyone from our Sheriff's Department who gave our team all the resources and trust we could possibly ask for.

Finally, on behalf of Inyo SAR, I'd like to offer our condolences to the subject's family and friends. Thank you for your patience while we searched for your father, brother, and friend. I do not believe he suffered, but passed away doing something he looked forward to every day of each year.



# Member Profiles

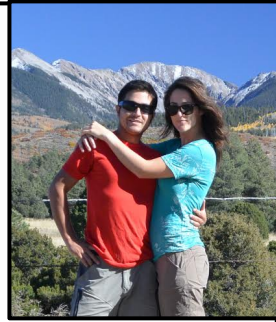


## Laura Lingeman

Born in the confines of the Midwest, Laura escaped to the mountains of Salt Lake City when she was 18. Although she was originally focused on rock climbing, her current mountain interests range from climbing to peak bagging to ultrarunning. These activities eventually brought Laura even further West to sunny Bishop, CA where she has been since 2012. She manages to support her hobbies by working as an EMT for Symons Ambulance and Mammoth Lakes Hospital. Her combined interest in the mountains and Emergency Services resulted in her involvement with Inyo County Search and Rescue; she has been an active member for two years and a Board Member for one. This past summer Laura also worked in Yosemite National Park on their SAR Team.

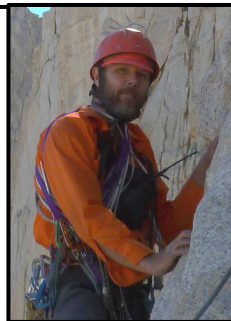
## Max Gallegos and Rose Masters

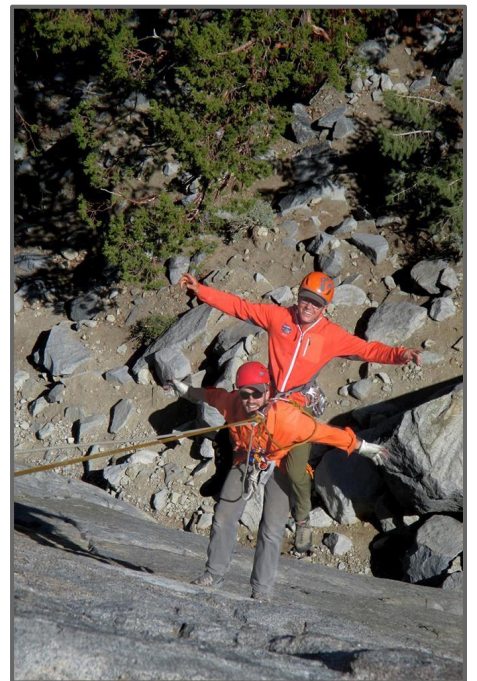
Search and Rescue is the business of finding people. In this instance however, through SAR, two people found each other! Rose and Max met at Rose's first meeting with Atalaya Search and Rescue in Santa Fe, NM (Max was the first person she saw when she walked into the room). Since then, they've spent quality time together dangling from cliffs, wandering around snowy mountains in the dead of night, and practicing splinting each other's limbs with hiking equipment. They joined Inyo SAR in fall 2013. As a new addition to Inyo SAR's cohort of SAR couples, Rose and Max headquarter in Independence as the South County couple where they experiment in the use of house cats in SAR operations.

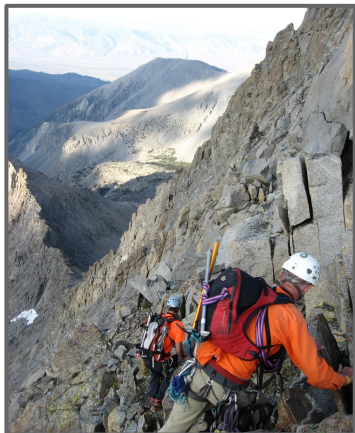


## Mike Hay

Mike was raised in Indio, CA, with a short stint in Micronesia at the age of 10. As an avid backpacker Mike decided to leave high school at the age of 17 to join the U.S. Army Infantry, because this was just getting paid to backpack around. Right? After four years in the military, Mike took a NOLS semester course and learned rock climbing, backcountry skiing, and spelunking. Then Mike went to Humboldt State University, where he learned how to run whitewater. In between boating and climbing trips Mike managed to get a BS in Natural Resource Planning. He also began his first career in Outdoor Education (OE). After several years of fulltime OE and guiding, Mike was ready for new challenges. He decided to return to school and earned a BA and eventually an MS in Geography while living in Alaska and enjoying backcountry skiing, packrafting, and a little sailing. Now Mike has finally fulfilled one of his long-held dreams, that of living in Bishop, by managing GIS for the County of Inyo. He also does contract GIS programming for the National Marine Mammal Laboratory. Mike's current recreational foci are rock climbing and exploring the local desert and mountains on foot. He's also putting his backcountry know-how to good use as a member of Inyo SAR.







# The Ethics of Going Solo

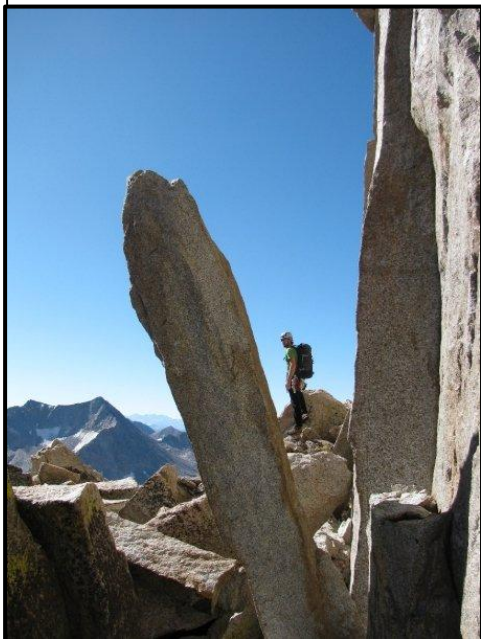
by Victor Lawson

Inyo County has the privilege of harboring some of the most spectacular geography in California and beyond. Much of it can be seen from the comfort of your car window as you venture up Highway 395, or from a local's back porch. However, for many, in order to really experience the grandeur our county has to offer, one must venture into the vastness of it. Some look for details nestled in the expanse: ptarmigan hunkered next to snow patches, rams dotted like boulders along a ridge, polemonium blooms bursting from granite fissures, the sound of a high country lake lapping at your feet, or a coyote yipping from across a dry lake bed. Sometimes, to be still and quiet enough to experience these details takes an awareness that can only come from being alone.

There are other reasons to be alone in wild and desolate places. Athletes can better keep their own pace, hunters and birders can better sneak, photographers can better wait for that perfect moment. Unburdened by partners' agendas, personalities, gear mishaps, and chatter, you are free to do as you please. Inyo County is unique in that it is predominately comprised of public land. Fortunately, on public land, you can largely do what you want.

But sometimes freedom isn't free. One inescapable truth must be mentioned and understood before anyone decides to go it alone in search of that intimate backcountry moment: a solo traveler is accepting an inherently higher level of risk than if they were in a group. Even so, I'm here to tell you that going solo is *100% OK*.

Of course, if you start out in a group, never leave your partners (unless it was expressly stated in the plan you made together before your outing). It's one thing to begin an adventure alone, and quite another to split up from your party.



As a solo traveler you have a responsibility to your loved ones and to yourself to be as prepared as possible. Your physical fitness should exceed the level needed to complete your adventure. Your gear and clothing should be perfectly matched to your outing and you should be very familiar with their use. You should know where you are at all times and how to get back to the car from any point in your travels. You should tell someone reliable exactly where you are going, what you plan to do and how long you think it will take. You should also provide them with a reasonable overdue time: a time at which you expect them to call for emergency assistance if you haven't been heard from.



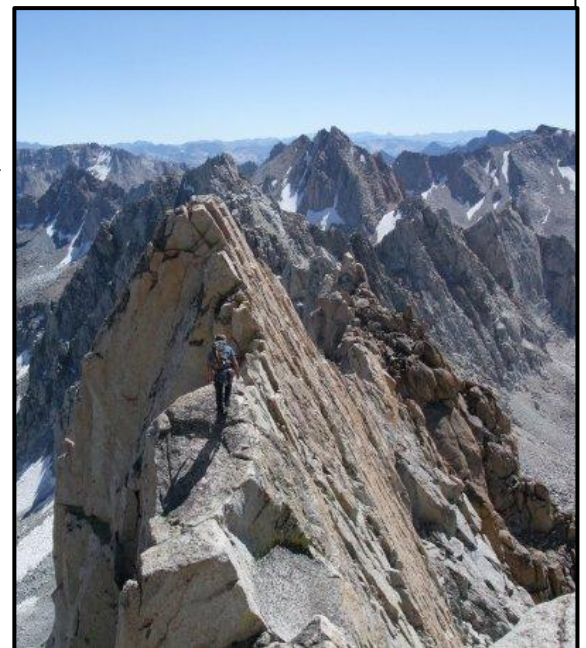
If you have set an objective that fits within the capabilities of your gear, body and brain, and you have left your itinerary with someone, then by all means have at it! Just remember that even with all the preparation in the world, something can always go wrong. Backcountry travel is unpredictable by nature. Rocks are loose, weather is always changing, people drop, break or forget things, and little injuries just plain happen. Sometimes these variables will only slightly affect the outcome of your trip, but often the unforeseen can alter a situation to the extreme.

Inyo SAR has several calls each year involving solo travelers. Usually we receive notice from a friend or family member that their loved

one is overdue from their adventure. These missions always begin as a search and sometimes end as a rescue or recovery. If the subject was simply slower than forecasted and we find them on the trail, tired but healthy, no one bats an eye. However, if they end up injured or worse, the public outcry is surprisingly deafening. A common theme we hear is that a personal locator beacon should be required for solo backcountry travel. Some have even said that going solo should be essentially outlawed by requiring people to register in pairs or groups before receiving backcountry permits.

While we can appreciate and commend the concern behind such statements, we believe education, rather than restriction, is the best way to keep adventurers in Inyo County happy and healthy. We believe it is your right to recreate in any responsible and sustainable way you choose, on your public land. For some, that means going out solo. Again, the lonely are not doing anything wrong, although they certainly are accepting a higher degree of danger.

This summer, Inyo SAR was tasked with recovering the body of a young man who fell while climbing alone on technical alpine rock. He was climbing a very well-established route at a level of difficulty that was within his abilities, during a good weather window. What caused his fall, we'll never know. A partner with a rope very well could have saved his life, although a roped fall in such terrain far from guarantees safety. Still, I do not find him in the wrong for deciding against climbing in a team. In fact, hundreds of people have scaled that very stretch of stone without ropes or partners, perhaps for the same reasons he did.





As I sat with him on a ledge some nine hundred feet above the base of the cliff, I was struck with the intense desire to try and explain why he did what he did to anyone who would criticize his choice to go solo that day. I wanted to assure his parents that their son was not crazy, that he was not stupid. I wanted to tell them that he had likely lived a day, a week, a season full of moments so rich and intimate *because* of his soloing. I wanted to tell them that although he had climbed alone, he was not alone in spirit as so many others of us have ventured across those same cliffs and ridges with only our skills and decisions and the weather to keep us company.

The wild places of your county, state, country, and globe are where true freedom lives. True danger lurks as well, but the reward often outweighs the risk when a well-prepared traveler heads out, unheeded by another human. I encourage those who call for more restrictions on soloists to really think about what they are suggesting. Barring access to public land for certain individuals based on their distaste for company or desire for solitude is an affront to freedom that is hard to defend. One's own safety is a personal responsibility, and what a great and sacred responsibility that is.



# Meet the Coordinators

Much of the work that goes into a typical SAR mission happens behind the scenes. For every hour the team spends hiking or carrying a litter, our coordinators spend twice as long dealing with logistics and communicating with the patients' families. Without our deputies we could accomplish very little in the field. We're so lucky to have them.

## Deputy Nate Derr

How long have you been with the Inyo County Sheriff's Office?

**Four and a half years.**

What did you do before this job?

**I was a firefighter for Cal Fire and the Forest Service.**

Where are you from?

**I grew up in Mono and Inyo Counties.**

Describe some of the behind-the-scenes stuff a SAR coordinator has to do:

**Work with Cal OES for mutual aid, monitor budget, follow billing procedures, establish relationships with cooperating agencies, liaison with the Sheriff, the Undersheriff, and the County Board of Supervisors.**

What do you do when you're not working?

**Hike, hunt, fish, spend time with my family, PT**



## Deputy Brian Hohenstein

How long have you been with the Inyo County Sheriff's Office?

**Seven years.**

What did you do before this job?

**I drilled water wells in Tennessee.**

Where are you from?

**Riverside, CA**

How many hours do you work in a typical week in summer?

**Sixty to eighty.**

How many SAR calls do you handle per week in summer?

**Between three and eight.**

What's your favorite part of the job?

**Notifying family and friends that we have located their loved ones safe and in good condition.**



# 2015 Calendar

## 2014 Rescue Members

Each year, Inyo SAR grants the designation "Rescue Member" to a few individuals who have shown extraordinary dedication to the team. These members maintain a high level of fitness and expertise and carry out numerous difficult and dangerous missions. Rescue Members also show their commitment to the team in other ways, regularly attending and leading meetings and trainings, serving on the Board of Directors, or taking on essential projects from fundraising to vehicle maintenance to gear purchasing to public outreach. Rescue Members devote hundreds of volunteer hours each year to making Inyo SAR an exceptional search and rescue team. Thank you for all your hard work.

Mike Hay  
Matt Larsen  
Victor Lawson  
Stephen Pfeiler  
Paul Rasmussen  
Julia Runcie  
Julie Vargo  
Ariana Wylie

Thursday 1/8  
January General Meeting

Saturday 1/31  
Winter Race Series  
Fundraiser

Thursday 2/5  
February General Meeting

Thursday 3/5  
March General Meeting

Saturday 3/7  
MRA Rock Rescue  
Recertification

Saturday 3/14  
Winter Race Series  
Fundraiser

Friday-Saturday 3/27-28  
Banff Film Festival  
Fundraiser

Thursday 4/2  
April General Meeting

Saturday 4/4  
Winter Race Series  
Fundraiser

Saturday 5/2  
Choo Choo Swap Meet  
Fundraiser

Thursday 5/7  
May General Meeting

Thursday 6/4  
June General Meeting

Thursday 7/2  
July General Meeting

Thursday 8/6  
August General Meeting

Thursday 9/3  
September General Meeting

Thursday 10/1  
October General Meeting

Thursday 11/5  
November General Meeting

Thursday 12/3  
December General Meeting  
Vote for 2015 Officers

# How You Can Help

## JOIN

Meetings are held at 7pm on the first and third Thursdays of every month at our Posse Hut, the first building on the right on Airport Road in Bishop. We are always eager to welcome enthusiastic and able volunteers to our team. Come by and find out more!



## DONATE

We welcome donations of all kinds, including gear and equipment in good condition. To make a financial contribution, you can visit <http://inyosar.com/donate>.

Please consider joining in the tradition of public support that has fueled our rescue efforts for decades. Your tax-deductible donation to Inyo SAR will help to keep you and your loved ones safe as you explore the vast and rugged wilderness of Inyo County.



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