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Rescue

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DRY CREEK SEARCH, PART 1 – FEBRUARY 11-13, 2019 **GREGG RETTSCHLAG, KEN SWICKARD, RON CHRISTENSEN and Others**

We received a call mid-morning from Ada County, requesting IMSARU to initiate a search for an overdue hiker in the foothills. These calls typically are easily resolved but “typical” means warmer and dryer months in the foothills. When we found out the subject had already been missing for nearly 48 hours, the seriousness settled in.

Details were slim: Our subject had gone hiking solo when his friend had been unable to join him and his snow-covered car had been located at the Dry Creek trailhead. What would become a three-day search in difficult weather conditions started with corridor searches of the trails, using both K9 and ground-pounding teams. The high-probability search area included 8 to 10 square miles of steep terrain, so area searches would only be directed by some type of clue. On the first day, the National Guard’s attempt to fly a Blackhawk for aerial search was thwarted by low clouds. As daylight gave way to dark, all IMSARU personnel and spontaneous volunteers returned with little information other than reports on trail conditions. Snow covered the entire search area, ranging from 6” at the trailhead to 2 and 3 feet at higher elevations. All but the upper section of the loop believed to be our subject’s intended route was cleared by night-fall. That upper section was most easily accessed by a snow-covered trail a long hike from the road. A spontaneous volunteer with snowmobiles helped our team cut some of the distance, but a long walk remained. This team of three started walking at nearly midnight along the previously unsearched section of the trail, arriving back at base camp nine hours later (the next morning.)

Meanwhile, when it became clear that this could be an extended search, Ken Swickard received a call in mid-afternoon requesting him to take our Command trailer up to the mission site. By the time Ken got the trailer ready to go, it was 1615 hours and he described the traffic to get onto Bogus Basin Road as a menagerie. On site, Mike Rock, Kristin Freeman and others helped Ken with the million details to prepare the trailer for Command Center... everything from leveling and blocking through power supply, removal of equipment not immediately needed, and assigning staff for that station. [Continued on Page 2](#)

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2519 Federal Way, Boise ID 83705. Editor: Charlotte Gunn, Phone (208) 378-7787 or e-mail
cpgunn@cablone.net Visit our unit web site at www.imsaru.org

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Day two dawned with clear skies and cold temperatures, so we set up a Landing Zone for a National Guard Lakota to fly an aerial search, but snow returned later in the day. We made attempts to insert a K9 team and ground-pounders up high, using the Ridge Road. Another spontaneous volunteer offered the use of his snow-cat for this assignment, but the new snow was once again an insurmountable barrier. The Ridge Road's winter conditions include snow, high winds resulting in cornices, and areas of deep unconsolidated snow. The snow cat was capable of carrying our teams for the first 3 of the 6-mile journey, and the 3 miles over snow on foot is a big ask for teams (especially for a dog) to traverse before even starting to search. Crews were very limited in what they could accomplish before walking the 3-mile return to the snow-cat. While up on the hill, we got the call that a snowmobiler (not one of our searchers) had gone down into a deep ravine off the ridge, and teams were instructed to stand by in case this person needed assistance. He eventually abandoned his snowmobile and started hiking up to the snowcat, with an IMSARU member meeting him partway. Despite an early-morning start and the final search teams arriving back in base after 10 p.m., little new ground was cleared, and the mission was scaled down.

On the third day a single crew walked one remaining unsearched trail until hitting the snow line, then covered the rest of the trail on snowshoes or skis up to its junction with the Ridge Road. There would be no further search efforts until conditions improved, allowing for area searches to begin...but of course there were still several hours' work to clean, dry and repack all of the equipment, making sure it would be ready for the next callout.

NOTE: The remainder of February in southwest Idaho was filled with wave after wave of snowstorms piling 4 to 5 feet of new snow in the higher elevations of the Dry Creek Trail after our subject went missing. We had no way of knowing that we would be standing down from this search for more than a month, waiting for the snow to begin receding.

FAMILY LIAISON AT DRY CREEK MISSION, FEBRUARY 11-13, 2019

--ALISA RETTSCHLAG

Gregg and I had plans to ski in the fresh snow at Bogus Basin on Monday morning but a couple of things happened: a phone call to Gregg and then a mission callout. A hiker/runner, planning to use the Dry Creek Trail off of Bogus Basin Road, had been missing since Saturday afternoon...and now it was Monday morning.

We set up base camp at a large pullout near mile 5 on the east side of Bogus Basin Road. Gregg met with the I.C., Sgt. Mike Rowe of the Ada County Sheriff's Office, and learned that the subject's friend had started earlier that morning to hike up the Dry Creek Trail and look for his friend...and that the subject's family was in route. As the O.L. (Gregg) watched family pull up, he looked at me: "You're family liaison."

I introduced myself as the family liaison and explained how I could help them (step one in Emotional First Aid), met members of the family and close friends, and asked if they needed anything--food, water, blankets, etc. (2nd step of EFA).

I pulled the Family Liaison bag from truck 901, heated water, solicited a few base camp members to carry supplies, and headed over to the family's car with offers of hot drinks and food. I then asked for information--details about the missing man (part of step 3). One young woman said that the missing man and a good friend often hiked this 14-mile Dry Creek to Shingle Creek loop. Another said the missing man had dinner with her every Sunday and she worried when he didn't show up. She called his workplace and heard that he hadn't shown up Sunday nor Monday. She then called the friend who had received a text about hiking but declined because of the poor weather forecast. This young woman called the police.

The man who had declined the hike started along the trail to search for the missing friend; one of the young women was able to track him on her phone. Part of my job was to keep the family informed as search teams deployed.

Over the first two days of the search, I was pulled away for various duties; at those times I handed the role of Family Liaison to Angie Christensen, Doug Loertscher and Sam Stone. They all did a great job of taking care of the family, performing their duties in that role. Emotional First Aid training along with Family Liaison training really does pay off!

EARLY EXPERIENCES WITH IMSARU MISSIONS

--RORY OLSEN

Prior to the callout on February 11 for the Dry Creek mission, I had participated only in a couple of missions that were smaller in scope and shorter in duration. Uncomfortable with my abilities to travel in winter conditions, I remained in base camp, assisting in unloading and checking out equipment to the field teams. Then I helped set up tables, chairs and equipment to provide hot beverages for family members.

Later in the day I was assigned to work radio communications from unit truck 901 until the command trailer arrived and was set up, when we moved over there and continued to monitor and receive radio communications from teams in the field, relay information from the O.L. to teams in the field, and confirm that the O.L. had copied the teams' information. It was very interesting and informative to be able to see what occurs within the command trailer during a mission, and provided a greater appreciation of how hectic it can be in that trailer during a mission.

On the second day of that Dry Creek mission, Kristin Freeman and I were assigned to take unit truck 902 to a higher point on Bogus Basin Road, to act as a radio relay between teams in the field and base camp. This also gave me a great opportunity to learn more about one of my team members and her vast experience in radio communications.

When IMSARU searched again in March, my first assignment was to ferry a dog team and flanker to a higher point on Bogus Basin Road for deployment into their search area. I was then assigned as a team lead with two other searchers for a corridor search along a social trail across the road from the Dry Creek trailhead. After a short rest, our team was assigned to search an area from Bogus Basin Road down to near the Dry Creek Trail, with the main goal of trying to clear the drainages within that area. We immediately encountered approximately a foot of snow on the north-facing slopes; the south-facing slopes were bare. Most of the terrain was steep and rocky and the bottom of the drainages contained heavy growth, making it impossible to search the very bottom on foot. I learned a lot about what it takes to be a team lead and about my own capabilities.



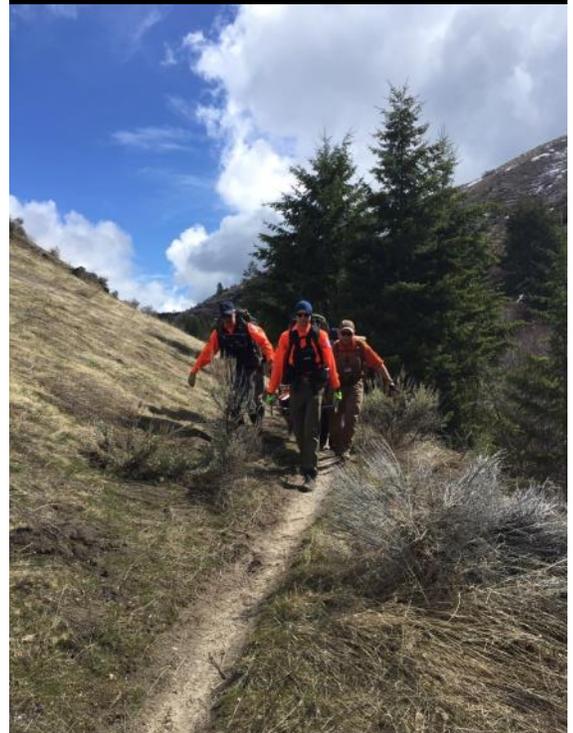
In March, the Tech Team trained on the new high-directional gin pole.



Top Left: Christopher Weltner and Chris Brookman investigated a pallet lean-to during the Dry Creek Mission.

Bottom Right: A common sight of IMSARU members working on Dry Creek. Here, unit members work the litter.

Bottom Left: Team Leadership field training involved a mock litter transport, which was helpful



DRY CREEK SEARCH PART 2 – MARCH 18-19, 2019 --GREGG RETTSCHLAG

Having waited more than a month for some snowmelt up near Bogus Basin, IMSARU crews returned to continue the search for a lone hiker who disappeared. One theory was that he might have gone up the Dry Creek Trail, retreated at some point, and tried to bail out to Bogus Basin Road from that trail.

On Monday we used K9 teams and ground-pounder teams; lots of ground was covered and none of it was easy. Searchers walked on steep terrain with anything from dirt to thigh-deep snow. Some was snowshoe terrain; a lot was boot terrain. Vegetation in the riparian areas added to the difficulties.

On Tuesday we shifted to checking the south-facing slopes leading down into Shingle Creek from the ridge between Dry Creek and Shingle Creek. Terrain and search area conditions were similar. We also utilized volunteers from a trail-running group, as well as Ada County Sheriff's deputies.

We've been filling the map with tracks, and that allows us to keep advancing the search. However, at this point we are left with vetting any theories we have for where our subject might have headed, while also filling in the map of trail loop sections that have been searched. We have covered the likely spots that are not too dangerous to risk, and so are suspending the search until conditions improve.

DRY CREEK TRAIL SEARCH – THE END -- MARCH 28, 2019 --COLIN SESEK

Our team was tasked with helping to find a 27-year-old male who had gone missing in the Dry Creek area of Bogus Basin on the February 9-10 weekend. After two previous searches that were hampered by snow and rough terrain, we were trying again as the snow melted. As we were formulating the plan, a hunter of shed antlers, using binoculars, located the deceased subject in our search area, in a location difficult to see from the trail. The call went out at 0645 to meet for the recovery; 15 members met at the Compound and headed up Bogus Basin Road to meet the Sheriff.

The coroners had already been to the site and were currently preparing the subject for evacuation. We established base camp in a wide shoulder off the main road, and went down the hill to meet the coroners. Part of our group assembled the litter for evacuation and the others searched the area for any personal items that might have been buried in the snow. (None were found.) We had a good turnout, so we rotated through the positions on the litter. There were a few creeks to cross and rocks to climb, but we made good time and got back to the road in a few hours. We assisted in loading the patient into the coroner's vehicle and returned to the Compound. All in all, it was a textbook recovery.

IMSARU members participating were Darryl Beemer, Angie Christensen, Ron Christensen, Chase Christopher, Kristin Freeman, Christi Kelley, Doug Loertscher, Mike Mancuso, Alisa Rettschlag, Gregg Rettschlag, Daniel Roberts, Colin SeseK, Ken Swickard, Christopher Weltner and Rod Zwainz. Rod Knopp was in-town coordinator.

DAN SCOVEL ACHIEVES “SIGN CUTTER” CERTIFICATION

Congratulations to Dan for being awarded his “Sign Cutter” certification with the Joel Hardin Professional Services/Visual Tracking and Training, Inc. on March 17, 2019. This certification represents 18+ years of hard work, and roughly 10,000+ hours of tracking experience in SAR missions and tracking training. The “Sign Cutter” designation is the highest level of achievement in the program and is defined as follows:

Fourth Learning Stage: Master Tracker

“Sign Cutter” is the historical U.S. Border Patrol term and title denoting those persons having reached the level of knowledge, a broad spectrum of practical experience, and peer level recognition of superior tracking skill equating to a Master Tracker. The term “master” has many definitions: exceptionally gifted or skilled in an art, craft or science; one who has achieved the status of a highly skilled workman or craftsman qualified to follow their trade independently and usually to supervise the work of others; a teacher, instructor, supervisor, expert, one possessing great executive ability; one who is vigorously bold or authoritative in conduct, decision and manner. All of these definitions are appropriate to describe those awarded the JHPTS-VTATI Master Tracker, Sign Cutter certification.



This tracking program student will have acquired the respect and recognition of peers throughout many years of active involvement and public demonstration of advanced tracking knowledge and skills in successful accomplishment of the broadest spectrum of tracking applications. The Sign Cutter title and definition includes elements and participation experience with all three primary environments (SAR, law enforcement/crime scene examination, and military Special Forces) in which JHPTS-VTATI trackers are employed as the most knowledgeable, most experienced, and most skilled tracking professionals.

Editor’s Note: Ask Dan about his tracking experience in Japan.

SHINGLE CREEK RESCUE – MARCH 30, 2019 --DARRYL BEEMER

At 2:50 p.m. I was trying on new synthetic pants specifically for SAR (and climbing fun) purposes when my phone buzzed for rescue of a hiker stranded in the foothills. Having been in this same area the prior week for a different mission, I knew there was a bike-accessible trail up to the snowline, so I threw my cool new bike onto the truck and drove up Bogus Basin Road to the “upper entrance” to the Dry Creek trail, where 901 was parked, with Maya and Christopher gearing up to head into the field. Those two were the hasty team aiming for the GPS coordinates of a mid-20’s male who had sent a distress signal to law enforcement via cellphone. He had lost the trail amid persistent snow and was running low on water, warmth and energy. The Ada County Sheriff’s Sergeant was able to triangulate the location of the subject’s cell phone and told him to remain in place for rescue.

As hasty Team 1 started up the trail, 902 arrived on-scene with a few more personal vehicles and searchers. Mission leadership was passed by Gregg to Chris, and Gregg then moved up Bogus Basin Road to establish improved communications with the field teams. Scotty Perkins soon arrived with his mountain bike and we were assigned as a secondary hasty team. We departed 45 minutes after Team 1 and had a fantastic ride with clothes, food and water to supplement their gear. About 4 miles into the trail we encountered snow and had to proceed on foot. Trailing us were teams 2 and 4, bringing a wheeled Cascade litter, SKED and hypothermia equipment.

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Team 1 found the subject a bit off the Shingle Creek Trail while we were still $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile out. The subject was in decent condition, but very grateful for the much-needed clothing, water and food. Chris B. did a unique creation of a “Rescue Group” and put all of the field teams under the command of Christopher, to assign resources according to the needs. The litter was set to the side of the trail and the rest of the teams continued toward the subject. Scotty and I met him at about 6:45 p.m., with the sun still up; the five of us started down through the snow and picked up the other two teams for a large rescue group guiding the subject through the snow and out at the trailhead. Scotty and I wheeled the litter while teammates delivered our bikes and the subject safely to the lower trailhead.



Scotty and Darryl’s bikes during the Shingle Creek mission.

Everyone was back in town by 11:30 pm after a nice hike/ride, and a grateful subject was able to sleep in his warm bed that night. This use of the bike team was definitely a quicker way to get searchers to the subject than simple hiking. My setup with a frame bag, two panniers and a small backpack worked wonderfully, and I didn’t strike the panniers on rocks or brush nor hit them with the heels of my hiking boots. Finding the subject in daylight was a great example of why rapid reporting and response are very helpful.

IMSARU members participating were Darryl Beemer, Chris Brookman, Tricia Brookman, Mike Buckingham, Angie Christensen, Ron Christensen, Maya Davies, Jim Findley, Kristin Freeman, Ed Leckert, Brian Marinelli, Scotty Perkins, Gregg Rettschlag, Monica Vermillion, Christopher Weltner and Tom Wheless. Rod Knopp was in-town coordinator.

IMSARU’S K-9 TEAM --CHARLOTTE GUNN

Having just returned from a session of K9 training in sloppy late-February snow, I find myself musing on the history of our team’s use of K-9s in search. The earliest hard evidence I have is in the newsletter of February 1993, but I’m pretty sure it had started a few years earlier after we had twice imported K-9 teams from the Salt Lake City area to assist in searches. One was a young man who we were told was recovering from brain surgery; he had left his car and his clothes near the backcountry town of Warren, was located by a K-9 team, and was flown out to McCall via helicopter. (This one especially sticks in my mind because it was my first time for a ride in a helicopter and I was sure I was going to die lying on the ground and shielding the subject’s face while the copter tried to land almost on top of us. The machine finally perched a bit farther up the hillside and we all survived.) The second K-9 use was in the foothills where a woman had disappeared. This time the subject was deceased and the body extricated via hand-carried litter.

It was after those missions that my husband said “We could train our own dogs,” and started trying with our pet Shelby. People laughed but neither George nor Shelby cared. Eventually we bought two successive German Shepherd puppies, Xena and Hobo, went to many K9 seminars in the Northwest, and K9 searchers became an impressive tool as well as faithful companions. (At that time it was quite unusual that both George and I each certified with both Xena and Hobo, which made the dogs more available when one of us was constrained by work.) By the time Hobo died, George’s cancer had spread...and there were several IMSARU K9 handlers at various levels in action as well as many who tried but did not succeed. Today’s training standards have become more professional, with certification standards that require many hours of work, and K9 teams are an important part of SAR groups.

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CALENDAR

May 4	Tracker Training	–Contact Ken Swickard for time and location of Tracker trainings.
May 7	General Meeting	7 p.m. at the Compound
May 11	Tracker Training	
May 14	Training Meeting	7 p.m. at the Compound
May 18-19	Field Training	Time & Place TBA
May 20	Tracker Training	
May 21	Medical Training	7 p.m. at the Compound
May 28	Business Meeting	7 p.m. at the Compound
June 4	General Meeting	7 p.m. at the Compound
June 8	Tracker Training	
June 11	Training Meeting	7 p.m. at the Compound
June 15-16	Field Training	Time & Place TBA
June 17	Tracker Training	
June 18	Medical Training	7 p.m. at the Compound
June 25	Business Meeting	7 p.m. at the Compound
July 8	Tracker Training	
July 20	Tracker Training	

THANKS to Karen Wright, owner of Stitches by KC, for donating to us a supply of Search Specialist rockers. (We were expecting to spend about \$100 for our order.)

Fearless editor-in-chief of *RESCUE* is Charlotte Gunn. Don Fridrich provides the online version and mailing help. Darryl Beemer formats and prints with the generosity of HP Inc. Thanks to all who write articles and provide photos.