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Ralph Obenberger
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MONO COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE
PRESS RELEASE

Robert Weber
Undersheriff

To: All News Outlets

From: Jennifer Hansen, Public Information Officer

Date: July 9, 2013

RE: Search and Rescue Team Operation: Search for Overdue Climbers in the Laurel Mountain area

On the evening of Saturday, July 6, 2013, Mono County Sheriff's Dispatch received a call regarding two overdue climbers in the Laurel Mountain area.

A couple, ages 31 and 32, from Oakland, CA, were climbing the Northeast Gully of Laurel Mountain when they failed to return from their climb and were reported overdue by friends. At approximately 10:30 pm, on Saturday, July 6, the Mono County Sheriff Search and Rescue (SAR) team was called out to search for the overdue climbers. One group of SAR members attempted to determine the location of the climbers via light signals from Convict Lake. Another group of SAR members drove the Laurel Lakes road in case the climbers descended in that direction. Neither SAR group was successful in locating the climbers. It was determined that air resources would be needed in the morning and the search was concluded for the night.

On the morning of Sunday, July 7, 2013, the SAR team staged at Convict Lake. SAR members scanned cliffs, hiked, and drove to high points in the area hoping to spot the climbers. A team began climbing the Northeast Gully route while another team ascended the other side of Laurel Mountain. After several hours of searching, the climbers were located by a spotting scope from Convict Lake. The climbers were off-route and halfway up the mountain. SAR climbers continued to climb toward the couple. A National Guard helicopter, from Mather, was able to fly in and extricate the couple and SAR climbers to safety. The overdue climbers were dehydrated but otherwise uninjured.

The climbing in the Northeast Gully is not technically difficult, but the route is long and requires good route finding skills and experience. Off-route, the rock becomes loose and the terrain is steeper. Per the Mono County Sheriff Search and Rescue (SAR) team, there have been two other rescues on this route in the last ten years due to climbers becoming stranded in steep, loose terrain. The Mono County Sheriff SAR team would like to remind climbers to not be deceived by the easy technical rating of this route and to gain experience on shorter alpine routes before attempting this climb.

Written and prepared by: Jennifer Hansen, Public Information Officer