



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

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Grand Canyon News Release

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Good Decisions Lead to Fortunate Outcome for Grand Canyon Backpackers

Grand Canyon, AZ. – Alan Humphrey and his wife, Iris Faraklas, quietly held hands as they talked to reporters, reflecting the cornerstone of the plan that probably saved their lives: “Stick together.” Family members reported the couple as overdue on Sunday, May 25. Late on May 26, with additional information from friends, National Park Service (NPS) rangers were able to determine that the couple had been issued a permit to backpack the Royal Arch route in Grand Canyon National Park from May 17 – May 23, and that their vehicle was still parked at the entry point for the route at the South Bass Trailhead. By May 28th, five days after the couple were expected to complete their trip, multiple ground crews were searching high-probability areas on foot, helicopter flight crews were searching drainages and rim areas increasingly distant from the couple’s anticipated route, a technical team from Zion National Park was searching the lower Royal Arch Drainage using canyoneering techniques and family members were starting to fear the worst.

Yet, at about 5:00 p.m., a ground search team found the couple—tired, hungry, but otherwise in good condition—near the South Bass Trail in the Royal Arch route area. “We couldn’t believe it,” said Patrick Gamman, a member of the team that located the couple. “After all of these days... We had been so worried!” Less than an hour later, Alan Humphrey was being hugged by his father. “There was a real sense of elation! It felt amazing to see my father and his friend right there at the helipad!”

Personnel working on the incident, and the couple themselves, attribute the fortunate outcome to being prepared and making good decisions. Humphrey and Faraklas had backpacked at the Grand Canyon before and were familiar with the rugged nature of the terrain and the changeable weather conditions. (Conditions during their 11 days in the canyon ranged from “temperatures in the 90s to hail and freezing,” according to Iris.) While they had never hiked the Royal Arch route, they had done research on the route and had sought the advice of others who had done the route before. They set specific dates when they would be meeting people after their hike; and they made sure that at least one person knew what they planned to do while they were at the Grand Canyon.

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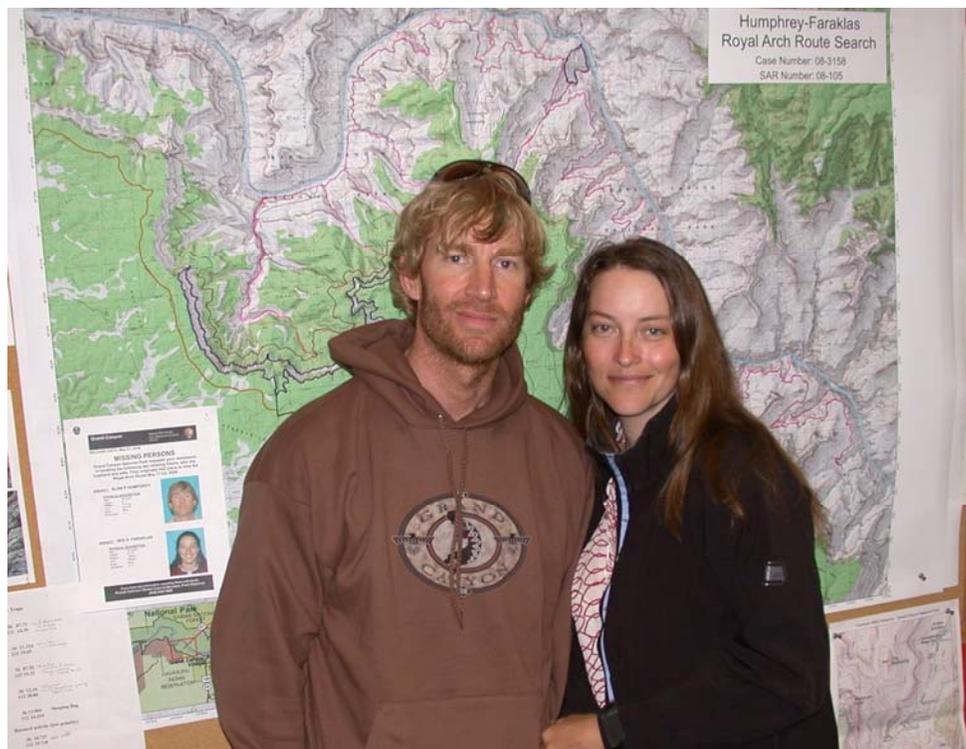
In spite of all of their preparations, on the last leg of their trip, the couple overshot their exit route and attempted to reach the rim in the wrong side-canyon. Eventually, they realized they were lost, and to a degree stuck, but they didn't panic. Instead, they assessed their situation, developed a plan and made a commitment to stick with that plan no matter what.

First, they decided to be prepared for up to a week on their own and rationed their one day of remaining food accordingly. Then, they found water and a source of shade and decided to stay put until help arrived or their meager supplies started to run out. Above all they made a decision to stick together..

These decisions, it is believed, are a big part of why they here today today. They shared the burden of decision making. They kept track of each other's condition physically, mentally, and emotionally. They kept each other on track. They stuck to the plan.

Finally, as their rations began to run out, forcing a last ditch attempt to seek aid at the river, searchers and a resourceful pair of lost backpackers found each other. Few make it out of such an ordeal needing little more than a meal and good night's sleep; but today, a healthy, injury-free couple who made a commitment to stick together, to bring each other through no matter what, stood smiling and holding hands in front of a camera. Their message was simple: it can happen to anyone. And if it happens to you, stay put...make a plan...stick together.

For information on how to safely navigate the backcountry in Grand Canyon National Park, please visit our backcountry trip planner at www.nps.gov/grca or call the backcountry office at 928-638-7875.



Alan Humphrey and Iris Faraklas stand in front of the map used to plan and track the search.

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