



National Park Service
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White Sands
National Monument

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White Sands News Release

For Immediate Release

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An Inter-agency Search Effort Successfully Rescues Lost Hikers

Alamogordo, N.M. On Monday, January 9, 2011, at approximately 3:45 pm, White Sands National Monument received word that two visitors had been hiking within the dunes since 12:00 noon and were lost and unable to find their way out. Russell Vandameer and Karen Renshaw, both of Oklahoma, left to go hiking with their three dogs, Stitch, Suzy, and Griswald. After finding a suitably beautiful spot within the dunes, Vandameer proposed to Renshaw. The newly engaged couple then attempted to hike back to their car, but were unable to find their way back. Rather than continue to wander becoming more lost, they contacted a cousin via cell phone and requested that help be sent.

An inter-agency effort between the National Park Service, Alamo West Volunteer Fire and Rescue Department, U.S. Air Force, and U.S. Army was initiated under a joint unified command. While two Army Rescue Blackhawk helicopters were en route from Fort Bliss, approximately an hour flight away, Holloman Air Force base diverted a F-22 Raptor from a training mission to the search effort. The Raptor was able to positively identify the couple with their three dogs. Two Air Force drones were also tasked, which were able to relay specific coordinates and monitor the lost hiker's location and movement from the air while the Army helicopters were en route. The hikers and their dogs were transported by the Army Blackhawks out of the dunefield to the command post, where they were examined by NPS and Alamo West EMS for exposure to the below freezing night temperatures. Renshaw accepted Vandameer's marriage proposal. The newly engaged couple invited the Blackhawk crew to the wedding.

The search effort was greatly aided by the assistance of the military aircraft, which utilized night vision and infrared equipment to safely locate the hikers after nightfall. NPS Ranger Kelly Roche acted as Incident Commander.

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