

# Two rescues in a week on South Sister

It's a mission that Deschutes County Sheriff's Office Search and Rescue (DCSOSAR) personnel take on regularly — sometimes several times each summer: A hiker who is not prepared for an overnight stay on the mountain gets lost on South Sister and SAR has to come out and get them.

SAR assisted two lost hikers in the space of three days on South Sister last week.

One of the rescues involved an airlift.

The Deschutes County Sheriff's Office reports that on Saturday, July 30, Search and Rescue was dispatched to a report of a hiker that was lost on South Sister after heading down from the summit.

The hiker, James Esposito, 36, of Portland, advised he had gotten off the trail and was climbing on some rocks having lost the trail about an hour earlier. Esposito reported he was hiking alone and had a little food and water left with him. Esposito added that he was dressed in running shoes; running shorts, a light T-shirt and an ultra-running vest.

Esposito's GPS coordinates were obtained during his call to dispatch, placing him about 1,000 feet west of the climber's trail at about 9,400 feet elevation. The battery on his phone was about 20 percent at that time. A DCSOSAR deputy was able to communicate with Esposito by phone long enough to confirm he was not comfortable proceeding any further, after he was provided directions to the climber's trail. Esposito advised he would be able to wait at his location safely until Search and Rescue members arrived.

The hiker and the searchers agreed Esposito would text every 30 minutes to report his status while conserving the cell phone battery

and keeping it in airplane mode in the interim.

Two Deschutes County Sheriff's Office Search and Rescue Hasty Team members were deployed to the location, followed up with a team of six.

Esposito hailed a climber that was on his way to the summit via the northwest route at about 2:25 p.m. Esposito was able to get the message to the climber, Brian Sebastian, that he had called SAR and provided Sebastian the DCSOSAR Deputy's phone number.

This was an important update because the searchers had not received a text from Esposito since the phone plan started.

Sebastian was able to see that Esposito was in a precarious location on the west slope of the mountain, not the south slope.

At 3:50 p.m., Esposito was able to make a phone call to advise he had 1 percent battery left and he had stayed in place. Esposito advised he had been attempting to send text messages without success.

At about 7 p.m., the first DCSOSAR team reached the summit while Team 2 was still ascending. Attempts to locate Esposito were not successful before darkness set in and the risk of creating rock-fall was a concern for searchers. Attempts to make voice contact with Esposito were not successful.

AirLink was placed on standby to transport more DCSOSAR personnel and equipment to the summit prior to nightfall, but the focus shifted to securing a military helicopter that would be able to hoist Esposito from his location, based on the difficulty in accessing him safely prior to nightfall.

It was not until after midnight that searchers learned

that the military helicopter would not be an option until the next morning.

Two DCSOSAR members spent the night on the summit while six members returned to Bend.

At about 5:30 a.m. on Sunday morning, AirLink transported two DCSOSAR members to the summit to team up with the two members that spent the night, to continue the search to locate Esposito. AirLink assisted by searching from the air. Initial efforts to locate Esposito via AirLink were unsuccessful.

One DCSOSAR Mountain Rescue Unit member was lowered from the summit of South Sister to the last known location for Esposito. This MRU member, from an elevation of approximately 10,000 feet, was able to see and make voice contact with Esposito, who was on a ridge northeast from him and at a slightly higher elevation.

Esposito was uninjured, but shivering and battling hypothermia.

DCSOSAR members repositioned and lowered rescuers to Esposito's location. Utilizing an extra harness and ropes, DCSOSAR members were able to raise Esposito to the summit of South Sister. AirLink responded back to the summit of South Sister, retrieved Esposito and transported him to St. Charles in Bend to be assessed.

AirLink further assisted DCSOSAR by returning to the summit of South Sister to fly all DCSOSAR members off of the mountain.

This complex operation was the second rescue on the mountain last week.

On July 27, at about 7 p.m., Quincy Sigona called Deschutes County 911 to report that her brother, Nole



PHOTO COURTESY DCSO

AirLink lifted a rescued hiker off the summit and returned for the search and rescue crew.

Sigona, had become lost after summiting South Sister.

Nole provided his coordinates, which were verified by a cell phone ping when he later called 911. Nole was approximately one mile west of the summit of South Sister and the South Sister Climber Trail. This area of South Sister is steep, with loose terrain.

Nole requested assistance in finding the trail as he was not equipped for an overnight stay and had no source of light besides his cell phone. Nole had a small amount of food and water, but had no other clothing than the shorts and T-shirt he was wearing.

A Deschutes County Search and Rescue Deputy was able to assist Nole via phone in returning to the summit and finding the trail, which he did at about 8:45 p.m. Nole traveled south

on the climbers trail until it became too dark to continue without a light source, at around 9:50 p.m.

A Deschutes County Sheriff's Office Search and Rescue team of four volunteers hiked in from the Devil's Lake Trailhead, locating Nole at about 11:10 p.m. in good health. The search and rescue team escorted Nole off the mountain and back to his vehicle.

The Deschutes County Sheriff's Office reminds those recreating in the backcountry to always prepare for varying conditions and carry the "10 essentials for wilderness survival." This includes sources for navigation, sun protection, insulation, illumination, first-aid supplies, fire, repair kit/tools, nutrition, hydration and emergency shelter.

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**Items NOT accepted:** BUSINESS-GENERATED HAZARDOUS WASTE, explosives, fireworks, ammunition, gas cylinders, radioactive and bio-hazardous waste.

Deschutes County encourages persons with disabilities to participate in all programs and activities. This event/location is accessible to people with disabilities. If you need accommodations to make participation possible, or to request this information in an alternate format please contact:

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