

Search for missing hiker continues: Family waits for news of husband, father

By Adriana Gómez Licón / El Paso Times

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Search and rescue volunteers Steve Murillo, left, Steve London and Brian Owens, rear, were members of one of the seven teams searching for Robert Sumrall on Wednesday afternoon in the Gila Wilderness near Silver City. The team was assigned to search the Iron Creek area down to the Upper Gallinas Campground looking for any signs of Sumrall or his black Labrador retriever, Zulu. (Kalen Severe / Special to the Times)

Photos of search and rescue effort

EL PASO -- The search for Robert Sumrall, the husband of a former El Paso city representative, yielded no clues Wednesday, four days after he vanished in the frigid and rugged mountains of the Gila Wilderness.

Rescue teams will push for a stronger search with more crews today.

Sumrall, 67, went on a hiking trip with his black Labrador retriever, Zulu, on Saturday morning and was supposed to return to his West Side home that night.

His wife, former West Side city Rep. Jan Sumrall, said he did not return home. Family members filed a missing-person report Sunday, and the search began that afternoon when a heavy snowstorm threatened the search area in the Black Range.

Family said Sumrall left on the hiking trip he has taken before wearing shorts and a sweatshirt. Temperatures Sunday to Tuesday were in the upper 20s and lower 30s, the National Weather Service said. Higher in the mountains, the wind-chill factor is greater. Ten inches of snow fell Sunday on the area, where the elevation ranges from 4,200 to 10,900 feet.

The sky cleared Wednesday, and temperatures rose in Hillsboro, N.M., near the search area, staying in the upper 40s and lower 50s.

Police found Sumrall's sport utility vehicle, a red Hummer H-3, on Sunday afternoon parked at the Emory Pass Overlook near Hillsboro. They set up a command post at the site.

About 15 search and rescue members searched on the ground in all-terrain vehicles. And a second helicopter arrived Wednesday to assist.

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"They covered all of the most logical trails, and tomorrow they are going to extend it beyond that," said Paige Strait, Robert Sumrall's daughter. She traveled from New York to nearby Silver City to be at the command post and to update her family on the search developments.

Robert Sumrall has lived in El Paso since 1991, when he arrived from Baton Rouge, La.

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Still, the mystery continues over his whereabouts and whether he is alive.

"If anybody could have lasted this long out there, that's my dad," Strait said.

Strait said there was discussion over getting assistance from Fort Bliss, but post officials would not confirm that information.

Officials had told Strait that the search would not continue after Wednesday, but Officer Martin Serna of the New Mexico State Police said the search would resume this morning.

Sumrall is the director of business development for Glacier Technologies LLC. The 4-year-old company, headquartered on the East Side, performs technology, engineering and call center services mostly for federal government agencies.

In the 1960s, Sumrall was a captain in the U.S. Air Force, Strait said. He has two daughters, including Strait, a son, a stepson and a stepdaughter. His wife of 20 years, Jan Sumrall, was the West Side city representative from 1995 to 2003.

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