

Search for El Paso hiker Robert Sumrall continues

By Adriana Gómez Licón / El Paso Times

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EL PASO -- Search teams kept looking for Robert Sumrall of El Paso in the rugged Gila Wilderness on Thursday and will resume the search today in colder and snowy weather.

Sumrall, husband of an ex-city representative, Jan Sumrall, disappeared in the mountains six days ago.

"We haven't had any clues since Sunday," said New Mexico State Police spokes man Lt. Eric Garcia. "We have absolutely zero to work on."

Two National Guard Black Hawk helicopters, and 25 members of search and rescue teams on the ground, on horseback and on ATVs have broadened the area where they are looking for Robert Sumrall.

Police suspended the search Thursday after 5 p. m. because of a possible snowstorm.

The National Weather Service predicted snow showers and a temperature in the lower 20s Thursday night in Hillsboro, N.M., near the command post.

Time and weather will tell how long the search will continue, police said.

"Once the volunteers are exhausted and resources are exhausted, and we have searched every single portion, then we are going to go and shut it down," Garcia said.

The blizzardlike conditions in the Black Range reported Sunday might have affected the hiking trip Sumrall, 67, took Saturday with his black Labrador retriever, Zulu.

Family members said he left for a hike wearing shorts and a sweatshirt.

Jan Sumrall said he was supposed to return to his West Side home that night.

Jan Sumrall's daughter Wendy Hoggard and son-in-law Chris Hoggard filed a missing-person report Sunday.

During the first three days of the search, Sunday to Tuesday, temperatures dropped to the upper 20s and lower 30s, the National Weather Service said.

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 to the upper 40s and lower 50s.

But cloudy weather revisited the area, and temperatures dropped to the upper 30s Thursday.

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On Thursday, police operated out of a command post at the Emory Pass Overlook near Hillsboro, where they found Sumrall's sport utility vehicle, a red Hummer H-3.

The company where Sumrall works as director of business development, Glacier Technologies LLC, sent food and water to the Grant County Search and Rescue crews Thursday, said Jan Sumrall.

Robert Sumrall was a captain in the U.S. Air Force in the 1960s, said his daughter Paige Strait.

Jan Sumrall, was the West Side city representative from 1995 to 2003.

A recent search and rescue effort in the Gila Wilderness lasted no longer than three days, according to El Paso Times archives.

In December 2006, police presumed Carolyn Dorn, then 52, to be lost or dead after three days of searching 5,000-plus square miles of the forest.

She spent 40 days wandering around the forest in subzero temperatures before two hikers found and rescued her.

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