

Search and rescue mission in Piedra Valley successful

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Staff Writer

On Saturday evening, March 19, a search and rescue operation began in the Piedra Valley area.

According to Mike Le Roux, deputy of Archuleta County Emergency Operations, emergency management received notification of two hikers being overdue in the Piedra Valley area around 8:20 p.m.

Members of the Upper San Juan Search and Rescue (USJSAR) and members of the Archuleta County Emergency Operations team responded to the notification, arriving to the Piedra River trailhead at around 9 p.m., Le Roux reported.

Two ground teams were sent out, with the hikers, described as being in their late 20s, being located at 1:20 a.m. on Sunday morning.

The two hikers were escorted out, arriving at the trailhead at 2:45 a.m., Le Roux explained, adding that, although a helicopter had assisted with the search, there was no medical issue.

Originally, the hikers had planned to hike through the Piedra River trail to the First Fork trailhead, a

trailhead that connects to the Piedra River trail by about 11 miles, but chose to turn around during the voyage.

Le Roux also had stated that the hikers embarked on their hike a lot later than was ideal, and that they were probably not as prepared as they should have been.

“I know that area very well, and it can get pretty technical,” Le Roux explained, adding that, on a nice day during summer, the hike can average five hours to complete.

He added that it was fortunate that the hikers turned around, as Forest Service Road 628 (County Road 166) leading to the First Fork trailhead was closed.

Had the hikers completed their hike to the First Fork trailhead, they would have still faced an additional 12-mile walk down the road.

Le Roux stressed importance of checking the status of Forest Service roads before embarking on adventures or establishing pick-up locations.

The status of Forest Service roads can currently be found at <http://www.fs.usda.gov>.

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