Amateurs in Action

Recounts of ham radio operators who have used their time and skills to help others in a time of need

Stranded in the Sierra Nevadas



Tony Fernandez KM6QFD

Friday 11 July 2025 was a nice, warm day for Tami Laird to drive her 9-year-old son Stirling to a Cub Scout day camp at Camp Wolfeboro in California's Stanislaus National Forest of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. The normally three-hour trip took longer than usual when Tami found herself mistakenly following rough logging trails in her sedan, guided by her GPS. After a while their car high-centered on mud and rocks, and after attempting to dig themselves out, and without cell service, Tami and Stirling abandoned their vehicle, but not until she had written bread crumb notes indicating their travel route.

The next day, the Calaveras County Volunteer Search and Rescue (SAR) Team was notified that the two were overdue and now reported missing, last seen near the area where they had been training. SAR set up a command post and set out for the search. Soon, some of the SAR team had come upon the handwritten notes, then eventually discovered Tami and Stirling, who were safe. But now the group had a new problem: they couldn't communicate with the command post to update them to their situation, since they were out of cell tower range and their SAR radios couldn't reach the command post.



Frank Yost KA6GWY

One SAR member, Tony Fernandez KM6QFD, happened to have his ham radio HT with him, and called out on a local CERA (Community Emergency Radio Association) repeater to request assistance. Frank Yost KA6GWY just happened to be listening on the CERA repeater at his home when he heard the call. After Tony explained the situation and provided coordinates, Frank called 911 and provided the SAR team with everything they needed to communicate the update and locate the group.



Tami and Stirling Laird

You can read more about Tami and Stirling's 24-hour ordeal on *The Independent*, *Inside Edition (Facebook)*, and ARRL.