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Absurdity easy to gauge with lost surveyors

BY [LOGAN JENKINS](#),
MONDAY, JANUARY 11, 2010 AT 12:04 A.M.

Surveyors occupy a special place in the American grain.

George Washington, [Thomas Jefferson](#), [Abraham Lincoln](#), [Henry David Thoreau](#) — they all measured the lay of the land.

Knowing exactly where they are, surveyors sight the lines of civilization, no matter how forbidding the terrain.



Call Logan at [760-737-7555](tel:760-737-7555)

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A pair of surveyors getting lost in a neck of North County within hiking distance of Interstate 15 is an absurdity out of a [Monty Python](#) sketch.

And yet that's what precisely happened on the afternoon of Dec. 30.

Here's the Sheriff's Department news release:

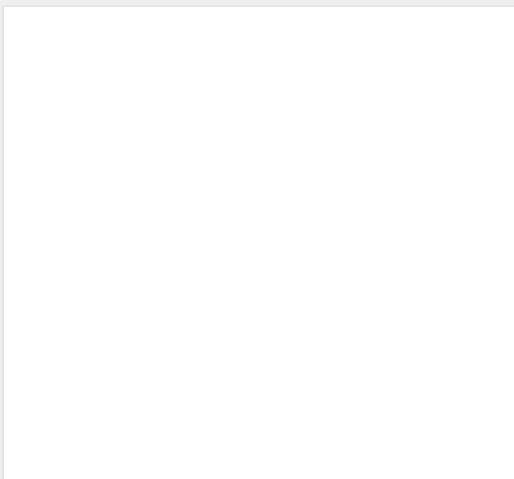
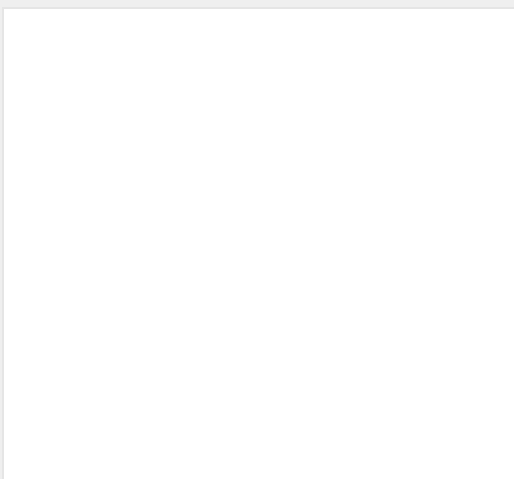
The Sheriff's Communication Center received a call from a surveying team leader working on the Stewart Canyon landfill project. He indicated two of his surveyors were placing markers in the area and lost their bearings and were lost somewhere in the area of Stewart Canyon southwest of the Pala Indian Reservation.

Deputies from the Valley Center Sheriff's Station responded to the area. Due to rain and low clouds the sheriff's ASTREA helicopter was not requested. Cell phone contact was established with (the surveyors). Both were wet, in light clothing and were becoming exhausted. They were not able to see any lights as they were in deep brush and trees.

Sheriff's Communications dispatchers worked with the cell phone service provider Verizon, and were able to ping (one of the men's) cell phone. This narrowed the search area to about one square mile. Deputies were able to establish voice contact with the surveyors.

Deputies hiked up the Stewart Mountain cutting a trail through tall brush and trees. They were able to contact and help the surveyors down the mountain. Neither man was seriously injured; both were cold, wet and very grateful to be rescued.

■■■
Local news outlets — City News Service (SignOnSanDiego, the Union-Tribune's Web site, is a [CNS](#) client);



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the North County Times; Channel 10; the Reader; and the Village News, a weekly — recycled the reported facts. The Union-Tribune's reporter had so many unanswered questions on the item — like where did this happen? — that he decided it couldn't be published in the newspaper.

I called Michael Pallamary, a La Jolla-based surveyor with 40 years of experience, a giant in the field.

"The story intrigued the hell out of me," Pallamary said. The Pala rescue "lit up surveyor networks," he said, adding that his colleagues were "aghast" as well as "embarrassed" for their profession.

"Will They Ever Live It Down?" was the headline of an Iowa surveyor blog. "At least Hansel and Gretel had a plan," one online wag remarked.

Pallamary, who has taught surveying, figures that the two men — one the Sheriff's Department said was 30 years old, the other 25 — are likely apprentices, not professional field surveyors, an earned title like doctor or lawyer. An Internet search of licensed surveyors bore that out, he said.

Nevertheless, Pallamary worries about what he calls the "Nintendo Generation," young surveyors who rely on electronic gadgets but tend to be clueless about a tool as basic as a compass.

"This (rescue) speaks poorly for the profession — and society at large," Pallamary said.

He speculated that the two men were carrying a GPS device that didn't function in the poor weather and thick underbrush. Fortunately, cell phone signals saved the day.

An old-school pro, Pallamary said he ties ribbons to branches to mark his way out of heavy terrain.

■■■

To be fair, more than a couple of surveyors lost their way in the final hours of 2009.

County Supervisor Pam Slater-Price and others in North County read this bizarre story and scratched their heads. Stewart Canyon landfill? No one had ever heard of it. There is a Stewart Canyon northwest of Pala, paralleling I-15 north of state Route 76, but Stewart Mountain? There is no such mountain in North County.

Slater-Price got her answer from Chandra Wallar, a county land-use official who wrote this Jan. 5 e-mail:

"Staff was able to speak with Bill Hutton, attorney for GCL. Mr. Hutton confirmed that the surveyors were working on the Gregory Canyon Landfill project. They were setting up monuments with known locations to create points of reference for a flyover to create an updated topography map. ... Apparently, the sheriff's staff was a bit confused on the location name."

Not only do we have two surveyors losing their bearings in an area surrounded by rural houses and an Indian casino, but the sheriff's deputies who rescued them evidently didn't know they were on Gregory Mountain, part of the Gregory Canyon landfill site that has been, over 20 years, the source of intense controversy — and two countywide votes.

And what's worse, at least to me, is that some in the media generally failed to deploy the simple compass of skepticism, the old-school tool without which we're lost.

Nintendo anyone?

Logan Jenkins: (760) 737-7555 ; logan.jenkins@uniontrib.com

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 Jack76 01/11/2010 10:14 AM

My wife's GPS unit wanted her to go to Coronado when she put in Third Ave. instead of 3rd Ave. for the address of the San Diego Civic Theater. She didn't know the zip code and selected the wrong option. Luckily, my wife is not blond and she didn't drive over there to look for the theater.


Like

 Pounceshuman 01/11/2010 12:37 PM [in reply to Jack76](#)

Nav Aids are just as good as the data used. It is the old GIGO (garbage in garbage out) premise.

Why don't you say your wife is not Mexican, or Black, or a Polack? Isn't saying someone's intelligence is based on her hair color is just as wrong basing assessment of intelligence on race or nationality?


Like


 Jack76 01/11/2010 02:11 PM [in reply to Pounceshuman](#)

 SDGuy and 4 more liked this

Oh, you're blond and I've hurt your feelings - sorry.


Like

 Seatrooper 01/11/2010 09:34 AM

 the1stcrash liked this


The door to the carpenters house is broken.

Like

 johnqpublic5 01/11/2010 09:03 AM


If one can get a society to rely completely on technology, then they will lose the ability to think for themselves.


Like

 Pounceshuman 01/11/2010 08:16 AM

The difference is that Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, and Thoreau didn't have GPS to help them get lost.

Like

 howdude 01/11/2010 08:15 AM

 allamerican56 and 2 more liked this

In our techno society today nothing is surprising. Where is common sense?? These GPS gizmo's some folks follow them right off a cliff. The snowbound Or. couple taking a logging road in winter !! Sorry Folks I for will still consult my trusty Thomas Brothers!!

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