

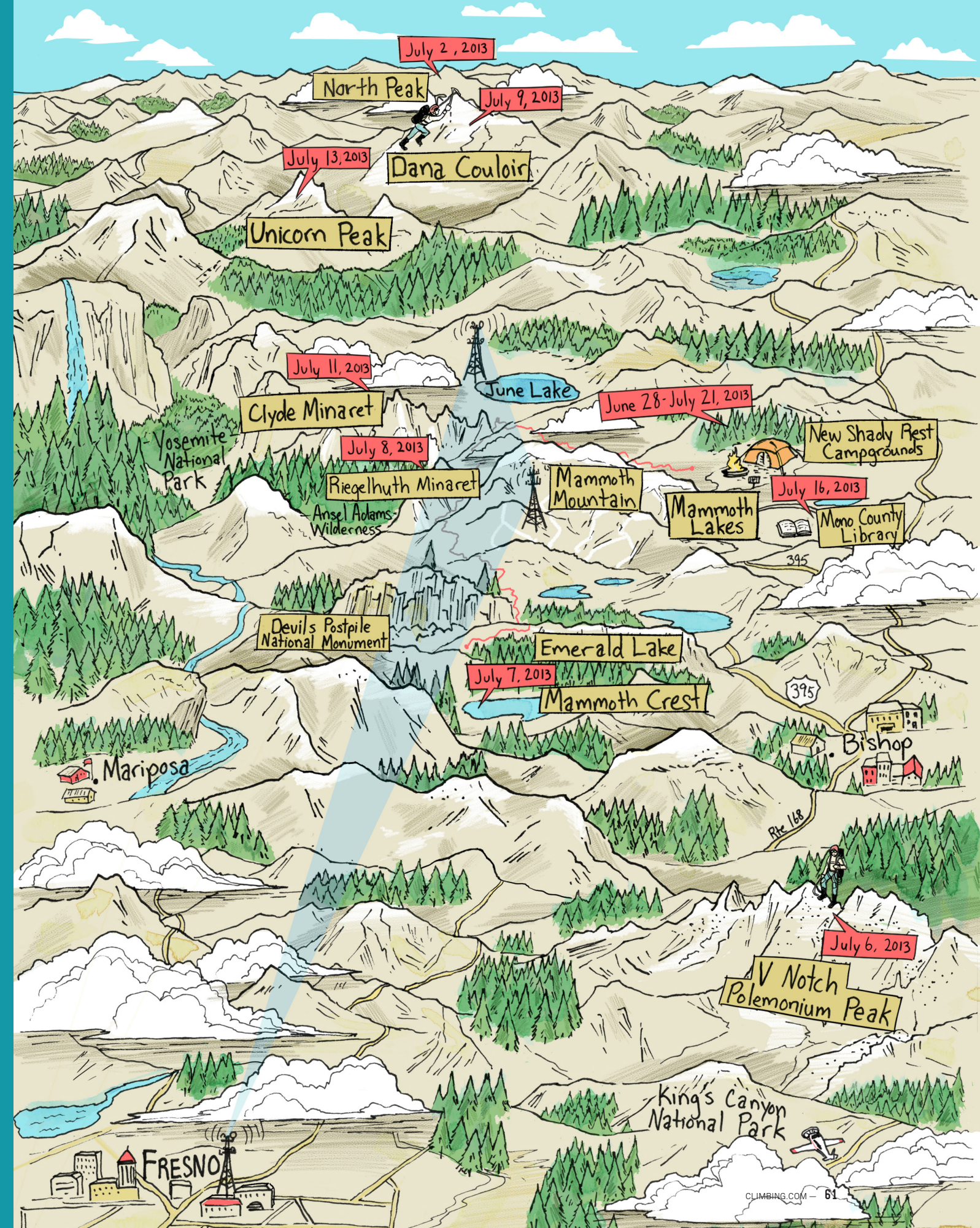
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An account of
the mysterious
disappearance of a
climber in the Sierra
Nevada

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IN THE SMALL SKI TOWN of Mammoth Lakes in California's Eastern Sierra, the first snowfall of the year is usually a beautiful and joyous celebration.

But for the family and friends of a missing Pennsylvania man, the falling flakes in early October 2013 were a disheartening sign. Hope was fading with the inevitable change in season, and those close to Matthew Greene were starting to understand the grave reality that he may never be found. From more than 2,500 miles away, his loved ones experienced a tug of war between despair and optimism, feeling helpless across the country as they went through the motions of their daily lives.



Three months earlier in July, the 39-year-old high school math teacher dropped his car off at a Mammoth auto shop for repairs. He was visiting the area for a summer climbing vacation when the car blew a head gasket. The friends Greene was traveling with headed home as scheduled, and Greene planned to drive to Colorado to join other friends for more climbing as soon as his car was ready.

"I may have to spend the rest of my life here in Mammoth," he texted to a friend as he got more and more frustrated with how long the repair was taking. He was anxious to get on with his trip.

No one has heard from Greene since he last talked to his parents on July 16, 2013. He did not tell anyone his plans for the following day. He never picked up his car. His campsite was left tidy, and his credit cards and phone have not been used. The only clue, a few pages torn from a mountaineering guidebook, pointed toward the Minarets and Ritter Range, a rugged mountain massif in the Ansel Adams Wilderness. At the time, Mammoth Lakes was experiencing sunshine and above-average temperatures. On July 29, 2013, Matthew Greene was reported missing, and his body has not been found in the three years since.

In 2013, more than 600,000 Americans were reported missing, according to the FBI's National Crime Information Center. At the end of the year, nearly 85,000 of those cases were still active. Matthew Greene is the only unsolved missing person case in Mammoth Lakes, and in January 2014, Greene's family filed for a death certificate in Pennsylvania, but the case is still open with the Mammoth Lakes Police Department.

"Most people assume that Matt was a victim of some sort of climbing accident—a fall of some sort," says John Greco, Greene's good friend and climbing partner that met him in California. But all his friends agree that he was experienced, skilled, and careful in the mountains.

BORN SEPTEMBER 8, 1973, to Robert and Patricia Greene, Matthew is the second of four children. He grew up in rural Pennsylvania, developing a love for the outdoors from a young age. He was a Boy Scout and often went hunting and fishing with his dad.

"Growing up in the boon-docks of Franklin Township was a blessing," Greene wrote in 1999 in a letter to his sister, Tiffany Minto, when he was in the Peace Corps. "I came out of there with independence, a love of nature, and the determination needed to succeed in track, school, or whatever." When they were kids, Greene would take Minto fishing and target shooting at the lake, where they'd stay until bugs

feasted on their arms. They went hiking together often, even in the really cold winters common to the Northeast.

"The ice didn't slow him down one bit," Minto said. "I struggled to keep up." Greene loved to run, competing on the track team in high school and running the Boston Marathon a few times as an adult. As the student speaker for his high school graduation, Greene urged his classmates to take chances.

"The time has come to fulfill our current goals and to set new ones to be conquered later," he said in his speech. "In our future travels and endeavors, no matter where they take us, we must not lose our youthful imaginations. We must not be too scared to take risks, and most of all, we must live life to the fullest." Greene went on to study at Clemson University in South Carolina before transferring to and graduating from Pennsylvania State University. As a Peace Corps volunteer on a teaching assignment in Papua New Guinea from 1998 to 2001, he regularly wrote letters to his sister, giving her advice on life, college, and relationships.

"Any associations you have in your life can be lumped into one of these three categories: people who push you forward, people who drag you down, and people who do neither," he wrote.

He also wrote to friends, telling tales of his adventures, like walking six hours to fix a radio transceiver and an "anti-city hiking tour," which was a nine-hour trek across dense bush and mountainous terrain where he found himself "crossing a roaring hundred-foot waterfall, wading through shallow rivers, carefully walking on top of scores of muddy, mossy logs, ascending countless ridges, and descending countless valleys."

In his letters, Greene not only gave accounts of his work and explorations, but he also contemplated life and its greater meaning. He wrote: "It's a pitiful thing when people reach the point in their lives where passionate inclinations no longer win out over regular routine. I don't know why our minds always gravitate to reason. It's a nuisance. At least for me, it takes a lot of mental effort to give in to my passions, though once I've devoted myself to them I'm never plagued with regret."

When he returned from the Peace Corps, Greene got a job as a high school math teacher in Pennsylvania and would

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Since Jill and John left Mammoth, they continued texting back and forth with Greene every few days. Jill grew concerned when Greene stopped responding to texts. "At first I didn't think anything about it," she said. "I texted him and didn't hear back. Then I phoned him and my husband sent him a text. Again, we didn't hear from him."

go on summer climbing trips to fulfill his need for adventure. He often traveled out West solo for camping, hiking, and climbing, occasionally meeting up with friends along the way. In 2006 he road-tripped through South Dakota, Wyoming, and on to Red Lodge, Montana. When his car broke down at the end of the trip, he toiled around town and hitchhiked to a trailhead.

In his trip log he wrote over the course of a few days: *Put in an awesome 10-hour hike. The rock was surprisingly solid. Yet, some big pieces moved. Returned to find that rodents had torn into my engine—plug wires, vacuum hoses, mostly wire sheathing. Coasted into town...took my car to Ronning's. They should get to it tomorrow morning...*

Same as yesterday—no car yet. Hitched a ride out to the Bear Track and hiked up the Silver Plateau. It's awesome up there—good mix of pines and open fields...

More town. More reading. More net searching. Coming up with a plan. Yellowstone, climb Teewinot, Wind River Range, Ring the Bells, Arrow, Vestal, possibly Eolus, Sunshine and Wisdom, Great Sand Dunes, Jessica and Longs Peak, then home. Still waiting on that car.

GREENE ARRIVED IN MAMMOTH LAKES a few days before he met up with his friends John and Jill Greco on June 28, 2013. He set up camp at New Shady Rest Campground on the edge of town and paid through July 7. John, Jill, and their 9-year-old son checked in at a hotel nearby. Over the next 10 days, Greene and John climbed many of the region's classic routes at places like Crystal Crag, Clark's Canyon, the Benton Crag, and the Gong Show Crag. They also ticked a few of the Eastern Sierra's classic alpine routes, including the *North Couloir* on North Peak near Yosemite National Park and *V-Notch* on Polemonium Peak near Big Pine.

On previous trips Greene kept a hand-written log of his climbs, sometimes elaborate and other times brief. He often checked and reported conditions on climbing websites.

During this trip, he wrote on Summit Post: *Did the V-Notch on Saturday, July 6th. We easily crossed the schrund via a snow bridge at the far left side. We studied the route well for signs of rockfall before committing, and only had one baseball-size rock rocket down during our ascent. Tons of rocks were falling down the U-Notch, though.*

During Greene's time in Mammoth, his Subaru was in and out of the auto repair shop. It would get fixed, then overheat driving up a steep grade and go back to the mechanic. It was finally diagnosed with a blown

head gasket, which would take additional time to repair.

JULY 7

John and Jill were scheduled to leave Mammoth Lakes. John had a work meeting in Southern California the next day, and Matt planned to leave for Colorado to meet up with other friends.

That morning the whole group hiked to Emerald Lake in the Mammoth Lakes Basin, where they skipped rocks and enjoyed the morning at the lake before Matt continued up the trail to the Mammoth Crest, and John and Jill headed down to their car to begin the drive south.

It was the last time any of Matt's friends would ever see him. "As we were walking down the trail, I say to my husband, 'You know, he goes off like this, and he doesn't tell anybody. If something happens to him we are not going to know where to look,'" Jill said in an interview. "My husband says, 'Yeah, and the bad thing about it is his car won't be at the trailhead.'" Even though Greene had planned to leave that day as well, his car was still in the shop.

"He was fine with being stuck in Mammoth," Jill said. "It's not like he was in some remote backcountry area. There were shuttles to take you all over the place, and he thought it was only going to be a couple days." Over the next eight days, Greene continued to climb classic Sierra peaks and routes, checking in with John and Jill via text every few days.

JULY 8

Greene soloed Riegelhuth Minaret, a 10,560-foot spire in the Ritter Range west of Mammoth Lakes.

JULY 9

Greene headed north to climb *Dana Couloir*, a popular 1,200-foot ice route on a 13,000-foot peak near Yosemite National Park's eastern entrance. Later he sent John an update: *The Riegelhuth Minaret took less than 6.5 hours round-trip but was scary, and the Dana Couloir was easy*

but fun and had the best ice of the trip.

JULY 10

A rest day. Greene called his parents and did some grocery shopping.

JULY 11

Greene took the shuttle to Reds Meadow Valley to hike and climb in the Minarets and Ritter Range again. On the ride to the trailhead, he spoke with a Devils Postpile maintenance worker. They talked about climbing Mount Ritter, Banner Peak, Clyde Minaret, and the cross-country hike between Ediza, Iceberg, Cecile, and Minaret lakes.

He was not sure of his itinerary for the day when he got off the shuttle at the Devils Postpile trailhead, but he eventually climbed the 12,280-foot Clyde Minaret, the tallest of the Minarets' jagged peaks.

JULY 12-15

Over the next few days, Greene hiked a cross-country route on Mammoth Crest in the Mammoth Lakes Basin, and he

climbed Unicorn Peak in Yosemite's high country.

JULY 16

He went to the Mammoth Lakes Library to use the internet. He called his parents and the mechanic, then sent a few text messages and made a small purchase at Rite Aid. He paid the campground for the night and the next day.

Since Jill and John left Mammoth, they continued texting back and forth with Greene every few days. Jill updated him on details for a trip to France they were tentatively planning for later that summer, and John received updates on the climbs Greene had done. Jill grew concerned when Greene stopped responding to texts. "At first I didn't think anything about it," she said. "I texted him and didn't hear back. Then I phoned him and my husband sent him a text. Again, we didn't hear from him."

JULY 21

After three unpaid nights, the host at the campground reported the abandoned campsite and suspicion of a "missing or overdue person" to the Mammoth Lakes Police Depart-



ment. Two MLPD officers responded to the call, visited the campground, and recorded the information on a police log. Campsite #164 was left intact, but Greene had not returned to it. His neatly folded laundry was stored inside the tent along with some gear. His food was in the bear box.

"We can't really do a whole lot, unless a missing person report is filed," said MLPD Detective Doug Hornbeck. "We'll get a name and the information, put it on the log, and that's as far as it goes." So the campsite was broken down, Greene's gear was put into storage, and new campers soon occupied the site.

JULY 26

Greene's mom expressed concern to her daughter that she hadn't heard from Matt. She'd been leaving messages that went unanswered. But Greene often went on long hikes and backpacking trips and didn't return messages immediately. Sometimes it would take him days or weeks to readjust to society after a good trek. He enjoyed the solitude of the wilderness and was not into technology, so Minto brushed off her mom's concerns, saying, "He probably couldn't recharge his phone or was spending some time in the backcountry."

Jill knew that Greene could not use his car phone charger because his Subaru was still in the shop, so she thought maybe his phone was dead. Still, she knew that his lack of response was unusual and she grew increasingly concerned when she didn't hear from him for 10 days. John called Tony, Greene's friend that he was planning to meet in Colorado, to see if Greene had arrived. Maybe he was spending time in the backcountry, Tony suggested.

JULY 29

Seven days after Greene's campsite was packed up and put into storage, Jill called the Norco Goodyear to inquire about the car—she was told it had been ready since July 18. Greene had not responded to a message saying the car was ready and he had not picked it up. Jill then called the Mammoth Lakes Welcome Center and talked to a ranger. She asked for someone to check on his campsite, and the ranger insisted she file a missing person report. Thirteen days after Greene disappeared, he was officially reported missing.

GREENE WAS NO STRANGER to climbing mountains. His list of ascents logged on SummitPost.org reads like the

He was probably wearing a blue Outdoor Research ball cap, a black t-shirt over a long-sleeve green shirt, and mountaineering approach shoes. He had a large black and white Mountain Hardwear backpack, a Petzl Quark ice axe, Black Diamond crampons, and yellow La Sportiva mountaineering boots.

resume of an experienced mountaineer, and his climbing partners say he was skillful on ice, calculated in the outdoors, and did not take risks.

More than two weeks after Greene talked to his parents for the last time, Detective Hornbeck contacted Verizon for an emergency information request. Verizon concluded that Greene's phone had been "powered off for quite some time" and "there was no way to track the current location."

The last ping was registered to the cellular tower on Mammoth Mountain on July 16. According to Detective Hornbeck, the ping created a cone-shaped triangle with towers in Fresno and June Lake, indicating that Greene's phone was located within that region, which consists mostly of the Ansel Adams Wilderness.

The Mammoth Lakes Police Department did not find any evidence of foul play, and the possibility of suicide was quickly ruled out. Greene did not have any financial troubles. He was single and showed no signs of depression. When the Grecos last saw him in Mammoth, Jill said he was his normal optimistic self.

On July 31, Detective Hornbeck notified Bill Greene (no relation) at Mono County Sheriff Search and Rescue. Typically when a person is reported overdue in the mountains, SAR launches an investigation. They are quick to respond and have a healthy roster of volunteers that are experienced mountaineers, but Matthew Greene did not tell anyone where he was going. And his car was still at the mechanic, so they didn't even have a trailhead. Without a known location, SAR could not begin a search.

Matthew Greene could have gone anywhere. Most of his equipment was stored in his car, which was parked outside the Norco Goodyear while waiting for repair, meaning he had access to his personal belongings 24 hours a day. From an inventory of the equipment left in his car and tent, friends were able to deduce what he was carrying with him. He was probably wearing a blue Outdoor Research ball cap, a black t-shirt over a long-sleeve green shirt, and moun-

taineering approach shoes. He had a large black and white Mountain Hardwear backpack, a Petzl Quark ice axe, Black Diamond crampons, and was either carrying or wearing yellow La Sportiva mountaineering boots. He did not have overnight gear.

Since he had no vehicle, Greene's only option to get to trailheads was walking, hitchhiking, or public transportation. With a number of local shuttle services, which Greene had used in the week prior to his disappearance, he could have made it to a number of trailheads from the Mammoth

Lakes Basin to Yosemite Valley. When Greene went for a hike or climb, he often removed the pages of a guidebook and reinserted them with notes after the climb. From *High Sierra: Peaks, Passes, and Trails* found in his camp belongings, chapter 12 was torn out—"The Minarets and June Lake." With the shuttle to Reds Meadow, Greene could have been at any one of the three main trailheads in the valley that leads to a network of paths that access the Minarets and Ritter Range in the Ansel Adams Wilderness.

The 231,533-acre wilderness area is located west of Mammoth Lakes and the Sierra Nevada Crest in Madera County. It shares a border with Yosemite National Park to the north, and the 581,000-acre John Muir Wilderness to the south. Though the region is popular for hiking, backpacking, and climbing, the mountain range is vast and rugged.

EVEN THOUGH SAR could not launch a formal search without a known destination, they sent teams to the Minaret region on training missions. They checked summit registers in the range, and a helicopter team did a flyover. Detective Hornbeck worked with the U.S. Forest Service to contact people with overnight wilderness permits for the region. If anyone spoke with Greene on the trail or shuttle, or gave him a ride, they have not come forward or they do not know that he is missing.

Greene's family hired an aerial tour company to fly over the region. They mounted a RED digital camera to the wing of an old Piper airplane. The camera is capable of recording high-quality images at 30 frames per second while being zoomed in 3x. They recorded 100 gigabytes of data that was later processed and examined, but showed no evidence of Greene.

Detective Hornbeck followed up on every single tip. Psychics from around the world called with information after looking into a crystal ball or having a dream. A retired police officer in Minden, Nevada, reported a sighting of a young



man that fit the description at a Nevada gas station. A woman said she had given Greene and his dog a ride to Colorado, but Greene did not have a dog. Glasses were found near the Inyo Craters trailhead less than 10 miles from Greene's campsite, but the prescription did not match. The police talked with campers in the sites adjacent to Greene's. They interviewed the employees at the auto shop. No one had any concrete information.

"What frustrates me the most with Matthew is he's so experienced, but he didn't tell anyone where he was going," Detective Hornbeck said. "There's nothing wrong with sending a text and saying, 'Hey, I'm going to go climb in the Minarets today.' That would solve a lot of problems."

Greene's sister began compiling facts and information, creating a Find Matthew Greene website and Facebook page. She did interviews with reporters. Friends started forums on climbing websites seeking information. Conversations were started, and theories were tossed around. Where would Matthew Greene have gone?

The MLPD press release was published in the local papers. Media outlets in Pennsylvania picked up the story, and a short news brief made it in the Los Angeles Times.

Matthew Greene is a 39-year-old white male, 5 feet 11 inches, approximately 155 pounds with brownish-blond short hair and blue eyes. It is believed that he may have gotten a ride from someone to a remote area to hike or climb.

WHAT MAKES THE MINARETS so appealing to climbers is also what makes the rugged peaks so dangerous for climbing. The Ritter Range is located within the Sierra Nevada, just west of the crest. The jagged landscape of the Minarets and sharp summits of Mount Ritter and Banner Peak can be seen from all over Mammoth Lakes. The range stands tall and mighty, separating the Sierra from the rounder mountains in the coastal range.

"There is a lingering feeling of emptiness and sorrow that just dampens my enthusiasm for most things I do," said John Greco. "I haven't done any mountain climbing since Matt disappeared. I could attribute it to a lack of partners, work and family responsibilities getting in the way, but in truth, I just haven't been motivated."

Unlike the granite that makes up much of the Sierra, the Ritter Range is metavolcanic rock, which was formed in several volcanic super eruptions, according to Allen Glazner, professor of geology at the University of North Carolina and author of a book about the geology in and around Yosemite. These eruptions produced hot volcanic rock deposits that flow much like an avalanche.

"Metavolcanic rocks are generally kind of sketchy for climbing because they flake apart easily and are not nearly as strong as granite," Glazner says. "That's why they form spiky landforms like the Minarets instead of big smooth cliffs like Half Dome."

In the summer of 1933, the Minarets became the location for a major search for Walter "Peter" Starr, Jr., a prominent San Francisco attorney and respected climber. When Starr did not report to work as scheduled, an all-star roster of climbers fled to Mammoth Lakes to aid in the search. Jules Eichorn, Glen Dawson, and Norman Clyde—pioneers of High Sierra mountaineering—were among the searchers. A member of the Sierra Club, Starr was known for logging long days of hiking in the High Sierra and climbing routes considered technically difficult at the time.

After weeks of searching, Starr's father called off the search and planned a memorial service. Norman Clyde stayed behind and continued to search. Nearly a month after Starr left to climb in the Minarets, Clyde discovered his body on the flank of Michael Minaret. He had fallen several hundred feet to his death.

IT'S BEEN NEARLY three years since Matthew Greene vanished from Mammoth Lakes, and still no trace of him has surfaced. In August 2014 his campground neighbors returned to the area and saw a missing person sign. They called the police department and met with Detective Hornbeck and Bill Greene from search and rescue. They said they invited Matthew to go for a hike with them, but he declined. He did not say, or they could not remember, where he was going.

Since Greene was carrying an ice axe and crampons, Mount Ritter is a logical guess for his destination on July 17, 2013. The southeast glacier is the most prominent snow route in the range, the trailhead is accessible from public transportation, and the mountain was in the chapter of the guidebook that he was carrying with him. For even the fittest of mountaineers, climbing Mount Ritter in one day is a big feat. The hike to Ediza Lake is seven miles one way, and then it is another

4,000 vertical feet of off-trail hiking and climbing to reach the summit.

"At the time of Matt's disappearance, I had a pretty strong suspicion that he had gone to Mt. Ritter, but after reflecting on it and revisiting the area last summer, I am not so sure," said John Greco. "I don't think the climb itself would be particularly appealing to Matt—it seems like somewhat of a slog with limited technical challenge."

Greene did not have any known pre-existing medical conditions, and an animal attack is doubtful. There has never been a human death by mountain lion or black bear in the region, and grizzly bears haven't been there since the 1920s. It seems likely that Matthew Greene had a fatal climbing accident. Maybe

he would have set out to climb the region's tallest and most prolific mountain on his last day in the area, but there is no hard evidence.

If Matthew Greene hitchhiked, like he'd been known to do in the past, he could be anywhere. And since he had climbed in the Minarets a few days prior to his disappearance, it is possible that the chapter of the guidebook was still in his pack. But there was enough suspicion that multiple search parties focused on the Minarets and Ritter Range. Greene's close friends and climbing partners went to Mammoth Lakes to search in August 2013, and a number of local climbers and mountaineers have spearheaded their own small search parties.

Dean Rosnau, a former SAR member, has spent nearly 30 days searching for Greene. In August 2013, Rosnau focused on the Minarets, but late last summer and fall he began to gravitate toward Ritter and Banner.

"In a search area so vast, what we are looking for is so small, one will literally have to step on the evidence to find it," Rosnau said. A lot of gear has been hauled out of the wilderness areas that surround Mammoth Lakes, but none if it was Matthew Greene's.

A MISSING PERSON is torturous for the living—the unknown and lack of resolution is part of a grieving process unlike any other. When the snow started to fall in October 2013, the search came to a halt and the missing person posters were

MISSING

Since July 17th, 2013

Matthew Greene

Matt has been missing from the Mammoth Lakes, CA area since July 17, 2013. Matt is a Math Teacher in Nazareth, PA & lives in Bethlehem, PA. Matt was hiking/climbing with friends in the Mammoth Lakes region in CA & staying at the Shady Rest campground. Prior to his disappearance he was having some car trouble. Matt stayed behind while his car was repaired with plans to meet up with friends down the line. His last known contact was on July 16th. Matt had yellow La Sportiva Nepal Extreme mountaineering boots, step-in crampons, a dark grey/black backpack, blue hat, and was probably wearing a long sleeve shirt with a darker (green/black) short sleeve shirt on top.

PLEASE HELP SPREAD THE WORD!

If You Have Any Information, Please Call:
 Detective Doug Hornbeck at (760) 932-7549 x 17 or the Mammoth Lakes Police at (760) 934-2536
 For Updates & Questions, Please Go To: <https://www.facebook.com/findmattgreene>

taken down for the season. The family petitioned for and received a death certificate in Pennsylvania so they could settle his affairs. There has been no memorial service.

"The hardest part is the not knowing," said friend Tom Davidock. "If he'd let someone know where he was going we'd have a completely different situation, but you can't get mad at him—we've all done it." Greene's closest friends and climbing partners each say they don't climb as much as they used to, and most of them can't really explain why.

"There is a lingering feeling of emptiness and sorrow that just dampens my enthusiasm for most things I do," said John Greco. "I haven't done any mountain climbing since

Matt disappeared, with the exception of the searches we did for him. I could attribute it to a lack of partners, work and family responsibilities getting in the way, but in truth, I just haven't been motivated to make it happen."

In 2014, Greene's father, Robert, spent the summer in Mammoth Lakes. At 69 years old, he was slightly overweight and out of shape, but he began training so he was conditioned to hike in the High Sierra. He wanted to spend the summer in the mountains where his son is presumed dead, and he hiked nearly 700 miles that summer. He explored the trails that Matt had enjoyed, he searched with Rosnau, and he climbed for the first time. Greco led Robert up Crystal Crag, so he could stand on a summit that Matt had also stood on the year prior.

"I wanted him to get a taste of the kind of climbing Matt loved to do most, so he could hopefully understand the appeal and attraction," Greco said. "I just kept thinking of how Matt would have enjoyed watching his dad climb—something I'm sure he never would have considered doing before Matt's disappearance."

Greene's mother, Patricia, visited Mammoth Lakes that summer for the first and only time for one week with her daughter. Not a hiker, Patricia spent most of the time in town, while Minto hit the trails with her father.

"I felt completely at peace and in awe of the beauty," Minto said, "but returning home just felt like I was turning my back on Matt, on the possibility of finding him. I wish I could move on, but it's just impossible."