

Lost hikers guided through remote area

An additional 14 rescue workers have been sent to help extract three hikers who were stranded in a remote part of Sichuan province's Wolong Nature Reserve after they were found by an earlier rescue team of 16, according to a report on Sunday in Western China Metropolis Daily.

At least 30 people, including police officers, medical workers and residents, had been involved in the search.

Wolong police received a call from the hikers on a satellite phone at about 3 pm on Thursday. The caller said he and his two companions – a man and a woman – were unable to continue.

They had entered a zone that is ordinarily off-limits to the public on Sept 30 and planned to walk through the mountains. However, they got altitude sickness and lost their way.

The satellite phone helped rescuers pinpoint the hikers' location.

It took six hours for the first rescue team to find the hikers, who were holed up in a cowshed in Paziqiao – a virgin forest area southwest of the reserve where altitudes soar up to 4,000 meters.

The two men were checked, and one was found to be overweight and suffering symptoms related to altitude. The woman had severe altitude sickness and was too weak to walk, police said.

"Pan, one of the male hikers, is overweight and got sick at the high altitude," said Wang Yong, director of the Wolong police station, who led the rescue team." His sickness will only worsen if we lead them home using the route we had originally planned."

Instead, he said, the team and the hikers will descend rapidly through Yinchanggou to the southeast. The altitude is lower, so oxygen is more abundant, but the terrain is more perilous, he said.

Police said the hikers may have illegally entered the reserve, as they did not get approval from local authorities to hike in the off-limits zone. The reserve covers 700,000 hectares, but only about 200,000 hectares are open to the public without special permission.

Because of the difficult terrain and the health condition of the hikers, police said it was hard to estimate the time needed to bring them out.