

Survivor of desert trek faces smuggling charges;
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Body

One of 12 survivors of a border crossing that ended in the deaths of 14 illegal immigrants who wandered five days in the scorching Arizona desert was charged with smuggling the group from Mexico.

Court documents say the survivor was one of three men who helped the immigrants cross the border.

The survivor, Jesus Lopez-Ramos, 20, and one of the other men took \$90 from the group three days into the trek and promised to return with water, the documents allege. Lopez-Ramos did not return and was found within 5 miles of Interstate 8, the group's destination. Another man was found dead nearby, but authorities did not immediately say whether he was the second guide.

According to court documents, Lopez-Ramos and the two other men led the group of 26 to 30 immigrants across the southwestern Arizona border May 19, traveling by van for about an hour and a half before continuing on foot. The immigrants said their water ran out after two days.

The third guide and three immigrants turned back for Mexico after a day, but court documents and officials did not clarify whether they were among the dead.

The charges against Lopez-Ramos, of Sonoyta in the Mexican state of Sonora, include bringing in illegal aliens, conspiracy to bring in illegal aliens and harboring illegal aliens, court documents show.

If convicted, he could receive up to life in prison or the death penalty, an Immigration and Naturalization Service news release said.

Lopez-Ramos' attorney, Bruce Yancey of Yuma, did not immediately return a telephone call late yesterday afternoon.

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INS spokesman Ron Rogers said the group that included Lopez-Ramos was rescued last Wednesday and Thursday from the southern Arizona desert east of Yuma. They were the survivors from a larger group of 26 that attempted to cross 70 miles of desert in temperatures reaching 115 degrees.

Neither court documents nor INS officials could explain what happened to the other man who went for water but did not return.

It was believed to be the deadliest attempt to cross the U.S.-Mexico border since 1987, when 18 Mexican men died in a locked railroad boxcar near Sierra Blanca, Texas.

By the time the group was found by search parties, the sunburned survivors were suffering from severe dehydration and related kidney damage. Doctors who treated them at the Yuma Regional Medical Center said they were within hours of dying had they not been rescued.

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