

latimes.com

\$3 million in marijuana found on boat that went aground off Catalina

Authorities also detain three Mexican nationals aboard the motorboat. They said they'd paid someone to smuggle them into the U.S. and were abandoned when the boat went aground.

By Andrew Blankstein, Los Angeles Times

April 20, 2010

Los Angeles County sheriff's deputies seized about 4,000 pounds of marijuana valued at about \$3 million and detained three Mexican nationals after a flat-bottomed motorboat ran aground in a remote area off Catalina Island, sheriff's officials said Monday.

A department employee on the island called for backup from the sheriff's Avalon station at 5:45 p.m. Sunday after seeing that the 30-foot panga with two 250-horsepower motors and 400 gallons of fuel aboard had become stranded in Cottonwood Cove, a remote area on the southwest side of the island, said Capt. Mike Parker of the Sheriff's Department.

Deputies said three men aboard the boat claimed they had paid a smuggler to bring them to the United States and were abandoned after the boat ran aground. Deputies found what appeared to be multiple bundles of marijuana on the boat, Parker said.

"This was discovered because of a very observant sheriff's employee working a remote part of the island," Parker said. "He saw something that looked suspicious. It's not typical to see a boat run aground there. His suspicions were raised, and he thought there was more to the story."

Darkness prevented deputies from loading the marijuana bundles into a department helicopter, Parker said. Aided by the U.S. Coast Guard, deputies guarded the shipment and then began to load the drugs at first light.

It took several hours and two flights to load the helicopter and take the shipment to the mainland.

The three men were arrested on suspicion of transportation of narcotics and booked at a federal detention facility, authorities said..