

## **Two Missing Marines Rescued**

**February 2, 2008**  
**Skyline Trail, San Jacinto Wilderness**  
**2008-004**

Part One by Pete Carlson

We received the call around 8:30 Saturday night that two persons where stuck on the upper part of the Skyline Trail just below the tramway on hard packed snow and ice. By 10:30 we had Kevin Walker and Grace Manues (who would run base), myself, Jim Manues, Dave Webb, and Patrick McCurdy (who would be going over the side) in the tram car riding up to the upper station.

Each of us took a 200 foot rope and a 100 foot rope with us along with the normal winter gear. Winter gear (sleeping bag, ground pad, bivy sack, stove, fuel, food, extra clothes - jackets, gloves, hats - crampons, ice axe, and other misc. things) adding up to 40+ pounds. We took the short hike to the top of the Skyline Trail and put on crampons and fixed the first 200 foot rope over the side. Dave went down first and then tied on his 200 foot rope to the first one and continued down. At 400 feet he had voice contact. The rest of us came down and Dave added the third 200 foot rope and continued down. At 600 feet he added the last 200 foot rope and as luck would have it he was able to reach the 2 persons. But these 2 were not who we were looking for. (See the write up for Mission 2008-005 for details).

We now made voice contact with another person, so Dave, Jim, and I continued on down to the voice. This was Lance, 1 of the 2 we were looking for. He told us that he and Lucas had been coming up the Skyline Trail and gotten into the snow filled canyon. They did not know where the trail went and continued across the canyon until they hit hard snow and ice and at that point both of them slipped. He was able to punch a small hole in the hard snow and sit down in it. Lucas was below him just barely hanging on and did not have a good spot to stay. They called for help on there cell phone, but after a couple of hours Lucas slipped again and went over a 10 foot cliff and stopped at some point below. He called to Lance that he was OK. Latter on Lucas slid down farther into the canyon ending up 1,000 feet below Lance. But we did not know this right now.

Dave and Jim got Lance to a safe point and started taking him up. I set up a 100 foot rope and repelled down over the 10 vertical drop and tried yelling for Lucas. No contact. I tied on another 100 foot rope and went down again. Still no voice contact and I was out of rope. Without more rope we could not safely continue down. So we all came up and got back to the tramway around 3 a.m. Sunday morning. Base had already called for more people and we would have more rope at 6 a.m. So we got a few hours sleep until

morning.

The rope and more people arrived at 6 a.m. and Lee Arnson, Rick Maschek, and I each took a 200 foot rope and started back out to where I had left a few hours ago. We quickly descended the ropes that we had left in place and got down the first 1200 feet. We set up the first 200 foot rope I carried and Lee went down first. He then tied on his 200 rope and continued down a total of 400 feet. Rick went next carrying his 200 foot rope. Lee and Rick decided that they could continue without using ropes as the snow was softer and not as steep. They still had no voice contact. It was decided that I would stay where I was until they could determine if Lucas was down this way or not.

## Part Two by Lee Arnson

After repelling down the 800' fixed line, Rick and I added another 200 feet and repelled to the end of that. It was then that we decided it was best to get off rope, carry 200 feet of rope with us and use our crampons and ice axes to continue on into the depths of Chino Canyon. After about 10 minutes of travel down a 40% slope, we had no voice contact and could see no sign that anyone had fallen. We continued on for another 15 minutes, losing another 500 feet in elevation, when eventually Rick spotted some skid marks in the snow. We picked up the pace, continuing down into the canyon, yelling out, and after another 15 minutes and 500 feet in elevation, we made voice contact.

At this point I felt as though I was running down the slope because I knew the subject was in this canyon, and still alive. I came upon a large boulder and there on the other side, was the second U.S. Marine, Lucas Ellison. He was in surprisingly good spirits and uninjured. His feet were numb from exposure, so we put him in a sleeping bag, covered him with two tarps, and made him something hot to drink. Now the rush of finding him was starting to wear off and the realization of how we were going to get him out of the canyon was starting to sink in.

We went back and forth with Kevin Walker at base discussing several options, none of which seemed viable due to the weather conditions. We were faced with the reality of having to backtrack the route we had just come down. Our subject agreed he was willing to give it a try as he stuffed his frozen feet into his frozen boots. I put my crampons on his boots, Rick put a helmet on him, we roped up and started our ascent.

Rick led the first 1000 feet until we got just below the fixed rope where we were met by Will Carlson and Jim Manues. They had brought us food and water and were also very helpful in kicking some good steps in the snow so we could get onto the fixed line. We were now able to attach Lucas to the rope with an ascender and he literally pulled himself up the last 1000 feet, one step at a time until we were at the top of the launching pad where we were greeted by the strongest winds any of us had ever been in. We all grabbed hold of each other and made our way to the top of the Tram station where we were met by Grace Manues who had the best hot chocolate in the world waiting for us.

The names I have mentioned in this article are only a fraction of the actual number of

people who participated in this mission. We were supported by other teams, as well as many more people from our own team, without whom we would never have been able to pull this off. Thanks to everybody.

Webmaster's Note: Many thanks to the teams from Sierra Madre, Altadena, San Dimas, San Diego, Rim of the World, and Wrightwood, who assisted us with all three missions on this weekend.

## Photos



Left to Right: RMRU's Pete Carlson, Lance, Pete's son William Carlson, Lucas, and Lee Arnson.

News coverage from [KESQ](#) and [KSPS](#).

RMRU is a volunteer search and rescue team that covers Riverside County and assists other teams with search and rescue efforts in other counties. Each member purchases their own equipment and takes time off work, without compensation, to participate in search and rescue missions. Team equipment is purchased from contributions from the community. We are a non-profit organization and are funded by [donations](#) from people like you.