



Hypothermic Hikers Stranded on Skyline Trail

December 26, 2009
SkyLine Trail
2009-019

RMRU rescues hypothermic hiker

Report by Nick Nixon "State Park Volunteer and RMRU Member" , read below for account from The Town Crier

At 16:25 on December 26, 2009 Mount San Jacinto Ranger Station at Long Valley was contacted by Riverside County Sheriff's office reporting that two hikers had telephoned in by cel phone that they were stranded on the Skyline Trail between Palm Springs and Long Valley. They reported being unable to move up or down due to bad snow and ice conditions. One State Park employee (Ric) and one volunteer (Nick), both trained in snow and ice safe travel, responded by hiking down to their location. In route, the State Park personnel determined that the assistance of RMRU would be required due to the bad winter evacuation conditions and a call-out request was made at 17:03. Other State Park personnel assisted by setting out fixed rope down the steep areas. The two hikers were reached after two hours at about 1,400 feet of elevation below Long Valley. The temperature was in the mid 20 degrees F. One hiker was wearing shorts and the other was in cotton jeans and tennis shoes. Both of the hikers were cold, wet, shivering and moving into the range of mild hypothermia. After the State Park personnel built a fire for warmth and provided clothing, water and food, the two hikers began to feel better.

Story from Idyllwild Town Crier Newspaper

Saturday night, Dec. 26, Riverside Mountain Rescue Unit (RMRU) members and state park staff rescued two hikers, Joe Silins, 21, of Tuscon, Ariz. and Christopher Miller, 28, of Indio stranded in ice and snow conditions on the Skyline trail. Neither was dressed for cold temperatures and both were wet and nearly hypothermic when rescuers reached them.

In another story of unprepared hikers, Silins and Miller both started in the early morning hours of Dec. 26 around 4:30 a.m. from the desert tram station intent on hiking to the mountain station but snow and cold stopped them about 1,400 feet

below the Palm Springs Aerial Tram Station. Not having previously known each other, they met on the trail and began hiking together. Although snow was clearly visible on the mountaintop, one hiker was dressed in shorts and the other in cotton jeans and tennis shoes. According to a Riverside County Sheriff's Department (RCSD) Cabazon Station pressrelease, the hikers made a 911 call around 4:20 p.m. saying they were stranded. Park staff hiked down to bring dry clothing and build a fire but determined that hiking the duo out required RMRU expertise owing to the steep grade and prevailing snow and ice conditions. RCSD activated RMRU at 5:03 p.m. and a ground team consisting of RMRU President Lee Arnson, Les Walker, Tom Mahood and Will Carlson reached the hikers at about 7 p.m. For two hours, they fed and warmed them with hot liquids, some food and dry clothes. According to Walker, the duo's first question was "How are we going to get out of here?" Walker said they'd have to hike up to the tram station, since no helicopter rescue was possible. Using a rope and belay system up the 40-degree grade, the RMRU ground team finally got the hikers back to the mountain tram station by 4a.m. Sunday. Temperatures at the time were in the high teens. The RMRU team and the hikers took the first tram down to the valley floor at 6:30 a.m., Sunday, Dec. 27. Both Silins and Miller declined medical treatment.

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.