

Hiker Stuck in Long Valley Drainage

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Palm Springs Tramway
2012-021

Written by Matt Jordon

Around 5:30pm Thursday evening, notification was sent out for a technical rescue of two people in Long Valley. Initially it was believed that a father and son had been scrambling and got stuck, but as Les, Carlos, and I responded to the ranger station, it became apparent that it was merely the 68 year old that remained stuck. With Kim running base, the last known location turned out to be the infamous Long Valley drainage - which is a notorious black hole for disoriented hikers exiting the area. After we finished interviewing the young nephew whom had made his way out with the help of State Park rangers, Sheriff Todd Garvin, and other park volunteer staff, we quickly decided to make our way out to conduct an initial search.



Rescuers heading down Long Valley Drainage
Photo by Helene Lohr

Within 30 minutes, Les (coming in from a steeper western approach) quickly made

voice contact with the subject. He called on the radio to Carlos, who was acting as relay near notch five, to let everyone know he had found the subject. As I continued scrambling down the main part of drainage, I noticed smoke that some of the park staff had previously alerted us to and not long after that - came upon the subject who seemed to be in relatively good spirits.

While team members Helene Lohr and Lee Arnson continued down the drainage toward the bonfire, Les and I conducted a basic interview of the subject and determined that his physical condition was about to play a major factor in easily getting him out of this predicament. Even though there were no serious injuries, multiple lifestyle conditions proved to be a stumbling block to him being able to hike out. We noticed a strong display of instability, disorientation, confusion, and irrationality that became additional challenges to the team in conjunction to the background lifestyle issues already present. When Helene got back to us she took over as lead medical in order to monitor vitals for the duration of the rescue. There were even statements on the part of the subject describing the desire to simply continue all the way down the canyon into Palm Springs.

When the sun faded and the shadows grew long, Lee extinguished the remainder of the fire that I had already begun to put out and the four of us came up with the plan to hike this man out. It wasn't going to be easy as the terrain is rocky, loose and steep, but we were going to give it a shot because no helicopter was going to get into this particular part of the mountain. I volunteered to be a work horse (tying a rope between myself and the subject) and pulling him up the mountain with necessary breaks to monitor his breathing and heart-rate. Meanwhile Les squirreled up the hillside and scouted for the best route while Lee balanced the man's caboose from getting too wobbly and from taking a bone-breaking tumble downhill.



**Subject resting on rope with rescuers
Photo by Helene Lohr**

We then decided to take the shorter, steeper way which required the use of additional ropes, anchors, ascenders, and a variety of other climbing gear. When Donny and Alan showed up to help us and bring with water and other snacks, Donny took over as lead technical person. He quickly and professionally re-rigged the scenario with the assistance of Les, Lee, Alan and me. We all wound up pulling and pushing for the sake of our subject during the course of the next several hours, but all went well without incidence or injury. We wound up getting him on the State Parks Tractor for a ride up the ramp back to the mountain station. Thanks to Sue - the helpful lead state park ranger – for the Tractor ride.



Subject coming up slope with rescuers helping
Photo by Alan Lovegreen

Looking back, I really appreciated our team's cooperation under stress and how we each wound up supporting each other. There was no arguing, no bad attitudes - but there was a good amount of humor even though I'm sure some were tired, hungry and very thirsty from donating the majority of the water supply to the subject. Even the subject cracked some jokes despite his unfortunate predicament. It was a reminder that deceptively simple rescues can turn out to be real hum-dingers because of unexpected complications - but we dealt with it to the best of our ability and had a successful mission overall. The best part was pigging out at Denny's after midnight in Palm Springs - all of us making light of the night's events and recounting the best highlights of the experience. One thing I would caution readers in the future is this: Take care of your health to the best of your ability, because even though the spirit is willing, the flesh is often weak. Good on the subject for being willing to hike all the way down the mountain, but it would have definitely killed him in the process despite his best intentions.

RMRU team members present: Lee Arnson, Carlos Carter, Donny Goetz, Kim Jordon, Matt Jordon, Helene Lohr, Alan Lovegreen, and Les Walker.

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.