

## **Three Hikers Lost**

**April 12, 2014**

**Skyline Trail Top of the Tramway**

**2014-010**

Written by Eric Holden

I had just finished making a nice dinner of Cajun-Sausage Alfredo when I got the text that we had three hikers stranded on the Skyline Trail. Ah Skyline, greater than 8,000 feet of elevation gain in under 10 miles, one of the USA's hardest dayhikes. I quickly annihilated a bowl of food and headed out the door. On my way to the Tram, I got a call from Les Walker letting me know that it would be he and I on the mountain tonight. Excellent, I thought, the best piece of equipment to bring into the field is Les. As I arrived at the Tramway, I was met by Cameron Dickinson who mentioned that Les was in the station and that we needed to gear up with helmet and harness.

Once in the station I was greeted warmly by Les and spoke to the Riverside County Sheriff's Deputy. The report was that three males in their early 20s had become lost on the upper part of the Skyline Trail and had hiked into a location where they could not move up or down. Due to the steep terrain and darkness, the Sheriff's Aviation Unit was not able to lower us in. However, they had been able to drop a bag with warm weather gear, food, and water to the subjects. During our briefing, we got a call for another rescue on the other side of the mountain near Idyllwild. Cameron left for that mission as he had to be in Idyllwild early the next morning for a Wilderness First Responder class.

Les and I got the GPS coordinates of the subjects and headed up the tram. Once at the upper tram station, our GPS receivers said the subjects were 0.5 miles away (as the crow flies) but 1,200 feet below us, at approximately 7,200 feet in elevation. Les and I quickly began our hike towards Grubb's Notch at around 9:30pm. With Les leading the way, we descended the Skyline trail and got to within 500ft of the coordinates provided to us. We went off trail and soon made voice contact with the subjects a little after 10pm, right where aviation said they would be.

The three subjects (Keith, Ali, and Matt), were cold and hungry but otherwise had good physical and mental faculties. We got them into warm clothing, provided some food and started packing up the gear that RSO had dropped to them. Once again, Les led the way, and we started the slow process of heading back up Skyline towards the tram station. Due

to lack of fluids and food, two of the subjects were experiencing leg cramps. Slow and steady, plus the subjects' resolve, got us up to the tram at about 11:45pm for some much needed rest.

We all caught the first tram down at 7:30am and headed home. I made a stop at the Hemet-Ryan Airport to return the bag of goodies that aviation dropped off the previous night.



**2 Subjects, Les, and Third Subject  
Photo by Eric Holden.**

What the subjects did right:

1. After getting lost and realizing their situation they called for help.
2. They stayed put.
3. They hunkered down and prepared to spend the night.

What went wrong:

1. The subjects did not have enough food to replenish the calories/minerals burned on the strenuous climb. The lack of salt and minerals that the body needs is what was causing the cramps.
2. They did not have extra clothing--Hikers should always bring a warm jacket on any hike and be prepared for the unexpected, like spending the night. 10+1 essentials.
3. After getting lost, they crossed the trail twice without noticing it. Lack of nutrients can also impair a hiker's decision-making process.

Hikers who find themselves lost should stay calm, take the time to note their surroundings, and pay attention to landmarks. Lost hikers should also use the map/compass/GPS (part of their 10 essentials) and come up with a plan. What to do if

you are lost.

Many thanks to the Riverside Sheriff's Aviation Unit for getting the subjects' location and for the drop bag of warm gear and food. Big thanks to the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway for dropping us off after hours.

**RMRU Members Involved:** Cameron Dickinson, Eric Holden, 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.