



Lost Hiker – Tram to Summit to Caramba

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San Jacinto Mountains
2016-019

Written by Eric Holden

After just finishing mission 2016-018 I was looking forward to the next day's training that I had prepared, some tracking with a technical rescue, but at 2am Saturday morning we get a text to meet at the tram at 6am for a missing hiker, looks like no training today! We end up having a great turn out, Cameron, Matt, Tony, Judy, Ray, Rob, Wayne, Glenn, Mike and Gary all report that they are on their way. On the first tram up Glenn lets me know that I will be running this mission. This would be my first time running a mission, but having recently been to ICS (Incident Command System) training, I felt ready and Glenn would be working with me giving me his expert advice.

Our subject is Daniel De Bias, 18-year-old male, who was last seen on the trail below Jean Peak the night before. Once at our staging area up in Mountain Station we assign teams and I sent Team 1 (Cameron and Matt) up the main trail to Wellman's Divide to cut for sign, as this would be the most likely place our subject went off trail. Team 2 (Tony, Judy, and Ray) were sent up the High Trail to Round Valley. The State Parks were also sending out teams and sent members up the Sid Davis trail to Tamarack Valley. I called up Kirk to run a yourlo.ca/tion on the subject but unfortunately his cell phone was not turned on.



**Tony searching near Lotus Camp Round Valley
Photo by Judy Spowart.**

After about 30 minutes Rob and Wayne (Team 3) caught the Tram up and quickly got assignments. They would head towards Law's Junction to look for any sign that someone had been there recently. We got word that CHP would be flying with a State Park volunteer to provide some aerial support. State Parks also drove two volunteers over to the Idyllwild side of the mountain and started one up Deer Springs and one up Devil's Slide. The mountain was now thoroughly covered with searchers. About an hour later we got word that Team 1 spotted some fresh Vans prints heading down from Wellman's Divide. We knew from interviewing the family that Daniel may be wearing Vans, but we were not 100% sure. Team 1 would start following the tracks but due to the large amount of hikers, the tracks got over run. They would eventually drop into the Willow Creek drainage.

Team 2 was sent through Round Valley to do one more sweep of Tamarack while Team 4 (Gary and Mike) were sent out to go up the Shangri-La route. About an hour later Rob radios in that he has fresh Vans foot prints near Law's Junction. Rob is a great tracker and I knew he would work these tracks and get a direction of travel. At this same time Gary calls into base letting us know he ran into some of Daniel's fellow hikers from last night. He was able to confirm 100% that Daniel was in Vans. This was the moment that I heard Glenn go "Yes!" with a huge smile on his face. Rob would let us know that the tracks were about size 11 and heading toward Caramba.

We pulled Team 2 back to work as a radio relay for the teams in the willow creek drainage. Team 3 were now diligently working the tracks while Team 1 hurried down to

assist and leap frog ahead. At about 12:00 hours Star 9 let us know that they were now in the air and could assist. We quickly sent them to the Caramba area and after a few passes found our missing hiker. About 0.75mile down the waterfalls from Caramba Camp.



**Matt and a burned out tree
Photo by Cameron Dickinson.**



**Matt at Lew's Cabin
Photo by Cameron Dickinson.**

The next 4 hours involved a lot of hard work by Team 1 and Team 3 hiking down to Daniel while Team 2 ran radio relay and Team 4 returned to base in case we needed to send them out with additional gear. Star 9 was able to land near Caramba Camp and pick up one searcher, but due to high winds, they had to swap aircraft. Eventually Daniel and all 4 team members were airlifted out of Caramba and back down to Valley Station. Daniel was in great spirits and uninjured. Team 2 was called back and we all shared in the joy from having a successful mission.



**Subject and Rob exit helicopter
Photo by Matt Jordon.**

RMRU member Wayne's story from the tracking field team - We picked up his tracks by laws junction and tracked him for approximately 1/4 mile. Star 9 heard our traffic to base regarding the direction the subject appeared to be heading and they scouted the area making positive contact approximately 1.6 miles to the east of us. They were able to instruct the subject to stay where he was and give us his coordinates. Rob lead us down Caramba falls drainage directly to him using his GPS. Fortunately, he was safe, uninjured and in good spirits. We shared some of our food with him before making the short but, strenuous hike out to the Land Zone where Cam was waiting. Matt had already been picked up by Star 9 and after an aircraft change out due to some sort of mechanical issue, they shuttled us out and down to the lower tram parking area. The subjects mother and girlfriend were waiting at the tram building and they were very grateful to the team for getting their loved one out.

Daniel's Story – Daniel left the hike the peak with friends but after it was nearing dark, he decided to run back ahead of his group to make sure they held the tram. He missed the Wellman's Divide turn and ended up heading towards Saddle Junction. He spent the night with some PCT hikers and eventually tried to get back to the tram via the Willow Creek trail. Unfortunately this trail is closed and severely overgrown from the mountain fire. This caused him to miss the Law's Junction turnoff and head down to Caramba.

This is one of those missions that was truly a team effort. Every team on the mountain was able to provide clues and help that lead to the rescue of Daniel and will go down as

one of my most memorable missions.

RMRU Members Involved: Kirk Cloyd, Cameron Dickinson, Gary Farris, Michael George, Glenn Henderson, Eric Holden, Tony Hughes, Matt Jordon, Rob May, Wayne Smith, Judy Spowart, and Ray Weden.

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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.