

Overdue man on day-hike

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Skyline Trail
1981-040

By Randy Iwasiuk

Alex Heckert who was vacationing in Palm Springs with his family, had decided to go for a day hike Friday. He picked the Skyline trail for his hike, destination the upper station of the Palm Springs aerial tram. Alex started at 8:45 am from Palm Springs, and planned to reach the top by mid afternoon. But by night fall he had not completed his hike. By mid evening the family became quite concerned, so they called the Sheriff's Department, who after gathering the necessary information activated RMRU.

The team and members from Alex's family met at the end of Ramon Road. Operations Leader Walter Walker spoke with the family members and filled out a Search and Circumstance Sheet on Alex, as the rest of us loaded our packs for a night search operation.

Walt called everyone together to give out necessary info about Alex. He was 28, slender build and in good condition. The plan was to start teams in from the bottom of the Skyline Trail, to try and find foot prints. And to also send a team down from the top of the tram in the event that Alex was near the top.

A group of us started out from the road head and headed up the old trail. We had gained several hundred feet and were beginning to get away from the noises of the city, so we started calling out, and to our surprise, we got a reply. We continued up and kept calling, the voice was approximately 500 feet above us and off to the South of the trail. Bernie McIlvoy was carrying our portable high intensity light, and soon had Alex's location pinned down. We climbed up the steep hillside while Bernie and Rick Pohlers gave us directions, and after about eight minutes we had reached Alex. Joe Erickson was the first to his location followed by myself, Brian Hixon and Kevin Walker. We gave him water and food, while we rested, ourselves. Alex explained that he had hiked a good portion of the day when he reached the snow line. Because of not having the proper gear for snow, he wisely turned back and started down. Night fall overtook Alex and sometime after dark he lost the trail. He made another smart move, and decided to stop and seek shelter before he injured himself. He spent a couple of hours under a overhanging boulder when we came along.

After some food and rest, we guided Alex back down to the trail and then out to his

waiting family, who were nothing short of overjoyed as we walked into base. It was the first time I ever saw the team receive a standing ovation. With gear loaded back into our cars, we headed over to a quick meal (compliments of Alex Heckert) and then home to bed.

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.