

Two Missing Hikers

**August 11, 2003
Caramba Overlook
2003-018**

By David Webb

Monday Aug. 11,03 a little after 10:00 p.m. the page went out to report to the Palm Spring's Aerial Tramway. After making a quick call into work I checked with my wife then called in that I was on my way. I got to the base of the tram about 2315 to find that Jim Fairchild was already on the scene soon Darrell Bell, Eugene Baune, and Glenn Henderson joined us. It wasn't long before we realized that this maybe all the help that was coming. This mission would have to be done with a team of five. The information we got from the mission briefing was that two 38yr. Old male left the upper tram earlier that afternoon for a 3 mile hike, no food, no water, no map or compass. They had a cell phone and used it to call for help. Their last known position was at Caramba Overlook, six and a half miles away.

By now it was coming up on midnight and we decided to grab the tram and head to the top. Once we got there we were able to regain contact with the subjects instructing them to stay put, to turn on and off their cell phone when we told them to so as to save their battery. The only real problem we had was that we couldn't get clear information out of these guy's on what direction they might have headed once they left Caramba. We knew it would take several hours' to get to them, so we told them to relax and we were on our way. At this point it was 0030 and we decided to hit the trail. Gene and myself would go in as team 1, while Glenn would follow in behind and perch himself high on a nearby ridge and spend the night acting as a human relay station while Darrell and Jim would handle base of operations. Gene did a fantastic job the entire mission working his G.P.S. and it wasn't long that we were on the trail he was able to report that we were making 2.7 miles an hour, not the greatest speed but it was good steady progress. At 0300 we made it to Caramba Overlook only to continue being frustrated by not being able to get a clear understanding on which way to go from here. We knew they didn't go east down the canyon, or go west up the canyon. The question of the hour was did they go north or south? We headed north up toward a ridge but stopped about two-thirds the way up after again getting confusing reports on which way they went after leaving Caramba. We were now getting the impression that they might have gone south. (Later we would find that they had indeed gone north.) We descended back to Caramba it was now 0430 and we were beat, we radioed in that we would make a bivi for the night and asked for a 0600 wake up call.

At 0600 sharp the radio came to life, team one this as R.M.R.U. base do you copy?

The hunt was on again. After regaining contact with the subjects we found that at first light they had continued moving, not good. Gene called in to request the help of the R.C.S.D Aviation Unit then we gathered our gear and headed south up toward the landing zone known as Caramba South. We made it to the south ridge and headed west staying on the ridge to the point we could look down on Law's Camp blowing whistles and yelling the whole way but to no avail. We started to realize that they were nowhere near and had to have gone north of Caramba. It was now about 0915 and Star 92 was on the scene but we had a problem we could hear them but they couldn't hear us. We worked our way back to Caramba South where Star 92 made visual contact with us circled around then landed. A deputy got out and gave us one of their radios so that we could now communicate and we were going to play a big game of hot and cold. Then we ran into the next problem, Gene couldn't get a signal on his cell phone so that we could talk directly with the subjects and Star 92. So we had base call the subjects then radio that information to Gene who was standing right by me and then I could almost instantly radio that information to Star92. Once they were in the air again we instructed them to head north and in less than 10 minutes the pilot radioed, we have visual contact. Everyone was thrilled but the job was only half complete the search was over but the rescue now had to begin. We waited patiently to see what would happen next, and then came the word. The subject's were in an area that Star 92 couldn't safely land so they were on their way back to the L.Z. to pick up one Unit member, we would have to do a hoist extraction. Gene and I looked at each other and there really wasn't much said, even thou Gene had just recently gotten back from Afghanistan and had lots of experience in helicopters I had the most resent training with the aviation unit in performing this type of rescue. Soon Star 92 was back on the ground at Caramba South and we got our game plan down. They would drop me down with a full body harness, access the situation, suit one person up and get them into the helicopter. They would then fly them to the P.S.A.T. parking lot, return and do it again. It went like clock work before long there I was all by myself on a remote part of the mountain signing, "We are the champions". But the moment was short lived soon Star 92 was again over head and lowering the steel cable on last time for me.

After refueling at the Palm Springs International Airport they flew me back to the tramway parking lot then took off once again to go get my buddy Gene. About 1100 Tuesday morning Gene was back, some 13 hrs. after it had started, it was over. The subjects were embarrassed but really glad to be out. While everyone else headed to the Sizzler in Banning to eat and celebrate, I was exhausted after along laborious and tedious night followed by a few hours of pure adrenaline I just wanted to go home and sleep. Which I did for the next 14 hrs. , It was over.

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.