



Three Additional Lost Hikers

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Skyline Trail, Palm Springs Tram
2005-003

by Rick Maschek

Please be Careful on the Ice.

I'm getting ready for school Monday evening, Martin Luther King's holiday when the call comes in...injured hiker Cornell Peak area. I call for a substitute teacher and leave for the Palm Springs aerial tram. Leaving from Hesperia, I'm one of the last to arrive and get redirected to the "Launching Pad" appropriately named for visitors that get too close to the edge for a look at Palm Springs and suddenly get "airborne". Not the case this night. The situation is three hikers coming up the Skyline trail from Palm Springs and upon reaching the icy snow, one of the party slipped but managed to stop before getting seriously injured or even killed (as happened a year ago to another hiker... without crampons and ice axe). Many of those responding were already down with the victims when I was asked to bring some spare crampons with me for the rescue of another set of three other hikers who were somewhere below the first three. As I reached those below, I was assigned with Max Brummett and Eugene Baune to look for and assist the second trio who had called on cell phone to say they had reached ice and didn't feel safe about continuing and had started a fire. We descended as far as the ropes we had would take us down the gully and got no response to our calls. We then climbed back up to where we found the tracks from where the first three crossed over from the trail up the ridge. We took the last rope off the "fixed-line" from the top of the launching pad and roped up. When reached the ridge overlooking most of the high area we thought we heard their answer to our call but apparently that was simply our own echo. We tried to get them to yell but could no longer reach them by cell phone. They had said earlier that they were at about 7,200' which was where we were standing but no reply to our calls. We began sweeping back and forth looking for tracks in the snow (there was plenty of them) and upon reaching the 6,800' level decided that either they went back down to Palm Springs or had gone to sleep (that's what we later found out). Since we were getting no response to our calls, we decided to wait for daybreak (it was then about 4 am) to continue. To avoid getting cold from not moving, we climbed into our sleeping bags. As the sky began to lighten, we got up and started sweeping back up the mountain. The sheriff's helicopter arrived and we directed them up to the direction we thought they were and as I recall, the stranded hikers were now on the phone directing the airship to their location. It was decided that Max would be lifted up to their location to put the trio into a harnesses so they could be extracted by the airship and flown off the mountain. With that done, Gene and I waited at a convenient place for extraction off the mountain. That helicopter surely does make life easier, thanks guys. When I arrived down below, I

found out the trio had started the two nights before so as to be hiking the lower portion of the trail in the cool night air...that explains them falling asleep. I also found out they were triathletes stationed at Camp Pendleton. The next day at school I got into a bit of trouble as they thought I was requesting a sub for that Monday (holiday) and so none was called and my students were without for awhile.

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.