



Search For Two Hikers Missing From The Tram

May 9, 2006
Long Valley and Tahquitz Drainage
2006-05-09

by Pete Carlson

We received a call saying two people were missing from the Tramway around 6 p.m. Monday night. Two people from a large tour group had ridden up the Tramway on the afternoon of Saturday, May 6. Brandon Day and Gina Allen had gone down to play in the snow and walk around Long Valley below the Upper Tramway Station. Most of the people headed back, but Brandon and Gina stayed and went a little further. They found a stream and followed it down. That was the last anyone had seen them. They had missed their flight home to Texas and all their belongings were still in their hotel room in Palm Springs on Monday afternoon.

By 9:30 p.m. Gwenda who was running base and operations had teams in the field. What each of these teams does is stop every 5 minutes to YELL and LISTEN. And while we are hiking we look for any fresh tracks on the ground or anything out of the ordinary.

Team 1, Lee, was hiking in from Idyllwild going to Saddle Junction and down to Laws Camp. Then continuing up the Willow Creek drainage to Willow Creek Crossing and looping back to Saddle Junction covering about 11 miles. Lee finished in about 5 hours.

Team 2, Erica and Jeff, headed up from Long Valley to Round Valley, over to Tamarack Valley, and back down the Tamarack drainage to Long Valley in case the couple changed directions and went towards San Jacinto Peak.

Team 3, Grace and Jeri, went down to Long Valley and started looking over the steep sides that look down on Palm Springs hiking up towards Hidden Lake.

Team 5, Patrick and John, headed down the Skyline Trail from Long Valley to Palm Springs as number of people lost in Long Valley have found that trail and gone down it.

Team 6, Will, was coming in late after night college classes and coming up the Deer Springs Trail, across the Strawberry Cienega trail to the Angels Glide Trail and up to Wellmans Divide. After 3 hours sleep he was up and searching down the ridge from Wellmans Divide to Hidden Lake Divide.

Team 4, Jim and myself (Pete), went from Long Valley up to Hidden Lake and then down to Willow Creek Crossing. From there we covered the same trail that Lee had done down to Laws Camp. We then continued down to Caramba Camp. We covered about 8 miles and

stopped for a few hours sleep about 2am. We were up a first light 5:30 a.m. had a short breakfast and started searching again at 6 a.m. We went down into Tahquitz Canyon about 1/2 mile looking for any signs that someone had started down the canyon. We found none, so we came back up to a ridge that went back towards the Tramway. As we went around the ridge we took other ridges down into the canyons to YELL and then came back up and went back up the main ridge.

We got to a point where we could look down into the Hidden Lake and Long Valley Creeks. We found a ridge that went down 600-800 feet into the canyons and took it. As we came around a large boulder field we saw smoke coming from the Canyon bottom. It had not been there five minutes before. We called base to get a helicopter over here and call the Forest Service that we had a fire. We were at least 2000 feet above the canyon bottom and it would take us at least an hour to get down the steep canyon walls. We continued on anyway in case the helicopter could not get to them. About 15 minutes later the Riverside County Sheriff's Helicopter flew in and confirmed it was the two missing hikers. They had fly back to base and off load some equipment and then they returned and picked up the two hikers. There were in good condition having spent three cold nights out with no food. We found a good location to be picked up and the Sheriff's Helicopter came back to pick us up. The Riverside Sheriff's Helicopter did a great job in getting us out and saved us a four hour hike back to the Tramway.

This was a classic mission and was truly a team effort. Without everyone there to cover all the areas we would not have had the success we had. Over the years we have had people going down the canyons, or up to San Jacinto Peak, or down the Skyline Trail. You never know for sure what direction the lost people will go.

Back at base we learned that the couple had found a camp site and a backpack that belonged to John Donovan who disappeared on the Pacific Crest Trail one year ago. He was last seen around Little Tahquitz Valley by other hikers in a storm. There were all going down to Idyllwild and he said he was going to continue on. No one missed him for another two weeks when he did not pick up next food supply. We have spent many hours searching for him yet never found any sign in the last year.

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.