

Rescue of Two Lost Hikers

March 23, 2008J

**Caramba Overlook, Tahquitz Drainage, San Jacinto Mountains
2008-010**

by Dana Potts

Myself and Michael George received a call on Easter Sunday to assist on a mission to recover two lost hikers off of the Palm Springs tram. The two had become lost and called a loved one for help. The Riverside Sheriff's Office (RSO) helicopter had spotted their fire and made contact with them sometime between midnight and one in the morning. Conditions were good with the temperature at 40 degrees at the top of the tram at about 6:30 a.m. Ground conditions were good to icy in the shade. Based on the temperatures overnight, we weren't very worried about the two suffering from hypothermia. The helicopter had also observed that the two had jackets on and were sitting next to a fire that they had made.

We set off from the tram with the latitude and longitude of the subject furnished by the RSO helicopter the night before. We set off cross country from the tram via Hidden Lake and south to the Caramba trail, and found the first sign of the two once they were about a 1/8 of a mile away from them. I found a fresh track in the snow with fresh mud on top of the boot print. We then yelled in an attempt to make voice contact and were successful. Within ten minutes, the four of us were together.

We found that the two had hunkered down next to the Caramba Trail at a stream that was running with snowmelt. There were several patches of snow left around their location. The two were in great spirits and great shape physically. They had just run out of the water that they had brought with them. When asked what food, if any, they had left, they said that they had eaten their last snacks during the evening. They made a small but warming fire within five feet of the water, which was completely smothered with water, dirt and snow prior to our leaving the location.

They had used a map and compass while hiking around the Long Valley area and were drawn by the ever-luring downhill pull of the Caramba area and its drainages. They had made up a checkerboard with broken sticks to pass the time in the morning. When asked how they were during the night, they said that they were both warm due to the fact that they had several layers of clothing with them.

The first of the two was hoisted by the RSO airship shortly after 1:45 p.m. Due to a rescue member from San Dimas becoming injured in a fall on another mission nearby (see write-up for [Mission 2008-009](#)), the airship had to divert prior to picking us up. We

hiked to a nearby clearing southeast of the Caramba trail where the three of us were picked up by a second airship and flown safely to the tram parking lot.

Lessons:

- Their [10 Essentials](#) came in handy and were used.
- They stayed put once they realized they were lost.
- They made a fire to stay warm and signal the helicopter.
- They had brought plenty of water and found more if needed.
- Proper clothing.
- Kept their cool.
- Cellular phone usage. They should have called 9-1-1 first then their loved ones.
- Map and compass only work if you check your map often and know where you are.
- A GPS would have let them know how far out they were.
- No real plan on where to go, which makes it hard for family to provide direction if you do get lost.

The last we heard was that the San Dimas Rescue member was recovering from some minor injuries at a nearby hospital. Our special thanks and appreciation always go out to other teams that come into Riverside County to help us in our missions. As volunteers, out on Easter Sunday away from our families and loved ones, we would all like to thank the Riverside County Air Crews for their professionalism and hard work getting us out safely and back home. This author (and I'm sure other rescuers) would like to thank his wife and family for understanding his passion for helping others even though often times it takes away from precious holidays & time with his children that can never be taken back.

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.