



Two Missing Female Hikers

May 10, 2008

San Jacinto Mountains - Palm Springs Tram

2008-018

This mission was accomplished in two parts. The eastern part focused on the Long Valley Drainage, above the Palm Springs Tram. The western part, in which the subjects were actually rescued, was on the Marrion Mountain Trail.

Eastern Part - by Pete Carlson

Saturday night before Mother's Day 8:30 p.m. the call comes for 2 missing women who hiked to San Jacinto Peak from the Tramway and got lost. One had called her husband at 6:30 p.m. saying they had started down from the peak and lost the trail. Only 4 people responded at first and we met at the Lower Tramway parking lot at 10:30.

Rick Maschek and I climbed aboard Sheriff Helicopter STAR9 with pilot Craig McDonald and TFO (Technical Flight Officer) Chad Marlatt for a short flight to Round Valley at 9,000 feet. Using night vision goggles the Pilot and TFO did a great job getting us into Round Valley at 11 p.m. at night. We then started hiking the trail to Wellmana's Divide yelling the women's names (Nadia and Elena) every 5 minutes. The trail was mostly under snow with patches of dirt where we could find it sometimes. But we had no real problems getting to Wellmana's Divide since we both know the area very well. From Wellmana's Divide the trail was easy to follow for about a 3/4 of a mile, and then it got hard again for about a 1/2 mile. Then it was easy again until the saddle between Round Valley and Little Round Valley just 1/3 mile from San Jacinto Peak. At this point the trail could not be found at all. There was almost no wind and our voices carried for at least 1/2 mile, but no response. We went up the Cabin just below the peak and around 2:00 a.m. decided to get some sleep until 6 a.m.

Gwenda Yates and Marty Syrett rode up the Tramway and set up base camp in the upper station. Marty went out and hiked around Long Valley calling the women's name but with no luck. By midnight they were settling in for the night and trying to get some sleep. Sunday morning at 6 a.m. Jim and Grace Manues, Mike George, Patrick McCurdy, and Lew Kingman were riding up the first tramway car. Gwenda had made up assignments for them to cover. Jim, Grace, and Marty would hike up the Round Valley Trail to Wellman's Divide and then down the other side to Wellman's Cabin and on down to Willow Creek Crossing. Patrick, Lew, and Mike would hike up to Hidden Lake Divide and on down to Willow Creek Crossing.

Rick and I started down from San Jacinto Peak to the first area that we thought they

might have gotten off trail \hat{A} ¹/₂ way between Wellmana's Divide and the Peak. There we split up and I went down the old trail to Tamarack Valley while Rick went down drainage to the South of me. We were \hat{A} ¹/₂ to \hat{A} ³/₄ of a mile apart and could hear each other yelling for the Women so we knew we had good coverage of the area. During this time the woman called her husband again and said they had found the trail and were hiking back to the tramway. With this news we all started to head back to the main trails to try and find them. Kevin Walker and Jeri Sanchez had just come up the tramway and they started hiking back up to Round Valley as Rick stared down from Round Valley and I closed in down the Sid Davis trail. We thought we would find them quickly. No such luck. Within 90 minutes we had covered all the major trails around the tramway and the missing women were not found.

We now were convinced that our secondary search area, the West side of the mountain down into Little Round Valley, was to become our primary search area. Gwenda sent Jim and Grace up to San Jacinto Peak and Marty down to Round Valley to cover this section of trail once again to be sure they had not come back onto the trail up high. Kevin and Jeri went over to Hidden Lake Divide and down to Willow Creek Crossing and on to Laws Camp. Patrick, Lew, and Mike took a high trail from Hidden Lake to Round Valley. Rick met up with Marty to search Round Valley to Tamarack again. Also the Helicopter STAR9 was returning to help move people around from Round Valley to Little Round Valley and other areas on the West side.

I went back to the Upper Tram Station to help Gwenda run base and the operation. Gwenda was trying to make contact by cell phone with the woman. Final with voice mail they were able to communicate. We found out they were on the Marion Mountain Trail on the West side. Glenn Henderson was on his way to base and I sent him to the Marion Mountain Trail head. I also called Lee Arnson to see if he could hike up the Marion Trail since it is close to his home. As it turned out STAR9 picked up Glenn from the Marion Trail head and took off searching the trail. Lee started hiking up the trail (see Lee's write up) and made voice contact.

This was a great search with everyone hiking many miles of trails and cross country to clear the area and be sure the women were not on the east side of the mountain. Gwenda did an excellent job with her cell phone texting and leaving voice mails to find out where the women were and to get them to go out in the open and stay put waving jackets if the helicopter came near them.

As always the Riverside Sheriff's Aviation Unit did a super job flying us around and picking up the subjects. By 5 p.m. we were on our way to a dinner before getting home around 8 p.m. Mothers Day night. Special thanks to all the Moms who put up with husbands and Sons who left them all day to search and to the Moma's who were out on the search missing special breakfasts with their families (Gwenda, Jeri, and Grace).

Western Part - by Lee Arnson

Mothers Day. I know there is a mission going on. In fact it's been going on for over 20

hours now. I've called in to say I was not available for this one. I hate these situations. Missions on holidays present the toughest decisions for volunteer rescuers.

The Team is looking for two women who went missing after not returning from a day hike to Mt San Jacinto. Base camp is set up at the Palm Springs Tram, and I occasionally call to get updated. The team is working very hard to find these women. Everyone wants to go home. I can't say enough about the team members who are out on this one. Dedication beyond description.

Around 2 p.m., Pete Carlson, who is at base, calls and tells me that they got a call from the subjects and they think they are on the Marion Mountain trail. There are no rescuers in the vicinity, and he asks if I can go and clear the trail. I only live about 15 minutes from the trailhead, so I tell my family I'll be home in two hours, max.

I hit the trail carrying only food, water and first-aid. My plan was to go light and fast, only stopping once and a while to call out for the subjects. The Marion Mountain trail is the steepest trail in the San Jacinto mountains, offering the most direct route to San Jacinto Peak. I've been on this trail many times before, so I feel confident going out by myself.

By now, Star 9 (our sheriffs' helicopter) is flying overhead and I am in radio contact with them. They are my only contact, since base is on the other side of the mountain and I have no line of sight for communication.

After hiking for about 40 minutes and constantly calling out for the subjects, I finally make voice contact. This is one of the most exciting things that can happen on a mission. I direct Star 9 to the area where I think the voices are coming from, and they spot two women about 300 yards down slope of the trail. Star 9 then directs me to the subjects as I am running down the hill trying to get a visual on the women.

After getting to them I determine if there are any injuries and what it's going to take to get them out of here. They explain that they are not injured, but cannot hike any further. I relay this to Star 9 and they go back to Hemet-Ryan Airfield to reconfigure the helicopter so they can come back to do a hoist raise of the subjects. Approximately 40 minutes later, Star 9 lowers two of their "Screamer Suits," or body harnesses, I put them on the subjects and they are raised on board of the hovering helicopter. Their day hike ended with the ride of their life.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who helped out on this mission. My involvement was minor compared to all the time that was put in previous to my going out. You gave of your time on a special day of the year. Be proud.

Images

Pete Carlson searches near the hut on Mount San Jacinto (photo by Rick Maschek)



Pete Carlson in the snow near San Jacinto Peak (photo by Rick Maschek)



Elena and Nadia are greeted by RMRU's Gwenda Yates



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.