



Stranded Hiker Tram Towers "Chino Canyon"

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Tram Towers - Chino Canyon

2009-017

By: Chad Marler

As Lee Arnson and I carpooled down the mountain from Idyllwild to meet our team at the Hemet garage so we could drive to Death Valley, a call came for a rescue.

According to the Sheriff there was a person underneath the Palm Springs Tramway between towers 1 and 2 who was cramped up and extremely fatigued.

Knowing our efforts in Death Valley were to find human remains, we knew helping a live person took priority.

Since the Sheriff's aviation crew were requesting two RMRU team members, Lee and I drove straight on to Hemet Ryan Airfield to prepare for the flight. The aviation crew had to wait for a "mountain pilot" who was skilled at navigating the helicopter in the sharp and unforgiving terrain of Chino Canyon. Not before long, we looked up to see Tony Bowen walking towards the bird in all his glory. Tony had recently retired so it was a nice surprise to see this confident pilot who any of us would completely trust in any flying circumstance.

We left the airfield approximately at 9am and enjoyed a perfect blue bird sky on our journey over the saddle and down the east side of the San Jacintos.

On approach into Chino Canyon, I realized that finding one person in that great expanse of land would be a challenge. It was decided after circling the area for ten minutes, that we needed to approach the area from a much lower angle so we dropped off the observer to lighten our load for the potential hoist.

On approach to the area between towers 1 and 2 of the Tramway (approximately 3,500') Tony spotted our subject who was standing and alert. I strapped on the "screamer suit" to my harness and then was lowered down to the subject.

The subject was a man who appeared to be in his early 40's who told me that he had attempted to hike down Chino Canyon after he had taken the tramway up the day before. Due to his underestimation of how enduring this hike would be, he found himself completely exhausted and cramped up to the point where he could not take another step. After spending a chilly night in Chino Canyon, the subjects hiking partner summoned help at the tramway base station the morning we performed the rescue.

To my surprise, the subject did not have a backpack or any items to help his decent other than the light jacket he was wearing.

After a smooth hoist, the subject was aboard the hovering helicopter that Tony masterfully navigated between the rugged canyon and the tramway cables. After dropping off the subject at the lower tramway station, Tony came back and hoisted Lee and I aboard for the short flight to the lower station. The subject did appreciate our help and was very happy to get a helicopter ride out. After the rescue, our team who had drove around the mountain to offer any additional assistance, picked us up and off we went to Death Valley for another mission.

Members present: Chad Marler, Lee Arnson, Tom Mahood, Les Walker, Nick Nixon, Chuck Springer, Tom Marshall, and Carlos Carter.

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.