



Two Hikers Lost in Willow Creek Drainages

May 9-10, 2010

Willow Creek Drainage below Hidden Divide

2010-010

Written by Lee Arnson

As my phone rang at 10:00pm I assumed we had a mission. When I saw it was from Gwenda, I knew I was going to be headed somewhere into the night. The callout was a search for two subjects, a 57 year old male and a 38 year old female, somewhere in the Carumba area, the Willow creek area, or maybe Laws Camp. What I'm getting at is, in the early stages of any search the information is pretty sketchy, and this one was no different. All I knew for sure was that I was to respond to the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway and be prepared for an all night search.

After arriving at the Tramway one hour later, I meet up with Chuck Springer and Pete Carlson. We now have enough for a Hasty Team, so we get on board the tram car that is being held just for RMRU. The Tramway usually closes by 9:00pm but they are staying open for us tonight so we can at least get one team in the field and bring up more in the morning if needed. On the way up we decide that Chuck will run base and Pete and I will be going into the field. Also on board with us is Deputy Hansel from the Sheriff's Cabazon Station, and he is starting to brief us on the details of our subjects. What he was about to tell us was something I had never heard before in my rescue career. It turns out that the 57 year old subject was actually the same person that the team had rescued two years before - and close to the same location where we would be going tonight. The prior mission had been a very rough rescue for which the team was presented the "Life Saving Award" from the National Mountain Rescue Association in June 2009. Pete and I were both on that rescue and here we were going after the same subject again!

With the updated information given by Deputy Hansel, we decide we will head towards Willow Creek crossing, and then down to Carumba if needed. Chuck makes sure that we have the proper gear for the night, as any good base operator would do. We assure him that we are good to go and as soon as we arrive at the upper station we head off into the night. There is a good wind blowing and the temperature is below freezing, and the closer we get to Hidden Divide, the deeper the snow gets and the trail is almost impossible to follow. Pete and I have been in this area many times

over the years, so we decide to just follow our instincts and start heading downhill towards Willow Creek.

We have been calling out for our subjects the whole time, but the wind is making it difficult for voice contact. The lower we drop in elevation however, the calmer the wind gets, and finally after about two hours of calling out someone answers us. That very second in time is one of the greatest thrills of any search, when you say to your partner “Did you hear that?” You call out again and you both hear an answer and now you are positive.

We can tell that our subjects are a long way off, but we keep yelling and moving towards them, working our way up 30 degree slopes, catching our breath and yelling again. We finally have a visual and we radio to base that we are with the subjects, they are in good shape, no injuries, just hungry and thirsty. I’m not sure if the male subject was embarrassed or happy to see us. And on top of that, we found out that these two did not start out hiking with each other. They met each other while trying to find the trail over to Hidden Lake Divide - crazy stuff.

Pete is able to find the trail from where we are and we slowly hike the subjects back to the upper Tramway station, getting back at 4:15am. We grab two hours of sleep on the floor, catch the first car down at 6:30am and head off into the day feeling proud to part of such a great team and knowing we just made a difference in someone’s life.

Members present: Lee Arnson, Pete Carlson, Chuck Springer

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.