



Two Hikers Out of Water on Skyline Trail

June 10-11, 2010

4,700' level, Skyline Trail

2010-016

Written by Pete Carlson

My wife and I were just finishing a quick two-mile walk at 5:30pm when the page from RMRU hit my cell phone: *We have two hikers out of water on the Skyline Trail*. The hikers had called the Sheriff by cell phone and stated that they were near a large pine tree and a big rock and were out of water and could not continue. They had started out at 1am that morning with only 6 liters of water between them. Based on this information RMRU members were going to meet at the top of the Palm Springs Tramway to start hiking down the trail since the only pine trees are above 6000' level (the Skyline Trail starts in Palm Springs and ascends 8,000' to the upper Tramway station).

I picked up fellow team member William (my son) at his house seven miles from mine and we headed to the Tramway. We met up with other team members at the lower Tramway station and since William was ready to go, he rode with the Sheriff's deputy in the first tram car to get things going on top. The rest of us took 15 minutes to sort gear and put on boots and took the next car up. Once at the upper station, William had gone over the top of the Skyline and started down the trail to the point where it traverses over to a ridge and starts down into the desert area.

As the rest of us were riding the Tram car up we found out that the deputy on top was talking to a group of hikers who were missing one of their members. We now had a [second mission](#) going and the first had hardly begun. Gwenda took over as Ops Leader and Base Camp operator for both missions and was going to run them from the top of the Tramway. New member Kevin and I were to join William and continue down the Skyline Trail until we found the two subjects who were out of water.

Kevin and I started down the Skyline Trail at 9pm and met William at 9:30pm. We were each carrying 6-7 liters of water and hoped that would be enough for all of us, team members and subjects alike. We still had not made voice contact with the subjects, but we felt sure we would shortly since there were very few pine trees at our elevation. We continued down the trail yelling for Chris and Roxanne every five minutes. Within one hour and 15 minutes we had reached Flat Rock but still had not made contact with the

subjects. We were beginning to wonder if we had missed them, but the air was calm and our voices carried a long way so we hiked on.

As we continued down the trail, a team from Desert Search and Rescue (DSAR) started up from the bottom. DSAR had also sent another team to help with the second mission (the missing hiker on San Jacinto Peak). As we continued to drop in elevation and it got later into the night, we began to wonder if the subjects really knew what a tall pine tree looks like. At the 5,000' level we finally heard a reply of "HELP" to our calls. It still took us another 20 minutes to reach the subjects, who were at the 4,700' level.

The subjects were very thirsty and each finished a liter of water in five minutes. They had planned on hiking up to Long Valley and camping overnight and then going to San Jacinto Peak and camping a second night in Round Valley. This was a trip they had read about in a book and they thought it sounded like a nice 3-day trip. But they had gotten lost between Ramon Road and the Picnic Tables (it had taken them 4 hours). Then it got warm around 10am so they set up a tarp to sit in the shade for several hours. By 4pm they had only reached 4,700 feet and were out of water and thirsty, so they called for help on their mobile phone.



Preparing to Hike Out

photo by William Carlson

We had the subjects pack up their gear and get ready to hike, and at midnight we started on the hike down to Palm Springs. Every 45-50 minutes we stopped and had the

subjects drink another liter of water. At the Picnic Tables we met the DSAR team; they had brought cool Gatorade for all of us. By then our (i.e., the RMRU members') legs were starting to hurt from all of our downhill hiking. Had we known where the subjects were from the start, we would have hiked up from the bottom of the trail. (I had hiked up the entire Skyline Trail 3 weeks before and felt great at Grubs Notch, but hiking down is much harder). At 4:30am we finally reached the Museum and the first mission was over. But we still had a missing hiker from San Jacinto to look for, so we headed back to the Tramway to ride the 6:15am car up.

Members present: Pete Carlson, William Carlson, Kevin Varner, and 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.