



Missing Hiker - San Jacinto Peak

June 10-11, 2010

Tramway to San Jacinto Peak

2010-017

Written by Gwenda Yates

Just before 5pm on June 10 I received a call from Lieutenant Matt Aveling, who informed me that we had a call for help on the Skyline Trail: two hikers were out of water. After calling out the team, I picked up the Rescue Truck and headed off to the Palm Springs Tramway. After arriving on scene, we were informed that there was a possible second mission. Six people had reported losing their friend at the San Jacinto Peak.

At this point I thought to myself, "This is going to be a long night." I called Glenn and informed him that we had a second search and asked him to put out a call for more members. We also called Lt. Aveling and asked for Desert Search and Rescue. Setting up these searches was going to be tricky because both the east and west sides of the mountain were involved. The decision was made to send Les Walker to the west side as a second base camp so that we could maintain radio contact with all field teams. Les went to pick up the white Communications van, then park at the Deer Springs trail head. As the team assembled at the Upper Tramway Station, members Tom Mahood, Dana Potts and Paul Caraher set off for the Peak. They went up the Sid Davies trail to Tamarack Valley, since the main trail had been covered by many people coming down already. The earlier team members had already headed off to the Skyline search.

It's now ten o'clock and the Tramway had accommodated us by running a late car so all members needed at the top were now in place. The rest of the searchers responding were going in from the west side. Les would have radio contact with them and we started a team up the Deer Springs Trail. That team included Rob May of RMRU and Dave Gomez, Beau Potter, and John Bechtel, all of DSAR. After learning the trail conditions John decides that his knees might slow the team and he stays back with Les to help run base.

Peak team and Deer Springs team are having no luck. At one point Rob's team sees some fresh tracks but, not knowing the exact kind of shoe our subject has, they

decide to stay on the trail and keep calling. The Peak team decided to catch a few winks just below the hut and the Deer Springs team is also catching a few winks.

At three o'clock the call is made to Lt. Aveling to give him an update, and we decide to call Cal OES. At 4:30 am the [Skyline search](#) is completed and we will be getting two members from that search to help (keeping in mind they have just done the Skyline top to bottom, 8,000' downhill). I know we are going to need the out-of-county resources. At 4am I hear a rooster crow over the radio. Dana has decided the whole mountain needs to wake up. That team clears the Peak Hut and the Peak. With no sign of our subject Lonnie, they decide to return to base via the Round Valley trail this time.

As I sit and stare at the map, I wonder if Deputy Burke thinks I am a nut, talking to a map and asking it, "Where are you, Lonnie?"

It's time to start making plans for the next day. I know we have to cover all the west side trails, Willow Creek Drainage, Caramba, and Long Valley. Now it is 6:30 am. Pete and Kevin V. have arrived from the lower Tram. With them is State Park Ranger Sue. Pete and I look at the map and we both agree what needs to be done.

The next thing I know, Ranger Sue comes running into Base Camp saying the missing hiker is at the bottom of the Tramway walkway. He is exhausted and needs help up the ramp. Sure enough, a few minutes later Lonnie is sitting in front of me eating protein bars and drinking water. His adventure the night before was a long one. He stayed on trails, slept when it got dark, awoke to sunlight and found the trail that eventually led him back to the Tramway.

He indeed went down into Little Round Valley (1.3 miles) and just kept walking down the Deer Springs Trail. When he came to the signs at Strawberry Junction (3.8 miles) and looked at his little map, he knew he was in the wrong place. So he figured out where he needed to go and started hiking up the Strawberry Cienega Trail to the Angels Glide Trail (2.3 miles). Just as he got to the Angels Glide Trail it got dark. So he put on his jacket and sat down to wait for daylight. In the morning he hiked up to Wellman's Divide, down to Round Valley, and back to the Tramway (4.0 miles). This is the second lost hiker on San Jacinto who just kept hiking long distances (11.4 miles) till he got somewhere with people.

It took another 90 minutes for all of the field teams to hike back out and for the mission to officially end. RMRU wants to thank DSAR for its help on both missions. It's always nice to work with fellow Search and Rescue teams and it's especially nice to have had successful outcomes on both missions.

Members present: Paul Caraher, Pete Carlson, Tom Mahood, Rob May, Dana Potts, Kevin Varner, Les Walker, 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.