



Dehydration, Heat Stroke - Stranded on Skyline Trail

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Skyline Trail
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Written by Lee Arnson

It is Friday, 3:00 pm and the clock on the wall is running in slow motion. I could go home, I'm self employed, but I'll put in a couple more hours and then call it a day. I hear my phone ringing - it's been ringing all day - and I almost just let it go until I see it's from Glenda, and I know that my work day is over and rescue time is beginning. She tells me to get down to the Lake Hemet Sheriffs Sub-Station and get ready to fly with STAR 9 (our aviation unit), that's all I am told.

I shot out of my office so fast, I don't even think I locked the door behind me, but that's the beauty of living in Idyllwild, I wasn't worried.

Upon arrival at Lake Hemet, I was relieved to see that the helicopter was not there yet, allowing me some time to get my gear together and calm down a bit. We work with the aviation unit a lot, but it is always nerve wracking. Working around helicopters is the most dangerous thing we can do, but it is also the most exciting.

As I hear the bird getting close to the helipad, I make radio contact with the Technical Flight Officer (T.F.O.), who turns out to be Deputy Eric Hannum. The pilot is Tony Bowen and I calm down even more knowing that I am going on a mission with two of Riverside County's best officers. We are very fortunate as a rescue team to have access to some of the best helicopters in the world and the pilots and TFO's to go with them.

Eric informs me that we will be flying to the East side of the San Jacinto mountain range to pick up two hikers that are suffering from heat exhaustion and maybe the early stages of heat stroke on the infamous Skyline Trail. This trail starts in Palm Springs and ends at the top of the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway. The two hikers were spotted by the helicopter earlier and were told to stay put and that help was on the way. The temperature on the ground is close to 110°, and we need to make this thing happen now.

As we make our way back to where the two were last seen, we are having a hard

time finding them again and it becomes obvious that they did not stay put and kept moving instead. This is upsetting to the pilot because they are now costing us precious time in finding them, using extra fuel, burning daylight, etc.

Eric finally spots the two hikers and I am let off on a boulder using a “hover step” where the helicopter doesn’t actually land, it just hovers about two feet above the boulder and I get out. It’s a real rush.

I work my way over to the two hikers and inform them that they are going to be put on board the helicopter and flown to a nearby hospital. One of the hikers tells me that he doesn’t want to go to a hospital, and that all he really needs is some more water and food. I tell him that he is getting on the helicopter and then he starts yelling at me about all kinds of stuff that has nothing to do with the situation at hand. It was then that I realized that he was suffering from heat stroke and he needed to get to a hospital as soon as possible.

He was a big guy, and instead of having him step up onto the boulder and into the helicopter, Eric decided it would be safer to hoist him up into the ship. We have done this operation many times before and this one goes smoothly and the subject is flown to the hospital while I wait with the other hiker to be flown out. Any time the helicopter leaves, you are never guaranteed it will return, it is just the nature of the business, but within a few minutes, I can hear that sweet sound of the air being chopped up and soon we are on board and flown to safety.

Since this write-up is for public reading on our web site, I want it to be known that the Riverside Mountain Rescue Unit has performed many rescues on the Skyline Trail over the years, and most of those included the Aviation Unit as well, making the rescue both costly and dangerous. Almost all of the rescues involved people who disregarded the conditions they were about to be faced with.

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.