



Lost Hiker Skyline or Cactus to Clouds Trail

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Palm Springs Art Museum
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Written by Matt Jordon

Sunday redefined its name when RMRU was called out to search for a lost hiker on Skyline during a toasty 110 degree day in Palm Springs. Normally, Skyline is best done in cooler weather or early-launched in the morning, but we received the word at about 1:30pm that there was a hiker about one half mile off trail to the north at about 3,500 feet elevation.

I had just finished some Spicy Basil Chicken and a Taro Boba at a Thai restaurant with Kim. I then began pre-loading with water in anticipation of several hours being twice-baked in the rocks lining Skyline. Kim and I arrived at the art museum and used GPS coordinates to get a location on the subject - also getting a mental image as to what to prepare for. By the time Glenn and Gwenda showed up with the truck, I slogged another couple of pints down and Glenn and I started heading towards the 'benches'. Radio contact from the museum was patchy at best, so Glenn decided to act as relay while I meandered on - meanwhile Paul and Ralph became two water trucks, each carrying over two gallons a piece for emergency resupply and hydration for the rest of us already in the field.

For those who haven't hiked Skyline in 110+ degree weather: I don't recommend it. Even strong hikers start bumbling their feet, coughing up slime, laughing at stuff that's not funny, and eyeing brambles and occasional dirt patches as comfortable beds. Gwenda, Ralph and the rest of the team did a good job making sure I remembered to cool off and rehydrate - sometimes we need conscious reminders when we have our minds on finding lost hikers and I appreciated the extra attention, a few clouds later in the day helped too. It also turned out that texting base at the museum was one of the more reliable methods of communication when I was behind hillsides with my radio. My iPhone doubled as a great GPS device and I was able to determine my elevation regularly while approaching the last known location of the subject.

At about 3,200', I started yelling for a response and I began hearing some faint

replies further up the hillside. I progressed to 3,500' and began traversing horizontally to the north past two or three gullies and eventually made visual contact with clear verbal communication. Cal Fire's estimation of about 1000 yards off trail was pretty accurate and it was a very good thing that the subject maintained his will in staying put because he managed to get onto an outcropping with some pretty steep drop offs. I met him and led him back to the trail where I gave him 32oz of cold water and we communicated that we were heading back down the mountain. The subject complained that he had felt nauseous earlier in the day and had vomited, though he seemed to be in good physical condition when we met. We slowly made our way downhill to about 2000' elevation when we hydrated again with the kind help of Ralph and Paul. The subject was still in good spirits, so we rendezvoused with Glenn at the benches and continued on to the museum where we declared 'mission accomplished'.

In retrospect, the lost hiker admitted to overestimating his ability to complete the infamous Skyline in August - a late 7am start and only two liters of water didn't help. He also conceded that the lack of other hikers on the trail was probably a good sign that it was a bad idea and concluded that the best way to hike Skyline as a beginner was to go with someone that has already done it (in cooler weather). He mentioned that a short walk through a wide dirt patch somewhere on the trail somehow made him lose his bearings and he then could not find the trail again - apparently his GPS was not as helpful as anticipated. Nevertheless, this poor chap was suffering from disorientation, dehydration, exhaustion, and just having an embarrassingly bad day altogether. We encouraged him to try again in cool weather with other hikers. Then we went to grab some much needed food and cool off. Nevertheless, the new motto for RMRU should be "On Any Sunday". Great job crew!

RMRU team members present: Paul Caraher, Glenn Henderson, Mike Herman, Ralph Hoetger, Kim Jordon, Matt Jordon, Lew Kingman, 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.