



Overdue Hiker Tramway

January 07, 2015

Tramway to San Jacinto Peak

2015-003

Written by Patrick McCurdy

RMRU was called at 2 a.m. on January 7th, for a 6 a.m. report time for a lost hiker out of the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway. Ted, in his earlier 30's, had gone hiking on Mount San Jacinto on the 6th and his parents reported him missing when he did not return home in Irvine where he was visiting from Florida. Arriving at the lower tram station at 5:45 were Glenn and Matt, both of whom came directly from Big Bear where they had been working on a mutual aid search with San Bernardino County, Lew, and myself. RMRU member Donny and five members of Desert Sheriff's Search and Rescue (DSSAR) were just a little behind us.

Glenn and Lew set up the command post at the tram while Matt and I got ready to head out as Team 1. With no real idea where Ted could be, Matt and I headed up the main trail towards Round Valley. Our recent storms had left a substantial amount of snow, but it was a gorgeous morning, about 40 degrees, with no need for crampons or snowshoes. Matt, who is a much stronger hiker than I am, had mercy on me and kept the pace reasonable. With not a lick of wind, our voices carried a substantial distance when we called out for Ted, but we got no answer. We checked the toilets at Round Valley, but again no sign of Ted. Note that it is not at all uncommon for lost people to sleep in the simple backcountry toilets to shelter from the elements.

As Matt and I headed over toward Tamarack to check the toilets there, Team 2, made up of DSSAR personnel, was getting started and were going to check the Sid Davis drainage, a common alternate path between Round Valley and the tram. About the same time Glenn and Lew at the command post were able to establish intermittent voice contact with Ted via cell phone, and slightly more dependable text contact. He said he had slept in a toilet but had now been hiking for about an hour and was on a well-worn snow trail. We all assumed he would head downhill and so figured he was somewhere between Team 1 and Team 2. Glenn and Lew were then able to talk Ted through getting a lat-long coordinate from his cell phone. As the field teams and the command post all started plotting the location, we began to scratch our heads as it plotted higher up than

Round Valley, somewhere below Jean Peak. It had never occurred to us he might go up.

Teams 1 & 2 had by this time converged back at Round Valley and we heard the first sound of Star 93 flying in to assist with the search. Team 2 headed up the trail toward Wellman's Divide, while Matt and I remained at Round Valley. Star 93 fairly quickly located Ted very close to the given coordinates. They said he was standing, apparently uninjured, but not responding to them at all. This had us concerned that he might be severely hypothermic. Star 93 asked for someone to do a hoist and Matt and I were ready! Matt and I were deciding who got to go up in the helicopter when Glenn advised via radio that he wanted me to go, as Ted's medical status was in question and I have more medical training than Matt.

Star 93 landed in the snow-covered meadow at Round Valley and TFO Eric Bashta rigged the airship for a hoist. It was a quick flight up to where Ted was and pilot Andy Rasmussen, blessed with near zero wind, did a great job of placing us very near Ted. I was lowered down by Eric Bashta, quickly determined that Ted was alert, cooperative, and uninjured, and he was hoisted out in a Screamer Suit. Star 93 dropped him in Round Valley where other field teams had converged, came back and hoisted me out, dropping me likewise in Round Valley.



Sharon, Matt, Subject-Ted, Kevin, and Patrick
Photo by Unknow.

Ted was in great spirits, feeling strong, and said he was absolutely fine with hiking three miles back to the tram. After giving him some energy bars and water, we made quick work of the hike back to the tram and didn't even get a chance to sit down before we all caught the next tram car down to the valley station. We were back at our cars by noon.

Ted had not originally intended to go to the peak, but met some folks with a GPS who assured him they could find it. He got separated from them, then made a wrong turn and got lost. With daylight waning he headed down and spent the night in one of the backcountry toilets, probably at Round Valley or Tamarack. At dawn the next morning he got up and started hiking back up to where was more familiar with the trail. With more altitude he found a cell signal and was able to make contact with the command post. About an hour later he was being hoisted out by Star 93.

Hosit Video

[Hosit Video](#) - Thanks to Patrick for a great video!

RMRU Members Involved: Donny Goetz, Glenn Henderson, Matt Jordon, Lew Kingman, and Patrick McCurdy.

DSAR Members Involved: Mike Calhoun, Mike Fogarty, Chris Miller, Sharon Ollenburger, and Kevin Wahlstrom.

Sheriff's Aviation: (Pilot - Andy Rasmussen) (TFO - Eric Bashta)

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.