



Nine Hoisted from Skyline

March 4, 2017

Tramway Skyline Trail

2017-012

Written by Eric Holden

Every year RMRU must pass a re-accreditation with the California Region of the Mountain Rescue Association. This test takes the team away from our area and almost inevitably we have a callout. This year did not disappoint. We had just finished the main part of our search/tracking test when we got a call out that there were 9 missing people on the Skyline Trail around the 7,500ft level. Luckily Cameron, Michael, and myself all had our winter gear packed and we made the 2-hour drive to the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway where we met Matt.

Turns out Riverside Aviation Star 9 had flown the area and located the subjects. They had all regrouped and now all 9 of them were stuck right at the start of the Skyline Traverse. Hoisting even one person off Skyline can be difficult let alone 9 people. RSO had already made plans and asked for the assistance of CHP's H60 aviation. With both dusk settling in and weather on the way, we were very happy when they arrived. Matt and I would team up with Star 9 and Cameron and Mike would be with H60.



Cameron and Michael with Several Subjects
Photo by Eric Holden.

I was first to be lowered to the subjects. No one was injured but one of the subjects was suffering from mild hypothermia. As I was getting her and another subject into screamer suits Cameron was lowered in with more screamer suits by H60. By the time Star 9 returned and lowered Matt to the scene, with more screamer suits, we were ready to start hosting them out.



**Eric hooking up a Subject in Screamer Suit
Photo by Cameron Dickinson.**



Matt and Subject waiting for Hoist
Photo by Eric Holden.

Over the next hour Star 9 and H60 would be running laps between the lower tram station and our location on the mountain. Depending on fuel loads we either sent one or two subjects at a time. I was extremely happy to have 4 rescuers on scene, as trying to both hoist, dress, and prep them would have been very difficult if only two of us were there. Before I knew it, we were sending our last subject up. The aviation teams returned to pick us all up and we met back at the lower tram station and debriefed a job well done.



**RMRU, RSO Aviation, and CHP Crew (The 9 Rescuers that Saved 9)
Photo by RSO Deputy.**

The Subject's Story: They started hiking the skyline trail at midnight that morning. They made it to the traverse around 10am but then couldn't go any further due to the snow and ice conditions. They didn't have (ice axes, crampons, snow shoes, ropes, or helmets) all necessary gear to make the last 800 feet of elevation gain. A couple of them tried to ascend but would only slide back down due to the conditions. At this time they started getting cold and knew they wouldn't be able to make it back down, especially since weather was due to hit later that night or the next morning, so they called for a rescue.

What to learn from this, Skyline is rated as one of the hardest hikes in America. We have had dozens of fatalities over the years on this trail due to slipping on ice in the winter or heat in the summer. Right now Skyline is one big ice chute and even accomplished mountaineers have issues ascending it. Know your abilities!!!! I had told them about a rescue two weeks ago, were a hiker broke his leg from a fall, almost in the exact spot they were at. They mentioned that they had heard about this but figured they had the skills to make it. This is what we hear all too frequently and luckily these hikers called it quits and could walk away from their ordeal.

RMRU would like to send out big time thanks to both the Riverside Sheriff's Aviation Team and the California Highway Patrol's H60 for their expert flight skills. Without them this rescue would have been 20 times longer and harder.

RMRU Members Involved: Cameron Dickinson, Michael George, Eric Holden, Matt

Jordon.

Other Agencies Involved: RSO Aviation Star-9 and CHP Aviation H60.

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.