

Lost Tramway Hiker

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Tramway to San Jacinto

2017-024

Written by Matt Jordon

The usual time of Tram callouts are just after the last car arrives back at the valley station, right about the time the sun has set and the temperatures drop for the evening. It should come as no surprise then whenever team members are tired, showered, and batting their heavy eyelids after a long workday only to get a text message that there is another overdue hiker, lost somewhere on the mountain. This was just one of those nights.

The heavy winter provided late season snow patches and crisp mountain air which awaited Cameron, Shani and myself after we converged in the quiet valley station lobby. The word was that two hikers went up and only one came down. The subject was an 'experienced hiker' -- and the goal was the peak. Of course: The hikers separated on the way up and the now lost hiker couldn't find his way back. The best info we could gather was that the lost hiker did make it to the peak, but then he hiked downhill about four miles and was last reported to be at a slight uphill area -- somewhere, anywhere.

My best estimation after learning the approximate timeframes and distances, as well as mixing in my basic knowledge of the mountain problem areas (including less than ideal signage) was now pointing toward Wellman's Divide and Strawberry Cienega. Since we only had three rescuers respond immediately for the held over tramcar, we decided to leave Shani alone in the radio room while Cam and I swept the Round Valley trail up to Wellman's Divide. We left late, around midnight and completed callouts and good communication with Shani along the way. After an unusually exhausting slog up to the divide, we again called out and made the best estimation of our time limitations and possible back up plans for a possible morning rescue. The time now was 2am.

By 4am, we had made it back to the Mountain Station where we bedded down for the night in the ballroom area overlooking the backcountry. Minding that the last word before the lost hiker's phone died was that he was four miles away from the peak, we agreed that this guy could literally be anywhere by now. We had to wait until daybreak to give it another shot -- possibly from Humber Park up the PCT or maybe even somewhere near Deer Springs. For now, we had to get some rest.

One of the best parts about overnight missions up the tram is the unique experience of bivouacking in the ballroom. It may be as close as it gets in Southern California to being trapped in the film *The Shining* where Jack Torrance is hopelessly isolated in the Overlook Hotel. This night, I recall hearing knocking from what sounded like the exit door into Long Valley. This happened twice and Cameron confirmed this the next day. All in all, big raccoons and wearisome imaginations could very well be the culprit.

Thankfully by first light, Glen, Alex, and Kevin were ready and willing to sweep the trail back up the peak as we just got word that the subject had met up with some PCT hikers and was now at the infamous stone survival cabin. We advised him to stay put until we sent a team up to make sure there were no more mistakes that would complicate another day. As Shani, Cameron and myself made the first car down, Glen, Alex, and Kevin were getting ready to go get the subject. An hour later, the mission was over as the subject was walking out safely.

The lessons here to hikers are: Don't get separated from your hiking partner(s) and always have a mutual backup plan that includes proper gear. The lessons for rescuers are: Pay close attention to the latest (ever changing) information and use your network of team members to successfully complete the mission.

RMRU Members Involved: Alex Rilloraza, Cameron Dickinson, Glenn Henderson, Matt Jordon, Kevin Kearn, Shani Pynn.

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.