

Search Caramba Area

January 19, 2019
San Jacinto Mountains
2019-002

Written by Josh Gould

On Saturday January 19, 2019, RMRU received a call around 5:30pm about a hiker who got lost while hiking on Mt. San Jacinto. Everyone met up at the bottom of the Palm Springs Ariel Tramway around 8:00pm. After discussing the situation with the Sheriff Officers, we learned the approximate location of the subject and that he has received a drop bag with food, water, and some shelter equipment. We headed up the tram to set up base camp at the top of the Tramway.



Josh calling out
Photo by Eric Holden.

After packing the appropriate gear Eric and Josh headed out for the long hike ahead. Leaving around 8:30pm. Ray, Daniel, and Blake stayed in communications from base with us. We headed for the area around Caramba which is around a Seven-mile hike. Checking in with base about every half an hour and checking the GPS every fifteen to twenty minutes to make sure we were on route. We would try to find the faster way to the subject while trying not to get to far of trail in the ice and snow.



Subject bedded down with gear from Helicopter
Photo by Eric Holden.

Around 1:15am, we were approaching the area the subject was in. A half hour later, we contacted the subject and evaluated his condition. The subject, Brian, was in good health and high spirits, while wrapped up in traps and a sleeping bag. Brian was in happy to see us. We radioed into Base and acknowledged that we had found him and that we were going to set up camp and stay the night. While thinking of the hike ahead we realized that the added drop bag with an all uphill climb was going to be a long and difficult climb, so they decided to request for assistance from STAR-9 in getting out of the area and back to an area closer to the Tramway.



Waiting for Helicopter: Eric, Josh, and Subject
Photo by Eric Holden.

At 6:30am Base put in the request for STAR-9s assistance. In case that STAR-9 was not able to assist, a second team of two was sent out part way and stayed on standby to wait for a response from the Riverside Sheriffs. This team included Shani and Blake and their goal was to assist with carrying the extra weight if the helicopter couldn't come. To prepare for the arrival of the helicopter, we and Brian packed everything up, grabbed the drop bag and headed to an area that the helicopter could land in for the evacuation. After a mile or two of hiking we had found a landing zone. After some time and convincing from our Base, we received confirmation that there will be a helicopter heading towards Team us soon.



Blake doing knots while waiting
Photo by Shani Pynn.

At 10:30am, the helicopter arrived above our heads. The pilot and co-pilot decided to circle around the area just in case there might be a better landing zone. After a short time, they had found a landing zone just north of where we were. Team One hiked up to the new spot and assisted with getting Brian into the helicopter. The first trip included Brian and Josh, while Eric waited for the second trip. Taking a short flight to Long Valley, where Josh and Brian were dropped off. STAR-9 returned to the original landing zone to pick up Eric.



Shani, Blake, Eric, Subject, Ray, and Josh at Uppder Tramway
Photo by Unknown.

Once we regrouped in Long Valley, we headed to the ranger station for a debriefing. While there Shani and Blake arrived. After the debriefing, both teams escorted Brian up to the tram to meet up us the rest of the search team. Once base was packed up, we headed back down the tram and met up with the Sheriff Officer. This is where RMRU and the subject parted ways. This was a great mission all around. The team work between RMRU, the Sheriffs and the Park Rangers was the key to a successful rescue.

RMRU Members Involved: Blake Douglas, Josh Gould, Eric Holden, Shani Pynn, and Ray Weden.

Brian was very thankful for the assistance of RMRU, the Riverside Sheriffs, and the Park Rangers. He had this to say about his experience:

“Hello RMRU, My name is Brian Ortiz and I was recently rescued by Eric Holden and Josh Gould on Sunday, January 20th from the San Jacinto State Park. I was hiking on the round valley loop trail heading towards the hidden lake divide trail, which was not tracked yet. I made a bad decision to break my own trail towards what I thought was round valley, I reached a high ravine and mistakenly went down into it, only to realize I

was not crossing any trails and had no reference to any landmarks. I soon became disoriented and did not know which way to go, to get back to long valley. I had hiked several miles in boots and gaiters [no snowshoes] and was exhausted by trekking through the deep snow. Around 4pm, I knew I had little time to correct my actions and notified a friend of mine that I was lost in the San Jacinto wilderness.

He was able to contact the San Jacinto State Park Ranger and I was contacted by the ranger, soon after. After a conversation with the ranger, I was advised to call 911. Once in contact with emergency services, I discussed my situation with the operator. I had prepared for a long day, so I had packed extra water [almost 6 liters] and warmer items, such as a packable down jacket, smart wool socks, heavy top and bottom base layers, fleece balaclava, glove liners and a headlamp with extra batteries. I did not intend to be out after dark but learned to always pack these items, no matter what.

Via text message, I was told by the ranger that a helicopter would be searching for me and to make myself visible, once I heard the helicopter. Within an hour, I heard the helicopter, but it was off in the distance, so I had thought I had given the wrong coordinates from my phone, which was reaching a low battery. As I waited to see what the helicopter was doing, it started to head in my direction, which I then found a clearing and aimed my headlamp towards it, I was soon discovered in the dark. The helicopter circled several times before it verified my condition, which was uninjured. I was then informed that they would return shortly.

After 30 minutes, the helicopter returned to drop a survival pack, which included a sleeping bag, headlamp, warm clothes, food, water and 2 tarps. The helicopter informed me that a rescue team would get to me in the morning. I unpacked the survival pack and prepared my shelter, once my sleeping bag was in place and I had replaced my damp clothing and settled in for the night. I was very comfortable and almost too warm with all the layers I had, including the sleeping bag. The evening weather was extremely mild, absolutely no wind and a full moon, perfect weather for an unperfected situation.

I had packed a thermometer that showed the low was 30.6 degrees overnight, but I never was that cold due to my clothing and the shelter provided. I did not sleep much and would occasionally hear some sounds but could not make out what they were. Around 1am, I heard what sounded like my name and I responded, eventually seeing headlamps coming up the hillside, so I turned mine headlamp on too.

I was greeted by Eric Holden and Josh Gould, who confirmed my status as “high spirits” with their base team. Eric told me that they had been hiking since 9pm, through very heavy snow and a steep decline to reach me. I was so relieved to be with experienced hikers who were calm, funny, interesting and personable. We all talk a bit and then settled in for the night.

We woke up and got packed around 6:30am, hiked uphill for a little while, to find a level clearing, hoping we would get airlifted out, since the survival pack was too heavy for us to hike back up the steep incline, [2,500ft gain] to the ranger station. Around 8am, we

were informed the airlift was denied by authorities, but I later learned that the sheriff on duty, insisted they pick us up. Around 9am, we received word that we would be getting an airlift around 10:45am. Around 10:45am the helicopter arrived and circled us several times, before finding a better spot to land, then our intended location.

As we hiked up towards the landing zone, the co-pilot greeted us and helped carry the survival pack to the waiting helicopter. The helicopter was concerned about weight, so only two of us were airlifted first, which was Me and Josh. I had never been in a helicopter, so I filmed the entire episode with my GoPro camera. The ride was thrilling since the aircraft floated in a bumpy manner and was extremely loud, hence the audio, helmet system the pilot and co-pilot use to communicate with each other. Everything was being prepared up at the landing zone in long valley, which happened to be the meadow right in front of the ranger station. We circled a few times around the area and then came in for the landing, which was guided by the ranger and his assistant volunteer.

Once out of the aircraft, we were instructed to get far back due to the high winds produce by the props and for safety reasons. The helicopter left to go pick up Eric and soon after, returned. I went through the procedure of being interviewed by the ranger and confirming my hiking permit and entry point. Once released, me and the entire rescue team took the tram down to the bottom, where I was interviewed by the sheriff. I was released soon after and was able to drive home, to San Diego.

I hope you do not mind my detailed account and I have so much respect for the Riverside Mountain Rescue Unit. Those volunteers are the epitome of altruism. Please accept my donation [donated through website earlier today] with all my heart and admiration for the volunteers who make up the Riverside Mountain Rescue Unit. I wish I was wealthy and could buy everything they need to perform their duties. I too am an outdoor enthusiast and know how expensive quality equipment is.

Please let Eric and Josh know, I will never forget this experience and the determination each one had to find me in the middle of the night, in very difficult terrain. This memory will stay with me for the rest of my life!

I just realized in my letter I wrote yesterday about my rescue, I did not mention the rest of the team that was supporting Eric and Josh. I believe there was Shani and Ray and a few others as well. I apologize for not mentioning their support was critical as well. Shani and another even attempted to reach us by foot, early that morning. Since the airlift was approved, they were called back. There was the radio dispatch team, etc. Upon reflecting on my letter from yesterday, I did not want to forget anyone who was involved in this rescue. Please forgive me for making this error. I'm not sure who all was involved but there was the volunteer's from RMRU, the Sheriff's department (pilot & co-pilot), State Park Rangers, do please let me know if I left anyone out? My sincere apologies!

Thank You, Brian Ortiz"

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.