



## Two Lost Female Hikers

**August 10, 2019**

**Tramway**

**2019-043**

Written by Blake Douglas

I was having coffee at Higher Grounds in Idyllwild with Vinay, Daniel, and new team member Kase Chong, following 8 hours of training at Saddle Junction followed immediately by a mission. We were all tired and ready to head home, when, of course, our phones pinged with another mission, this time at Wellman Divide. Kase and I were available and ready to head back up Devil's Slide, but after confirming the coordinates we found that our subjects were near Miller Peak, making this a tramway mission. Since most tram missions end with us being stuck at the upper station until dawn, Kase was unable to join us, so Glenn and I took the team truck down from Idyllwild and drove to Palm Springs with Michael George coming from Riverside and Cameron from Temecula. On our way, we heard from call captain Gwenda Yates that a second mission was possibly going to be called out at Deer Springs trail, but fortunately this one never manifested.

Cameron arrived at the tram in record time and, considering that the rest of us were still about an hour away, he was given clearance to proceed on his own. Normally RMRU requires a minimum of two members for field teams, but since our subjects were reported to be on the trail and without injuries, the mandate was waived on the assumption that Cameron just needed to escort them back to the tram station.

Once we arrived at the upper tram station, Glenn intended to keep Mike and myself in reserve, but we had only just started to unpack our overnight gear when we were asked to head out on another mission; this one being a welfare check on a camper in Round Valley. Knowing Cam's mission could easily turn into a medical call or a search, Mike and I brought all our gear and began heading up the Willow Creek trail, then across Round Valley.

As we headed west, we observed a pair of lights working south, down the main trail that runs east of Jean Peak, heading for Wellman Divide. Considering it was nearly midnight, it didn't seem likely that these were regular hikers, as we almost never encounter anyone on the San Jacinto trails after dark. I wondered if, somehow or other, our subjects had gotten ahold of lights, and were now deviating from their original location. Moments later, Cameron radioed that he had arrived at the coordinates near Miller Peak, saw no subjects, and heard no response to his callouts. I then reported our observation of the

moving lights. You can only hear one person at a time on the radio, but I'm pretty sure there was a simultaneous "aaaaugh" from Cam and Glenn.

Glenn put our Round Valley mission on standby and redirected Mike and myself to Wellman Divide, hopefully to cut off our subjects before they got there, since Wellman is a great place for people to miss the sign and get lost (or, if you're already lost, even more lost). Cam approached from the north while Mike and I continued the Round Valley trail up to Wellman's. Fortunately, Glenn was able to call the subjects on their cellphone and instruct them to remain at Wellman's when they got there. We reached Wellman's within half an hour, to find our subjects and a pair of better-equipped hikers; the lights we had seen belonged to them. According to our subjects, they were so cold at their original position that the passing hikers had offered to relocate them.

One of our subjects was suffering from altitude sickness as well as signs of early hypothermia, but otherwise they were ok. After briefly warming our ill subject, we began hiking them back down toward the tram, with Mike breaking off at Round Valley to continue our welfare check mission. Travel was slow and we stopped periodically for warmth, snacks and to keep up a positive attitude, since our ill subject was trudging along almost silently at this point, just trying to focus on getting to the tram. We made it with enough time for a short nap before the dawn crew arrived to take us down the mountain; fortunately, our subjects were feeling better at this point and everything worked out ok from a medical perspective.

What went wrong: while our subjects had some hiking experience, they didn't expect to get tired, sick or to be out after dark. A lack of anticipation and planning around worst-case scenarios is a common theme among subjects who are lost but not injured; they simply didn't pack enough of, or the right kind, of equipment for the situation they ended up in.

**RMRU Members Involved:** Cameron Dickinson, Blake Douglas, Michael George, and Glenn Henderson.

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.