



Tramway Hiker

October 08, 2019

Tramway to San Jacinto Peak

2019-055

Written by Blake Douglas

Around 7:30pm we received a callout for a missing hiker from the Palm Springs Tramway. This didn't come as much of a surprise because the tramway had just reopened the previous day, after being closed for a month for annual repairs, so we expected a larger-than-average number of people to be on the trails. Our hiker was just past the Wellman Divide junction; he was lost and lacked overnight gear.

James and I were the first to respond, and we coincidentally met Kase Chong in the parking lot as he was coming down from a day of hiking. Kase joined Glenn and Mike Cara running base while James and I went up and began our hike to the subject's coordinates. We made it in about 90 minutes, finding the subject about 200 feet south of the trail with some light bushwhacking through whitethorn, pine and manzanita. As near as our subject could tell, he had missed the Wellman Divide junction (as is often the case in this area) and once he reached the water at Wellman Cienega, he realized that he was going the wrong way, then lost the trail, and was unable to find it again before nightfall. He was in great shape other than being lost, and we immediately headed out.

Normally a night mission out of the tram means that we are spending the night at the Tramway's mountain station and take the first car down in the morning. Fortunately, Star 9 was available for this mission, and was able to land in the Round Valley meadow almost as soon as we arrived there at midnight. It was a strange and almost unnerving experience to go from a casual conversation between the three of us, to the noise and tension of a helicopter landing, and then suddenly being alone in the forest at night. The silence and cold tend to creep in quickly when you aren't moving, and despite having been in these mountains alone, at night, many times before, it still makes me a little anxious. The minutes started to stretch on, and when I heard the buzz of Star 9 coming back over the ridge and I was ready to go in record time. We landed at one of the tram's parking lots, then went to Denny's before heading back to Riverside. The pumpkin pancakes were pretty good.

RMRU Members Involved: Michael Cara, Kase Chong, Douglas Blake, James Eckhardt, 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.