



Injured Climber

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Tahquitz Rock
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ate Sunday afternoon RMRU was notified by the Riverside County Sheriff's Department that there was an injured climber on Tahquitz Rock. Sending my son, Kevin, to load gear for both of us, I called fellow unit member John Dew. We agreed to ride up the hill together.

Since the call was for an injury we all hurried, even faster, than our normal quick response. As we drove along John, Kevin and I discussed a plan of action since we would be 45 minutes ahead of the rest of the unit members.

Two unit handtalkie radios are kept in the Hemet - San Jacinto area since three unit members, who live there, are generally able to respond to rescue missions. When we arrived at the Humber Park roadhead we were given information about the accident by the deputy. He pointed to the general area where the climber had been reported to have fallen. We gave him one of the unit radios, so that we could communicate, since we would be leaving ahead of the rest of the unit members.

Hiking up toward Lunch Rock, we stopped a couple of times to call out. It wasn't until we were well around to the north side of the rock that we received a response to our yells. It was now dark and beginning to turn quite cold. Scrambling up a rock I caught sight of the beam from a lone flashlight.

We had been given the impression that the climber was somewhere up on the rock. But when we arrived at the light we found that the injured climber, Mike Shea, was laying at the base of the climbing rock. We quickly introduced ourselves, took off our packs and put on our parkas.

Mike's climbing partner related that an anchor had failed while Mike was rappelling down the steep rock face. Mike had traveled over 100 feet during the accident, ending up on a snow bank. Other climbers and Mike's partner had given what first aid they could and covered him with a sleeping bag.

Mike was in amazingly good spirits as I talked to him while conducting an examination to determine the extent of his injuries. Lifting up the foot end of the sleeping bag, I was confronted with copious amounts of blood covering his clothing

and the snow. At this time I could not determine where he was hemorrhaging from. So out came my oversize bandage scissors and I began cutting the right pantleg of his climbing knickers, going almost to the waistband, much to Mike's dismay. No gross wounds could be seen and I suspected the guilty area was underneath him. Calling John over, who had been supervising the building of a fire, I directed him to maintain traction on the right leg. With the help of others we rotated Mike onto his back.

A two inch avulsion immediately came into view. Surmising, from the combination of pain in the area and the opening in the flesh and skin, the femur (upper leg bone) was probably completely fractured through. It had most likely knifed through the muscle and skin during the fall and then retreated. Applying a compression dressing, without causing more pain was a problem, but one I was able to solve from training in the hospital emergency room and experience in the field.

The examination had previously revealed that the right ankle and knee could also contain fractures. Applying adequate traction was going to be very tough. 461, our handitalkie, crackled to life. RMRU's van had arrived and Jim Fairchild, via the radio, was requesting us to advise him of needed equipment.

On the top of our list, was the Hare traction leg splint. This was closely followed by the rescue sleeping bag and the wheeled litter. A length of climbing rope, warm clothing and flashlights for the people who had first given aid, were also needed. Jim radioed back that unit members were arriving and the requested equipment would soon be on the way along with more manpower.

John and I made Mike as comfortable as possible under the circumstances, while Kevin kept the warming fire going. In very good time our fellow members arrived along with the needed equipment. The Hare splint was unpacked and readied for use. With John holding traction on the ankle, we applied the splint. Our job was complicated because of the pain and tenderness in both the ankle and the knee areas. We rose to the occasion by special padding and supports. While we were splinting other members prepared the rescue sleeping bag and the litter. We gathered around Mike, and with great difficulty due to poor footing (snow and loose rocks), lifted him up and placed him in the litter. After he was secured into the litter we packed all our gear and started the long trip down, cross country, to Humber Park.

With all the usual problems of transporting a victim in a great deal of pain, we arrived back at base well after midnight. Mike was loaded into the Idyllwild Volunteer Fire Department ambulance and was on his way to the hospital. Very tired, but elated that we had been able to help a fellow climber in need, we headed home.

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.