

Climber with possibly two broken ankles

September 2, 1985
Tahquitz Rock
1985-038

By Bill Blaschko, M.D.

Cameron Robbins and I were waiting for the rest of the team at Fuller Mill Creek Picnic Area when our pagers went off announcing a rescue of an injured climber on Tahquitz Rock. We stayed at the scene of the first search until there was more information available (see 1985-037). Fortunately the missing subject was found and Cameron and I were off to Camp Maranatha, the rendezvous for the mission on Tahquitz Rock. Mary Bowman and Walt Walker soon joined us. We learned that a climber had fallen near the top of the Long Climb and had possibly broken both ankles. The Long Climb is a popular route, which as the name implies, goes up the tallest portion of the rock. The climb has a difficulty rating of 5.7 on a scale from 5.1 to 5.12, the higher the number the harder the climb.

A rescue strategy was formulated. It was felt that the best plan was to land a team at the top of Tahquitz Rock by helicopter to complete an assessment of what men and equipment were necessary to evacuate the subject. In the meantime all the items that were most likely to be needed were carefully laid out. I was selected to go with Walt on the first trip because of my medical expertise. I packed a cervical collar, leg splints, blood pressure cuff and other first aid gear into my pack. Other team members prepared ropes, slings, and hardware needed to raise the injured climber to the top of the rock from where he could be flown to safety.

The sun was just getting low in the sky when Don Landells flew his helicopter into Camp Maranatha. Walt and I wasted no time getting into the bird. As always the view from the helicopter was spectacular as we rose above Fern Valley. Don circled the rock a number of times, testing the wind currents, before resting one runner of the helicopter on a rock outcropping near the top. Walt and I evaluated the situation while Don hovered a safe distance away. Our subject turned out to be one tough customer. He had managed to get to the top of the rock with the aid of some other climbers in the vicinity. His left leg was significantly injured and he had pushed himself up on his good leg while the other climbers had painstakingly, and painfully, dragged him to the top. I did a rapid survey of the subject and found a number of abrasions and bruises in addition to a very swollen and painful left ankle. After splinting the broken ankle the subject was maneuvered into position to be loaded into the bird. Don made another one runner landing in the fading light and I quickly moved up the boulder and into the bird. While I pulled on a sling I had attached to the subject's climbing harness, Walt and the

other climbers boosted him into the helicopter. Don flew to Camp Maranatha and gently landed. Other RMRU team members were there to help the subject out of the bird. The climber headed on to Hemet Valley Hospital for x-rays and treatment.

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.