



## Suicide Rock Rescue

**August 31, 2008**  
**Suicide Rock, Idyllwild**  
**2008-027**

By Lee Arnson

It's 1:30 in the afternoon and I'm at my office watching the rain come down. Not real heavy, just enough to get the road wet and create that great smell that goes with it. I hear sirens and then see Idyllwild Fire drive by and then shortly thereafter Pine Cove Fire goes by. I figure there is a fire in Fern Valley or possibly a car accident.

A little while later Gwenda calls me and said she heard on her scanner that there is a climber down on Suicide Rock. Now that I know what is going on, I put out a "heads up" for the rest of the team, assuming we are about to be called out to assist. Only a few minutes later, Gwenda called me back and said that Idyllwild Fire was with the subject, I now put out a "90", meaning to abort and stay home. Since these write-ups are both reviews and critiques, I must admit this was my first mistake.

Now I'm just plain curious as to what is going on, so I drive up to the trail head to see if I can at least "observe" Idyllwild Fire in action. This was my second mistake, because if you belong to search and rescue team you don't observe other people doing rescues, you get involved or you don't go at all.

As I'm hiking up to the base of the rock, I meet up with Clark Jacobs, a local legendary climber who witnessed the whole accident. He saw a young couple climbing on a route known as Captain Hook, when all of a sudden the leader falls over 100 feet and lands on his head. Clark was able to get to the climber, who was turning blue and suffering mass trauma to his head. Clark was able to move the climber just enough to open his airway, make sure he was breathing and then call 911. Clark tells me that he has seen many falls in his 40 years of climbing, but this is the worst one ever. I reassure him that he did the right thing, but he is visibly shaken.

We both decide to go up to the site where the climber is now being taken care of by Idyllwild Fire and CDF paramedics. The CDF helicopter has already lowered its medic, and the subject is packaged in a litter, ready to be airlifted to an awaiting ambulance. As the CDF helicopter moves back into position for the hoist, mother nature decided that it wasn't going to happen that easily. The rain turned to hail the size of golf balls and was coming down so heavy that you couldn't even look up any more at the hovering bird, which by now is pulling out because the conditions are too dangerous to fly. Now the mission has turned into a carry out. Henry Negrete from Idyllwild Fire

looks at me and asks me to grab the wheel that attaches to the bottom of the litter. Now I'm involved, and we start to bring the climber down in the worst conditions any of us have ever seen. The whole hillside is just melting away from the rain and hail, we are not even sure where the trail is at times, and on top of this the subject is screaming at the top of his lungs in pain. We are doing the best we can in getting this guy down, following Clark Jacobs because he knows the area better than any of us. Mark Lamont from Idyllwild Fire offers me his helmet, because I'm the only one without one, and he pulls his fire jacket over his head. I'll never forget that. We were all getting pummeled from the hail, and going down this hillside in knee deep mud, and the whole time trying to protect the climber.

Eventually, we get down to the flats, and the going gets pretty good all the way to the ambulance. He is loaded up and taken to the helicopter that is waiting at an LZ in Idyllwild. The hail has stopped by now and turned to rain, so the subject is flown to a hospital in Riverside.

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.