

PCT Hiker Needs Medical Aid

May 11, 2011
Pacific Crest Trail at Snow Creek
2011-010

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Written by Patrick McCurdy

At 2 p.m. the page went out for RMRU to respond to the Snow Creek trail head for a Pacific Crest Trail through-hiker who had been vomiting non-stop and was severely dehydrated. All my gear was in the garage drying off from Sunday night's mission, but it was quickly in my truck and I was headed out to Snow Creek, where the PCT comes down out of the San Jacinto Mountains before heading up into the San Bernardino Mountains.

On the drive out I was considering our options. If we could get our subject stabilized and hydrated we might be able to walk her out, but we would simultaneously probably bring up a litter team with the Stokes litter and rescue wheel, as we were initially told we had no helicopter support. Given the time of day, if we had to carry her out, we would have to hurry to have any chance of getting this done before dark.

While Matt Jordan had already been hiking in the area and had gone in on foot, I was the first to arrive by vehicle and was surprised to see Star 9 (the RSO helicopter) flying up the drainage. As I spoke to the deputy on scene I heard Star 9 on his radio say they would need someone from RMRU on board. Tough luck, eh? The air crew wants one of us on board and I'm the only one present!

They landed at the water pumping station and it took me less than five minutes to gear up. I thought we would likely do a hoist with the "screamer suit," but TFO Eric Hannum said there was a nice rock right where the subject was on the trail and it was perfect for a hover step pick-off. Eric and I discussed various contingency plans and pilot Andy Rasmussen quickly had the bird powered up and we were off.

The wind was blowing hard and the ride was quite bouncy, but Andy did a good job of putting us in a hover above the rock right next to our backpackers. When Eric signaled me to go we were about 6-8 feet up, but just before I jumped Andy brought the bird in close so it was only a 2-3 foot fall.

There were about six backpackers in total and one of them appeared to have medical

training as she gave me a concise report of the medical condition of our subject, Sarah, which had been improving. Sarah was alert, ambulatory, and in good spirits. Most important for a hover pick-off, she was calm. We quickly went over exactly what she needed to do and were back on the rock, so I radioed Star 9 we were ready.

Due to the wind I was sure Andy would allow Eric to get only Sarah in the bird before backing off and then come back again for me, but Andy did a superb job of bringing the bird in for a very steady hover and Eric was able to reach out and pulled us both into the bird one at a time. Twenty-three minutes from takeoff and we were landing at the Command Post with Sarah. Glenn Henderson came out to greet us and together we walked Sarah over to waiting CalFire and AMR medics would attend to her medical needs.



**Patrick and Sarah arrive at the Command Post
Photo by Pete Carlson**

[Watch in HD video](#)

Matt Jordan made it by foot up to the trail where the backpackers were just about the time we were ready to do the hover pick-off, but the helicopter could not pick up three of us and they got another call shortly after we landed, so Matt had to hike back out. He got the short end of the stick on this mission. The other responding RMRU members had remained at the Command Post in case the helicopter rescue was not successful.

RMRU Team members present: Lee Arnson, Paul Caraher, Pete Carlson, Glenn

Henderson, Matt Jordan, Patrick McCurdy, Gwenda Yates.

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.