



Rescue above Tin Mine Canyon Trail

**November 30, 2012
Cleveland National Forest
2012-043**

Written by Alan Lovegreen

On Saturday, November 30th, RMRU was activated to locate and return two subjects lost in the Santa Ana foothills above Corona. With a number of scenic hiking trails and a well-traveled fire road leading back into the heart of the Santa Ana Mountains, this general area is popular with hikers, mountain bikers, and off-roaders. And when RMRU is called out to this particular site, located near the entrance to Tin Mine Canyon Trail, the situation usually includes adventurous subjects:

1. Going off-trail on one of the steep, informal routes lined with nylon ropes.
2. Becoming disoriented in the tall brush and tree cover.
3. Running out of daylight before they can safely descend or ascend.

This was one of those missions.

Pulling up at 9:30PM, I was the second RMRU field member to arrive at the staging area adjacent to Tin Mine Canyon Trailhead. Roger was already present, Michael and Paul were on their way, and Glenn and Gwenda were en route with the rescue truck. After we had all assembled, the Sheriff's Deputies and US Forest Service officers briefed us on the situation. As we suspected, the subjects had climbed up an unmarked trail, become lost, and called 911 before their cell phone batteries died.

We loaded up our callout packs into the rescue truck and by 11:00 P.M. we were rolling up the Skyline fire road. The soggy, clay-rich earth immediately clogged our wheel treads, giving Glenn the opportunity to hone his mud-drifting skills. We stopped early on to drop off Michael to work with a Forest Service officer located with his truck about a mile up Skyline - from there they were able to make voice contact with the subjects and see their signal light. But the best way to get to their position was to continue driving past, around, and then above, all in order to deploy our team uphill of the subjects position.

After another twenty minutes of driving, we found a hill that was too steep to ascend in the rescue truck. Our tires spun out and the snow chains we subsequently applied were not enough to overcome the sludge; driving back down would be too dangerous. The

plan evolved accordingly: Glenn and Gwenda would stay with the immobile truck while Paul, Rob, and I would continue along the fire road on foot. Then, we would follow a fire line trail down the hill and, with luck, make contact with the subjects.

As we hiked, moonlit vespers flowed over the green contours of the hillsides. One minute we would be able to clearly see across the expanse separating us from our stationary teammates on the other hillside, and the next minute the mist would reduce visibility to only a few dozen feet. After a couple of miles we split off from South Main Divide to descend a curvy single-track trail that I knew as "Skinsuit" from my previous experience mountain biking in this area. Soon enough, we made voice contact with the subjects.

Then came the hard part, to those gazing from afar, the groundcover on these hills looks soft and manageable, but up close the terrain becomes a labyrinthian fugue of impenetrable undergrowth. We scouted out three different entry points and settled on the middle route as the most manageable.

Our mode of path making was a comedy of errors punctuated by snapping tree branches, grunts, groans, rocks tumbling down the hillside, and our vocal callouts to the subjects. Michael, who could now see our headlamps from across the canyon, would radio us with valuable course corrections throughout our descent. After roughly forty-five minutes of crunching through, crawling under, and snagging ourselves upon tangles of ten-foot high foliage and brush, we broke into a small clearing and made contact with the subjects. They were both wet and shivering, but otherwise in good condition. I fired up my stove as Paul and Roger pulled out dry jackets, gloves, and headlamps for them. After drinking some warm liquids and exchanging some wet clothes for dry ones, they were ready to follow us out of the wooded maze.

Around that time arriving RMRU member Dana had relieved Michael of his spotter duties and begun to coach us down to the canyon floor. At that point we still had at least 1,000 feet of elevation to descend before making it back to the Sheriff's vehicles. We were less talkative by this point, instead focusing on safely making our way down the eroded trail. The dawn glow welcomed us as we clomped back into the staging area. "How ya doing?" asked one Sheriff's Deputy as our muddy boot-steps reached the group.



Roger, Two Subjects, Alan, and Paul at Base
Photo by Dana Potts

After getting checked out by the EMTs that had been waiting for our return, the rescued subjects made sure to thank us several times before departing. The mission still wasn't over, however, since we had a stuck rescue truck and personnel out in the field. The Sheriff's team took our trapped vehicle seriously; they would use a helicopter extraction of RMRU personnel, and two (unsuccessful) tow-truck attempts to get our truck off of Skyline. The morning sunshine soon dried the fire road enough to drive the truck back out, and with that RMRU's forty-third mission of the year was finished.

RMRU team members present: Paul Caraher, Michael George, Glenn Henderson, Alan Lovegreen, Roger May, Dana Potts, and 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.