



Injured PCT Hiker

April 26, 2017
Fuller Ridge Trail
2017-021

Written by Gary Farris

The team received a mission call out late Wednesday afternoon for a Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) “through hiker” reporting an ankle injury. Most “through hikers” seeking to complete all 2,659 miles of this Mexico to Canada trail are normally passing through our region this time of year. In less than 3 weeks, this was our second call out to rescue an injured PCT hiker in the same Black Mountain / Fuller Ridge area.

I met up with Glenn and Tyler at the HWY 243 and Fuller Ridge Road Junction, loaded up my gear in the team truck, then we drove up together for a very slow, almost 1 hour, and bumpy 8 mile drive up this severely damaged dirt road. The good news was, unlike our Mission about 2 weeks ago, the road was clear of snow all the way to the Fuller Ridge / PCT Trail Junction which saved us about an extra 2.5 mile hike. The bad news was our subject was located at least 4 miles up the PCT, well past our last subject’s location from 3 weeks ago.

Michael George had been assisting our aviation unit personnel earlier in the day locating potential helicopter landing zones in the Idyllwild area so was first on the scene and headed up the trail before our arrival. While Glenn worked operations from the team truck, Tyler and I up started up the Fuller Ridge Trail at about 6:30 pm. It wasn’t long before we hit snow slowing our progress. With the heavy snowfall, this year in our local mountains the snow still covered about two-thirds of our 4 plus mile hike to the subject. We were blessed with an awesome sunset and the city lights of Hemet far below as we crossed a ridge to the south side of the mountain.

During our ascent, Tyler and I passed several other through hikers asking them if they saw the injured man. Most stated they had and described his condition as “reclusive” or “semi-responsive”. After about another mile we caught up with Michael and continued under headlamps searching for the subject. Within perhaps another ½ mile we reached the subject. With these various “through hiker’s” descriptions of the subject in mind we were pleasantly surprised that the subject was in excellent spirits, and in very good physical condition apart from his ankle. He was more than adequately stocked with food,

water and gear. He even had a high-quality satellite based emergency locator beacon / tracking unit with text messaging capability.



**Tyler and Michael with Subject and his Tent
Photo by Gary Farris.**

The subject explained that his injury occurred when he missed a trail switchback. Once he recognized his error, he was returning to the trail when he slipped over some loose rocks and severely sprained his ankle. He described it as “blowing up to the size of a grapefruit”. He setup his tent near the PCT and fortunately a water source was nearby. He communicated via text on his satellite unit to adult children his situation and his plan to stay put and rest his foot. As the days passed, 5 days in total (yes 5 days) the swelling had diminished but the subject came to the conclusion that he would need assistance in hiking out. At this point he contacted emergency services requesting assistance.

High winds prevented helicopter hoist evacuation and the weather forecast in the

morning predicted more of the same. We asked the subject if he wanted to wait until the morning to hike out but stated that after 5 days of sitting around and his ankle much better decided he was ready for an evening decent. After packing up this gear and distributing most of it between our three team members to lighten his load we began a slow walkout to the trailhead.

About one third of the way back we were joined by Cameron and Corey who came up once they got off work. Perfect timing as we were about to traverse to the north side of the mountain and back into the snow. Sections in the snow our subject needed a lot of assistance descending the steeper sections. We arrived back to the trailhead at about 2:30 am and then drove back to the road junction at HWY 243 to debrief the subject with the Sheriff's Deputy. This was wrapped up at about 4 am and we all headed to our respective homes.



**Cory, Tyler, Subject, Michael(Back), Gary, Glenn, and Cameron
Photo by Sheriff's Deputy.**

In summary, this extremely well prepared PCT hiker who made an error very common to anyone walking a trail, missing a switchback and continued to walk straight. After becoming injured he did the correct thing in setting up a safe camp and then waiting to see if he would be able to get out on his own. Once he knew he would need help he called

for it.

RMRU Members Involved: Cameron Dickinson, Cory Ellison, Gary Farris, Michael George, Glenn Henderson, and Tyler Shumway.

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.