



Lost person near Suicide Rock

August 4, 2018
Suicide Rock Trail
2018-013

Written by Tony Hughes

The Cranston Fire had closed most of the trails in the San Jacinto mountains. On August 4th some of the trails re-opened at Noon. A page went out at 4:40 PM that we had a lost hiker near Suicide Rock. Sheriff's Aviation in Star 9 was able to fly over and spot her. They captured her coordinates and told her to stay put. Mike, Kaitlyn, and I were all responding. Gwenda spoke to Aviation and given the fact that I was in Orange County and Mike was in Corona, they suggested we get picked up at Corona Airport. Kaitlyn, being the newest member of our team, had not yet completed Helicopter training and would have to wait this one out.

In the shortest drive I have ever made for a mission, I was at the airport in about 25 minutes. Mike was already there. We were confident we would be doing a hover step, where the helicopter would get close the ground or touches down a skid allowing us to get out. However, we wanted to prepare as plans sometimes change mid-flight, so we put on our harnesses and were prepared for a hoist. We also brought some light technical gear in case the area was steep. A family leaving the airport stopped while we were gearing up in the parking lot and asked if we were skydiving. We let them know we were going to rescue someone from the wilderness and a helicopter would be picking us up if they wanted to stay and watch. I guess a helicopter isn't as exciting as skydiving, so they left.

Star 9 arrived a few minutes later and landed in a grass strip close to our cars. Mike and I got in and we started flying toward Idyllwild. The flight crew briefed us on the way and I entered the subjects coordinates in my GPS. We flew over the area of the Cranston fire. The fire teams did an amazing job protecting the homes and other structures on the mountain. Everything was burned except narrow areas of coverage around homes. The plan was to land at Keen-Wild and quickly reconfigured so our TFO, Jerry Osterloh, could be on the outside of the helicopter during the hover step. As we approached Keen-wild we quickly found out all 3 pads were occupied – 2 with helicopters and one with a pallet of water. The water was likely there to prevent someone from landing next to one

of the helicopters with a large rotor.

Chad Marlot, our pilot, took us to an alternate spot on a ridge above Lake Hemet. Once we were reconfigured, we headed toward Suicide Rock. The subject was now in the shadows of the mountain and we were high enough to be in the sun, so we couldn't get a visual to confirm she hadn't moved. We circled around to the South-East side of Suicide Rock. Chad got us in close, hovering about 5 feet off a big rock outcropping. Jerry tossed our packs out. I was first out and despite telling the family we were not skydiving, I'm pretty sure our exit from the aircraft may have qualified as a base jump. I hit the ground and moved to a safe spot. Mike was prepping his jump and at the same time the thrust from the helicopter caused our packs to start rolling. Thankfully they rolled toward safety and not off the cliff. Mike jumped down, we signaled to Star 9 that we were all good, and they took off.

We quickly put on our packs and started heading toward the subject, who was about 1/3 of a mile away based on the coordinates we received. We did a few call outs on top of Suicide Rock just in case she moved. No response. We got to the saddle that joins Suicide Rock with the main Deer Springs Trail. We did another call out. We had a response. We stayed high and traversed across a few drainages. We used call outs like a game of Marco Polo combined with our GPS to hone in on her location. Within a few minutes we came around a big pine tree and there she was.

She didn't have any injuries but had run out of water. We gave her a bottle of water and started hiking down the valley to regain the climbers trail. She had come up the climber's trail to the top of Suicide Rock, a hike she had done many times, but had gotten off trail in some old growth forest on the way back down. She did the right thing by calling for help and staying put. We were able to get to her with about 30 minutes of day light left. The pickup from Corona Airport had saved us hours and made the rescue much simpler.

We reached the climbers trail at the bottom of the valley just before dark. We had a good chat on the way down and everyone was in good spirits. We let the subject know that the team was holding our annual pancake breakfast the next morning and that she should stop by if she was still in the area.

This is the part of the trail that climbs up a bit before dropping down to the water tank by the private road. We followed the trail and reached the subjects car, parked at the top of a private road near the water tank on the climber's trail. The rescue had gone smoothly to this point, but what would a rescue be without some sort of complication. The deputy was not at her car as we had been led to believe. Most people access the climbers trail from the other water tanks on Fern Valley road, so we assumed the officer was probably over there. Mike and I had no vehicle, our cars were in Corona. We had no cell service, and no one was responding on the radio. The subject had a car, but it was a 2-seater. Figuring the

Deputy was probably on Fern Valley Road, Mike headed down there to see if he could spot him. Mike got to the road and no sign of the deputy. The subject and I got in her car and drove around to meet up with Mike. We continued up to Humber where we found the deputy. He interviewed the subject and she was free to go.

I put my stuff in the Deputies vehicle and this is when I found out the toss of my pack from Star 9 to the ground had blown a hole in my water bladder and got everything in my pack wet. We drove down the road and Mike had connected with the second deputy in the area. The deputies drove us over to Lake Hemet Station and confirmed dispatch had contacted Star 9.

A little while later Star 9 picked us up and took us back to Corona. On the way the pilots mentioned they could see hot spots from the Cranston fire still burning through their NGVs (Night Vision Goggles), even though they weren't visible to the naked eye. They brought up the FLIR on the console, but it didn't work the same way and didn't show any flames.

Star 9 dropped us off at our cars and we were done for the night. Mike and I had a short night and quickly turned around and went to the pancake breakfast the next day.



**Tony, Subject, and Michael
Photo by Unknown.**

Our subject stopped by and gave us each some cookies and a gift card. She also donated to the team and we are very much appreciate her support.

RMRU Members Involved: Michael George, Tony Hughes, Kaitlyn Purington, and Gwenda Yates.

Sheriff's Aviation: Pilot Chad Marlot and TFO Jerry Osterloh.

Riverside County Sheriff: Deputy Burden and Deputy Bruce.

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.