



Fall 2012

**Riverside County Sheriff's
Volunteer of the Year**

RMRU Member Profile

Aviation in Action

2011-2012 Mission Reviews

Donation Spotlight



"Great things are done when men and mountains meet." William Blake



RIVERSIDE MOUNTAIN RESCUE UNIT

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RMRU WANTS YOU!

RMRU is always looking for new members. Do you fit the bill?

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Letter from the President



callout page for our thirty-fifth went out late one night in the middle of September!

This year's RMRU Board is focused on updating the team's tactics and using recent advances in search technology by buying laptops for the vehicles so that we can use the Radishworks mission management software in the field. Our extensive archive of searches, rescues, and recoveries are being transferred to a new website that will be easier to navigate and update. In the past year we have tested new systems of litter rigging, looked at CMC rescue devices for raising and lowering a subject, and changed over to our new radios. The Rescue Committee is also updating our team manual and some members on the team are trying out new high-visibility orange shirts.

Although I have been on the team for seventeen years, I became a first-time RMRU president during an especially dynamic period. Most years see about thirty-five missions, and this year the

Of course some things never change, and most missions still require the traditional spirited rescuers hiking off the trails.

To help put more boots on the ground, I am focusing on raising our efforts at recruiting new members. We aren't just looking for people to dig an ice axe into a frozen waterfall; we're also looking for people that can drive our rescue vehicles to the missions, coordinate our events and activities, and get involved in many other ways. And we want new members to have a comprehensive training program, so the Rescue Committee is modifying our existing approach so that all incoming members receive adequate training.

It has been my pleasure to serve as RMRU President. We look forward to serving the community as our fifty-first year comes to a close.

Rob May, RMRU President

RMRU honored by Sheriff

by Helene Lohr



On April 4th, 2012, the Riverside Mountain Rescue Unit, an all-volunteer search and rescue team, received the Riverside County Sheriff's Department "Volunteer of the Year" award at a ceremony in Riverside.

It was an exciting experience for the team to be recognized for years of dedicated service.

Around 500 people attended the ceremony held annually to honor especially meritorious service by both uniformed personnel and volunteers. Riverside County Sheriff Stan Sniff made the presentation to our team.

In closing remarks, Sniff acknowledged the valuable contributions that volunteers like RMRU provide the Sheriff's Department. "Without the valuable service volunteers and citizens provide our department, we could not provide the levels of protection and safety that we do. We have over 1,600 volunteers that work with us. I offer my congratulations to each of the honorees."

RMRU TEAM HISTORY:

RMRU is one of the longest serving volunteer search and rescue units in the country.

Organized in 1961, it is also nationally recognized and honored.

RMRU began very modestly and owned nothing! Equipment was slowly purchased through the hard work of founding members. The Unit was given a used panel truck and members worked many long hours preparing it for search and rescue.

The first year saw a total of seven missions and a working budget of less than \$200. The Unit now averages more than thirty-five missions a year and needs \$1,500 per month to run its growing operation.

RMRU has saved over 500 lives since it was founded in 1961. This amazing work is made possible by RMRU's Sustaining Members and the money they contribute each year. See the end of this issue on how to become a Sustaining Member and help contribute to our ongoing mission of saving lives.

"Without the valuable service volunteers and citizens provide our department, we could not provide the levels of protection and safety that we do."

SHERIFF STAN SNIFF

RMRU has saved over 500 lives since it was founded in 1961 and rescued many more from dire situations.



RMRU team members in action throughout this last year...

Member Profile: Paul Caraher

by Les Walker



A member of the unit since March 2010, Paul Caraher is one of the most active members on the team despite his far-flung commute from Laguna Beach. He is a member of the current RMRU Board of Directors, and is a consistent, positive influence on missions, training, and team development. Here is Paul on what it means for him to be part of RMRU.



Paul is known for attending as many trainings and missions as possible, despite living so far from many missions. He consistently sets a great example with his positive attitude, perseverance and dedication to the team.

My first mission (back in April 2010) ended up being two missions, and I still recall starting at 9:00 a.m. and finishing 1:00 a.m. the next day. Not bad for my first call out. I got a real taste of what to expect with RMRU.

All of the missions are unique and interesting, but a more recent one was particularly memorable. We were called out approximately 9 p.m. to search for two missing hikers, one whom was injured, in the Cleveland National Forest. It was going to be a long night of creek crossings, rock hopping and poison oak drudgery.

Years before I joined, I would have told someone they were crazy to go out in the middle of the night and hike eleven miles in an unfamiliar canyon without radio contact to look for two hikers who shouldn't even be there in the first place. Fast-forward back to the mission, and the feeling is one of excitement and confidence in yourself and your teammate. You both know that you have put in long hours of training and are ready for the mission: Hey...at least it isn't raining.

I was still fairly new on the team and this was my first time finding someone as the point man. The look of relief and gratification on the subject's faces is something that will stick with me forever. Shortly thereafter Sheriff Aviation hoisted us out and all were safe.

Sometimes people are amazed when they find out that I spend approximately two hours driving an average of 180 miles roundtrip to be on the team. When I first joined it was all about helping people. Two years later it's still about helping people but now it's about not letting my teammates down. I know it sounds corny, but I am sure the feeling is pretty much the same for those who came before and those who will be on the team years from now.

My advice for new team members is that RMRU is like anything else in life: you get out of it what you put into it. Some advice I got from a retired SAR member in another county was "Get comfortable on the rock, attend all the trainings, and be compassionate." At the time it sounded very simplistic. Today, it has proven to be some of the best advice I could have received.

"It was going to be a long night of creek crossings, rock hopping and poison oak drudgery."

RMRU RESCUER PAUL CARAHER



Paul acting as litter attendant on Big Rock - RMRU Technical Rock Training Day

"The look of relief and gratification on the subject's faces is something that will stick with me forever."

RMRU RESCUER PAUL CARAHER

RIVERSIDE COUNTY SHERIFF AVIATION



Aviation Provides Helitac Training

The Aviation Team commits many valuable man-hours and resources to ensure that active RMRU members are trained in the skills they will need to work with a helicopter crew and safely conduct a rescue hoist.



"Here comes Star 9!"

The sound of the helicopter blades approaching is a much anticipated reward for RMRU rescuers. Skilled in flying at night through extremely treacherous terrain, Riverside Sheriff's Aviation Unit has played a critical role in innumerable RMRU rescues.

THE A-Star



The Aviation Unit uses A-Stars for rescue operations. The A-Star has earned the reputation as the best performing in the world in the most extreme conditions. Renowned for its high altitude capabilities and maneuverability, on May 14, 2005, it set the record for elevation by landing on Mount Everest. The Unit has modified their helicopter to add hoisting capabilities, a vital component of many rescue operations.

The Unit is looking forward to an investment in bigger aircraft in the future. With more size and power they can carry more rescuers to help save lives.



Riverside County Sheriff Aviation has long been a strong and invaluable partner of RMRU.

In this Picture: RSO pilot Andy Rasmussen and TFO Juvien Galzote aid a RMRU rescue on the infamous Skyline Trail ("Cactus to Clouds") above Palm Springs.

Aviation In Action

by Helene Lohr

Riverside Sheriff Aviation Unit has long been a close partner and an invaluable asset to RMRU. With the introduction of helicopters in 1992, the Aviation Unit quickly became integral to many RMRU rescue operations, enabling the insertion of rescuers and equipment directly on the mountain and thus dramatically cutting the team's response time to the subject.

Aviation's largely unheralded work has enabled RMRU to do their job more safely and effectively. Their speed, skill and dedication has helped to save the lives of many subjects in dire need.

We spoke with retired Chief Pilot (now part-time) Tony Bowen and TFO Eric Hannum about Aviation's critical role in rescue operations and the dedication that goes into making Riverside County Sheriff's Aviation Unit a top-notch air rescue team.

Although a standard air patrol is not without its own hazards, flying in a mountain rescue operation entails more risk. Popular survival TV shows often gloss over the skill necessary to complete a helicopter-assisted rescue. As the cavalry swoops in at the last minute of the show, the public is left with the impression that a helicopter can effortlessly glide in to any location and snatch up the subjects without exertion or fuss.

"I think it's unknown by the general public what we do. A regular citizen hears the helicopter and thinks that we just fly around and make a lot of noise," states Hannum. The truth is that it takes many man-hours of

devoted training, flying at night in difficult and dangerous conditions, dealing with unpredictable weather and terrain, and working hand in hand with rescuers to insure the safety of the public.

Risk Vs. Reward

The decision to use a helicopter in a rescue is always a question of risk versus reward. Something as simple as single bird or kite can damage or bring down a helicopter.

These risks are compounded in a mountain rescue. Nighttime operations, flying low through tight rocky ravines, inserting rescuers on the edge of steep ridge lines, conducting hoisting operations in unpredictable wind and weather: all things that could put aircraft and crew in danger at any moment. The crew must know their helicopter inside out and be ready to respond to rapidly changing circumstances.

While the dangers of flying in unpredictable mountain conditions can make it a risky proposition, the benefits can be immense. Many grateful RMRU rescuers will tell you that an operation that would otherwise take many hours or even days can be shortened to a matter of minutes with the addition of a seasoned air crew. "It's the most dynamically risky thing you're going to do, but it's dynamically a huge time saver," says Bowen, and during Search and Rescue Operations, saved time equal saved lives.

The Training Program

The Aviation Unit's Search and Rescue flight training program is in the capable hands of

Tony Bowen. After a long and successful career as Chief Pilot, Tony retired to part-time Rescue and Training Status at the end of 2008. Tony has long been a legend amongst RMRU; known for keeping his calm and sense of humor in the most heinous of rescue conditions.

"We are always asking 'How do we mitigate our risk in the mountains?' says Bowen. One of the best ways is through extensive training. Despite the risks inherent in rescue flights, "It's more dangerous if you don't practice," relates Hannum. Bowen agrees: "The key is to be safe. We want to be as efficiently trained as possible. The human factor is key. If we don't train correctly, we risk human life."

The process of becoming a seasoned helicopter pilot or flight officer is already lengthy—five years from the start of training to accomplished aviator. In order to train a pilot for mountain based Search and Rescue operations, it takes several more years. According to Bowen, "The training is completely different for rescues from standard aviation training."

Dealing with higher altitude mountain conditions introduces a host of new factors to concentrate on. "Above 7000 feet it's a whole new ballgame for the pilot," relates Bowen. The thinner air, wind, up- or down-drafts, all add to the complexity. "The pilot has to be focused on working out how the aircraft reacts in these new conditions."

"Density Altitude"

$$DA = 145442.156 \left[1 - \left(\frac{P/P_{SL}}{T/T_{SL}} \right)^b \right]$$

"Density Altitude" is the pressure altitude adjusted for non-standard temperature. An increase in temperature will cause an increase in density altitude. In hot conditions, the density altitude may be significantly higher than the true altitude. Air density is perhaps the single most important factor affecting aircraft performance. It has a direct bearing on:

- The lift generated by the wings
- The efficiency of the rotor
- The power output of the engine

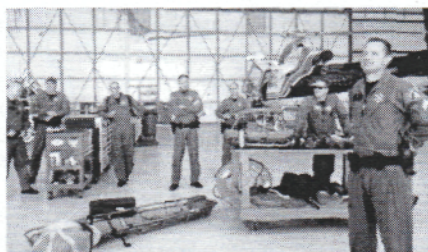
Heat and altitude also play a big part in how the aircraft handles. The 'density altitude' (see box) can be vastly different from winter to summer at the same altitude. According

to Bowen, San Jacinto Peak at 10,800 ft on an 80 degree day can have an effective density altitude of 16,000 ft. "You can have less power as the air is thinner, less dense. This limits gas, the number of rescuers you can carry and the time you are able to spend out in the air. During winter you might be able to take two rescuers on a half tank of gas, in summer you might have to refuel after flying just one rescuer in."

The progression of the training is stair-stepped. The pilot starts with completing standard daytime patrols, then graduates to nighttime patrols with night vision goggles. Once they are confident, they move to daytime mountain training, then night-vision based mountain flights, and finally challenging hoisting operations at night.

Training With RMRU

In addition to flight training, the crew must train together with RMRU to perfect the joint skills needed for rescue operations. In order to keep crew and rescuers current in their abilities, Aviation conducts a thorough biannual Helitac Training with RMRU. Included in the full day of training are vital skills such as- hoversteps, and day and nighttime hoisting with the added complication of loaded rescue backpacks. The rescuer is expected to have familiarity with all of the rescue and hoisting related gear and be able to put them on the subject efficiently in high pressure circumstances.



The Aviation unit Team conducting Helitac Training. Photo by Helene Lohr

Aviation invested in a hoist for their helicopter in 2000. According to Bowen, during the first training with the hoist RMRU rescuers were skeptical about its safety, "but after their first training, they were impressed by the very standardized procedures. We keep it all the same, every time. We want you [RMRU] to be safe, we want you to be as efficiently trained as possible." In fact, hoisting operations can actually reduce the risk; "If you can hoist a rescuer in or subject out - you have less exposure in dangerous terrain," relates Bowen.

That said, hoisting can take longer, and sometimes time is short. In that case, "We still do hover steps. We will do one foot step

off, inserting the rescuers directly. It's much faster to get in, but it's balance between time and risk factor."

Critical Crew: The TFO

While the public may have a basic understanding of the duties of a helicopter pilot, few people know much about the second vital member of an air team; the Technical Flight Officer or "TFO". The TFO fulfills a multitude of functions that allow the pilot to focus on the critical duties of flying the helicopter in dangerous terrain.

To be a successful TFO multitasking skills are critical. "You are responsible for the left side of the aircraft in tight mountain areas, helping the pilot avoid trees, debris that could disable the helicopter, rocks, keeping track of where the rescuers are at, the location of the victim, transporting equipment and rescuers in and out of aircraft and holding the spot for the aircraft. You are keeping track of a minimum of three to four critical things at once," recounts Hannum. In addition to this, the TFO is in charge of running the radios and using topo maps to find ways for rescuers to access the subject.

For every hoisting operation RMRU rescuers place their confidence directly in the TFO. Standing clipped in outside the aircraft, the TFO operates the hoist. "Hoisting is pretty physical. You're outside exposed on the skid. You're dealing with the elements, the wind, the weather, and keeping track of the risks of the terrain. It's out of most people's comfort zones," relates Hannum. Hovering a couple hundred feet in the air, being buffeted and spun by the wind in the dark as they are raised toward the skid with a full winter pack, the rescuer puts full trust in the strength and skill of the TFO to help transport them safely into the helicopter.

A Good Team

Working with Aviation has always been a true pleasure for RMRU. We have a long history of mutual trust and respect. Aviation's dedication, skill and friendship are greatly appreciated. And the feeling is mutual. "We appreciate having you guys around- there's times when we can't do it or do it alone and it saves us and the taxpayers a lot of time and money." Says Hannum. Bowen Agrees; "You guys (Volunteer SAR Teams) are professional. It's shown when we work with you on hoisting, in training, in the rescues we've done together. We make quite a good team."

We do make quite a good team. RMRU looks forward to working with our friends and partners at Aviation for many years to come.

2012 Mission Reviews

With 35 rescues before October, 2012 has been the busiest rescue year on record for RMRU. The following pages contain a selection of first hand accounts of RMRU missions written by the team members involved.

RMRU members are on call 24/7, to search for and rescue hikers, skiers, rock climbers and outdoorsmen whenever and wherever tragedy strikes.



Rescue on Skyline Trail

(Palm Springs Tramway)

January 24, 2012

Written by Donny Goetz

The call went out Tuesday night at 6:12 p.m., "We have a search at the tram." There was still good snow coverage up high on San Jacinto and overnight temps would likely be below freezing AND there was a high wind advisory for the area. I knew it would be a long, miserable night for all involved, especially the two lost hikers.

I arrived at the lower tram parking lot at approximately 8:30 pm. Pete Carlson pulled into the lot just after I and we both began stuffing our packs and suiting up. Inside the tram station I was greeted by Les Walker, Patrick McCurdy, Lee Arnson, Matt Jordan, and Alan Lovegreen. Gwenda Yates had left a few minutes earlier to move the team vehicle over to the hospital to set up the radio relay, which is necessary for missions on this side of the mountain. I learned then that our two subjects were lost on the dreaded Skyline Trail, which has a reputation of being the steepest trail in the country as well as one of the deadliest. I had never been on it, and now I was about to head out on it at night, with high winds, snow and ice conditions and below freezing temps. Nothing else can really get you pumped up like that!!

We rode up the tram with our personal and extra team gear, established a secondary base in the Upper Tram Station, and finished prepping our packs. Alan and Patrick were to man the base, which meant they would be up all night in shifts monitoring our radio

channel. Les had stayed down below to assist with a possible helicopter evacuation of the subjects. Lee, Pete, Matt and I were to be Team 1. Within a few minutes Team 1 was out the door heading toward the small notch where the Skyline tops out. This spot is affectionately named the Launch Pad due to the potential for the unprepared hiker to catch some ice and launch off a thousand feet down the steep gullies below.



Rescuers Lee, Donnie, and Pete at top of Skyline Trail. Photo by Matt Jordan

As we approached the Launch Pad we stopped to put our crampons onto our boots and swap out our trekking poles for ice axes. The wind was howling and it bit at any exposed skin. I pulled my zippers closed, snugged up my jacket, and pulled my fleece balaclava up over my face to fight the wind that was so determined to make us miserable. Just as we began our descent over the ridge, we got news that the helicopter was going in to attempt to pick the subjects up! We were advised by base to

head back up and find some shelter from the wind while the pilots sorted out their options.

After a short time and some confident reports from the RSO pilots, Andy and Chad, we decided it might be best to return to the tram. Jokingly, I told Lee that "if we head back now, the pilots will call off their attempt due to the wind and we'll just have to start over again. And if we stay out here in the cold, the pilots will swoop in and pick them up no problem!" We had a laugh, took off our crampons, and headed back to the tram. We made short work of the hike back, motivated by the warmth awaiting us. Yet, not more than fifteen minutes after we had arrived back we got the word that we all knew was coming; it was simply too windy for the pilots to safely approach the treacherous hillside this evening. So we suited back up and headed out.

Again, we deployed our crampons and ice axes to begin the descent. The wind hit us hard as we came over the ridge but we were fortunate in that there didn't seem to be much ice to contend with. There was ample snow, however, and the steep terrain still required acute attention to travel over safely. We removed our crampons after descending another 600, and continued on the trail that was steep and littered with fresh debris courtesy of the wind (three days prior the mountain had seen winds gusting to over 105 mph). Nonetheless, we made good time down to the 6,200 foot level that our subjects were reported to be at. We quickly made voice contact with the subjects, and I pulled out some extra clothes and sleeping bag for our subjects while Pete brewed up some hot cocoa and Lee called base with the news. We then discussed options for extraction. The subjects, Mario and Ana, felt they could

continue hiking with us. Lee and Pete encouraged us to head back up the hill but the thought of climbing the steep 2,200 feet back to the tram didn't sit well with me. Matt also felt that heading down would be easier. I felt that if they could hike up this trail to this elevation in 5 hours, then we could surely make it down in 3.5 hours or even less! We agreed and set out downhill.

This was a mistake.

The trail continues steeply down the hill for another seven miles from this point. It is rocky, unmaintained, and riddled with misleading shortcut trails. Additionally, we were all carrying heavy packs loaded with full winter gear and we were all short on water. Had we gone back up we would have had our fill of water by melting snow with our stoves. We also probably would have made it up in about 3.5 hours or so.

As we pushed on into the wee hours of the morning, the unrelentingly steep terrain took its toll on us. We talked less, all of us focused on simply getting out, one grueling step at a time. Finally, at 5:30 a.m. we had had all we could take as a team. We stopped and decided to get into our sleeping bags and rest for a bit. My quadriceps were convulsing as I sat on the ground and Pete was bothered by a pain in his knee. Everyone else was thoroughly exhausted (except Matt who was full of life and is living proof that alien life exists AND is better than us!). Lee called into base and requested a helicopter to extract us from this point. We still had two miles left to go and, at least for me, it might as well have been 2,000.



Mario and Ana warm up with some hot cocoa.
Photo by Pete Carlson

Les and Lew were now running base. Les gave two first-light day hikers, Ellen and Sally, who also must be from the same distant planet that Matt is from, some extra water to bring up to us. Team members Paul Caraher and Helene Lohr, who both had shown up around 5 a.m., were ready to come up and help us however they could. They grabbed some more water and set off up the

trail to meet us at our little impromptu campsite. Les was hard at work making calls to get a helicopter for us and shortly after sunrise was on the radio with the good news that we were going to get flown out. Ellen and Sally arrived with the first bit of water, followed by Paul and Helene, all whom helped us prep the landing zone.



Paul escorts Ana to helicopter. Photo by Pete Carlson

At approximately 10:30 a.m. the helicopter came ripping up over the ridge right towards us, guided by the GPS coordinates Paul had given them. Matt was the first on board followed by Ana. The chopper took off and was back for the next load within 10 minutes. Pete, Mario, and Helene went off on round two, and again, the chopper hurried back for Lee, Paul and me. The RSO pilots, Andy and Juvien, were amazing! We are very lucky to get to work with dedicated professionals like them.

With that, mission number three for 2012 was in the bag. We all hopped in our cars and headed off to Carrow's Restaurant for a nice meal which the Sheriff's department so graciously provides us with. As I write this, two days afterward, I am still feeling the toll of the ordeal. That feeling will pass. But my gratitude for all the efforts of everyone on our team, at the Sheriff's department, the Palm Springs Tram, our friends and families who support us and the other non-affiliated folks who often lend a hand to us will never fade from my sight.

RMRU team members present: Lee Arnson, Roger Barry, Paul Caraher, Pete Carlson, Donny Goetz, Glenn Henderson, Matt Jordon, Lew Kingman, Helene Lohr, Alan Lovegreen, Patrick McCurdy, Rob May, Les Walker, and Gwenda Yates.

Injured Hiker on Angels Glide Palm Springs Tramway January 24, 2012 (Pacific Crest Trail/"Angel's Glide") Written by Donny Goetz

On Saturday afternoon around 1:30 p.m. RMRU received a callout for a mission out of Idyllwild. We were to meet at the Deer Springs trailhead to begin a rescue near Wellman Cienega for a sixty-six-year-old hiker with a possible compound fracture of her ankle. Upon my arrival at the scene Steve Bryant was already acquiring GPS coordinates with Donny, and I found out that Nick Nixon had made it to the subject and, along with a State Park employee and a Good Samaritan, was keeping her comfortable.

When Carlos and Roger arrived they helped Donny and me push the litter and wheel up the trail toward the subject. The weather was already foggy and drizzling in patches, but we remained hopeful that helicopter assistance (Riverside Sheriff's Star 9) would get to the subject within the hour. Unfortunately this didn't wind up happening because of the heavy fog in Hemet and on the Idyllwild side of the mountain. Nevertheless, the pilots tried very hard to find a break in the clouds and wind to be able to make a pick-up, but it just was not possible because of the poor weather.

Not long after RMRU Team 1 set out we were notified by radio that five members of the Desert Search and Rescue team (DSAR) were following on the trail. Within a couple hours we had rendezvoused and we began taking turns pushing and pulling the litter up trail. Conditions went from bad to worse; cold weather, downed trees, and slippery conditions began taking their toll. Four members of our combined team turned back down trail to safer conditions. As for the remaining rescuers, our fingers were turning red and becoming useless, and we had to strip wet layers off to dry out. Roger made some warm drinks to rekindle our core temperatures. The cold was bitter and the wind fierce. We wound up pausing until the State park volunteer and the Good Samaritan could come downhill to assist in moving the litter. Fortunately some of the worst was over at this point; only a 1,000' section of off-camber ice, layered under a bit of fresh snow, got in the way. I think all of us wound up slipping at one point or another, even with micro-spikes on our boots.

By the time we all arrived at the subject it was about 10 p.m. We found the subject to be in good spirits and staying relatively

comfortable. There was no way that any of us were going to be able to wheel her out in the shape we were in after that ascent and in those conditions. The decision was made to wait out the night until first light when a possible helicopter extraction might occur. We also found out that Alan, Mark, and Dana were in the process of following us up the mountain with more supplies and to help wheel the litter down in the morning if needed. It wound up being an icy night, exposed under the bright moonlight when some of the clouds parted to reveal the winter wonderland. That is hard to appreciate when everyone is shivering. The State Park volunteer and the Good Samaritan wound up getting recalled to the station in Long Valley around 11 p.m.

Around sunup we found out that the Cal-Fire helicopter team was going to give it another try through the clouds that effectively closed off the Hemet side of the mountain. After a few hours of trying, they were finally able to spot one little break in the weather down by Temecula. They seized the opportunity and made it out to us. Not much time went by before they lowered a medic down onto the trail. By now Alan and Mark had made it to us and were assisting in preparing the scene; Dana was acting as radio-relay about a mile away, while Kim and Gwenda were running base at the road head.

We put the subject in a screamer suit and the helicopter safely lifted her. Within five minutes, the helicopter attempted to pick up the medic and this is where things got exciting. The wind was picking up and the helicopter was having a hard time hovering in place. They managed to get a cable down to the medic where he clipped in, but all of a sudden, the cable got longer, and longer and longer. It was paying out way too much and some of us knew something was wrong. Two or three seconds felt like minutes when at the last micro second, the medic had the wits about him to release the cable and throw it away from everyone. This is when the helicopter experienced a large gust of wind and blew downhill and to the west, jerking the cable in the process from zero to close to a hundred miles an hour in less than a second, right through the tree line. We were all stunned and very relieved that the medic wasn't still attached as this would have spelled almost certain injury or death for him.

The helicopter made one more try to extract the medic, but conditions were just too windy to safely get him out so we all wound up just walking out - including the medic. Thankfully his time the weather was at least relatively clear and some of us had a chance to rest for a few hours. Alan and Mark

volunteered to take the litter downhill, which was much appreciated, and we began our hike to the Deer Springs trailhead, arriving at noon on Sunday. There were hot breakfast burritos waiting for us, which made all the difference in the world.

The subject wound up having a broken tibia and a broken fibula, but fortunately, no compound fracture. She was an experienced hiker who took adequate precautions on icy conditions; she had micro-spikes and basic survival gear such as an emergency blanket, a charged cell phone, GPS, snacks, and water. Accidents happen to all of us and it was great to see so many people work together to get her out safely and to support one another.

RMRU team members present: Steve Bryant, Carlos Carter, Donny Goetz, Mark Houston, Kim Jordon, Matt Jordon, Alan Lovegreen, Roger May, Nick Nixon, Dana Potts, Gwenda Yates. Aviation assets: Riverside Sheriff's Star 9 and Hemet-based Cal-Fire. Assisting agencies: Desert Search and Rescue (DSAR).

Rescue below Tahquitz Peak (Idyllwild)

April 1-2, 2012

Written by Helene Lohr

It's 5:47 p.m. I had just gotten down from a seven-mile trail run when the call-out came: "We have a rescue, snow and ice. Call the rescue line." I jumped up off the couch, pressing the phone to my ear and beelining it towards my gear closet. The message on the rescue line from Gwenda says we have a seventeen-year-old boy stuck up in the Chinquapin Bowl area below Tahquitz peak; he's uninjured, but not able to safely move from his position; he managed to get a call out to 911 despite the sketchy cell signal in that area. I get a shiver down my spine. The bowl is an extremely steep drop off on the northeast face of the peak -- this time of year it'll be covered in a nasty sheet of ice.

I state my availability after the beep: "This is Helene. I'll be there in 30."

After sifting through my gear closet and adding items to my basic grab-n-go pack (like ice axe, crampons, gaiters, a heavy down jacket, and my warmest sleeping bag in case we need to bivvy overnight) I swing on my winter pack and head out the door.

Lee Arnson, Les Walker, and I establish Mission Base at the trailhead, and more rescuers are en route. Paul Caraher is bringing the team truck up from Hemet. We form our plan of attack, where Les will stay on scene and run Base until Paul gets here to take over. Lee and I will head up Devil's Slide trail, while other rescuers will be shunted up the trail behind us as needed. Soon Lee, Will and I are off at a quick clip.

The conditions don't really get challenging until we reach the Saddle Junction. As we come up to the junction the wind kicks increasingly strong gusts our way. What has been patchy snow coverage turns into a continuous sheet of ice and hardened snow. If the subject is stuck long in this sort of wind on a fully exposed slope he runs a high risk of hypothermia. Getting him out will be difficult enough without this added complication. I glance at my thermometer -- it's already down to 18 degrees...and with the wind chill....



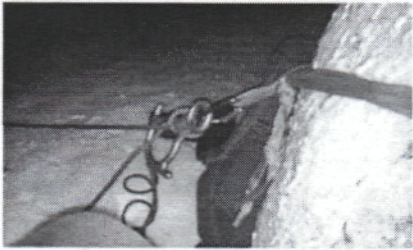
Rescuer Will Carlson on Tahquitz Ridge
Photo by Helene Lohr

We cut cross-country across the slopes to save time. The snow is really just crunchy ice from continuous freeze/melt cycles. Our crampon spikes bite into the edge of the mountain and keep us from sliding. The slope here ranges from only 20 to 35 degrees but it's already taking concentration to place each step correctly.

About two hours in we reach the first overlook into the bowl, and upon reaching the flat area around the saddle above the bowl we see fresh snowshoe tracks. Bingo! Lee gets radio confirmation from base that the snowshoe imprints match the type the subject had been wearing. No more than 20

minutes later Will gets voice contact, and we carefully make our way towards the sound.

The slope has increased to about 45 degrees, some particularly nasty sections even ranging towards 60 degrees. I take extreme care with every step, making sure to plant my axe securely before I move each foot forward. Even with the weight of the winter pack I don't have enough mass to really bite into the ice, so I have to put extra downward punch in every step to make sure it's secure.



*Belay station anchored to ice covered tree
Photo by Helene Lohr*

Lee and Will pick their ways over 100 feet downslope to the subject. He is lodged in the well of the tree that stopped his slide and saved his life. They check his status -- amazingly he's uninjured and is still awake and alert, but very cold. They outfit him with a down jacket, crampons, my extra headlamp, and one of our back-up harnesses, while I wait above securing the belay we've rigged. The thermometer reads 13 degrees, the wind chill bringing it down below 0. In a matter of minutes Lee and Will tie the subject in to the line and get him moving upslope as I take out slack.

We radio in to let Base know we have the subject and that he's in good condition. Due to the conditions the call is made to not crowd the slope with too many rescuers. We have enough people to set up and run belay and monitor the subject's wellbeing. Pete Carlson and Alan Lovegreen (Team 2) have hiked up to the saddle behind us. Carlos Carter and Les Walker (Team 3) are approaching on the South Ridge Trail. Base calls them all back. Despite their cool heads and experience, on this steep windy slope more rescuers would not necessarily be better.

The decision is made to head up towards the ridgeline for a straight, if rocky, shot to the Forest Service Fire Lookout Tower. We slowly coax the subject up the incline along a series of belays. He's understandably scared and nervous after his experience, but we can't afford to move too slowly. In these conditions succumbing to the cold is a

looming risk for the whole team if we don't keep moving and get out of the wind soon. I'm already shivering off and on and I can see that the guys are working through the cold as well. In order to set up the belays quickly they have to take their gloves off, instantly leaching the heat from their hands and putting them at greater risk the longer we spend on the slope.

We crest the edge of the Tahquitz ridge and the wind abruptly dies. Now that I'm reasonably sure of my own safety I turn my attention to checking more thoroughly on the subject's wellbeing. He's still shivering, but that's a relatively good sign. It means that although he's cold, his body still has enough energy to try and produce much needed heat. I engage him in conversation to both encourage him and make sure he is still alert.

He relates that, expecting only a day hike, he only brought a small daypack with minimal food and water. I break out my extra provisions and make sure he eats. Lee melts a Nalgene worth of snow and we watch him drink. After a few minutes he noticeably peeps up.



Rescuer Lee Arnsen approaching Forest Service lookout tower. Photo by Helene Lohr

It's about 4:00 in the morning when we all arrive at the tower. We all share a few snack bars and some water, and settle down onto the floor for a couple hours rest.



Rescuer Will Carlson grabs a couple hours sleep in the Fire Lookout. Photo by Helene Lohr

After a wake-up serenade from the radio at 6 a.m. (thanks Paul!) we pack up our gear and hit the trail. The wind had blessedly died down around dawn. The South Ridge Trail, with its southern exposure, is refreshingly clear of snow and the going is easy. My legs are stiff from overuse and it takes a while to really get into a rhythm, but the siren song of scrambled eggs and bacon is calling us all and we make short work of it.

Pete Carlson and Les Walker are waiting on us at the trailhead -- I can't say I've ever been happier to see them -- especially since they were there to drive us out. We brought the boy back to his grateful mother up at Base and then headed out to a much deserved breakfast.

Looking back over the night I know that the members of RMRU are the best. From working with Will and Lee in the worst conditions on the mountain, to the support from the backup teams (Carlos, Alan, Les and Pete) ready to spring into action, to the guidance and information from Paul at Base, I wouldn't want any other team of mountaineers at my back.

RMRU team members present: Lee Arnsen, Paul Caraher, Pete Carlson, William Carlson, Carlos Carter, Helene Lohr, Alan Lovegreen, and Les Walker.

Trabuco Peak Search

(Ortega Mountains)

May 29, 2012

Written by Michael George

After just unpacking from a Boy Scout overnight trip and actually getting a two hour nap, I got a cell phone text. "SEARCH FOR MISSING HIKER." My sons both looked at me and said "REALLY?" Every week there is a call-out, Dad." I responded, "I know, but I don't go to very many of them, now do I? Someone needs help now and I have time," so begrudgingly they let me go.

I hurriedly packed and raced out to the Corona hills where I met Glenn, Lew, and Roger May. The Riverside County Sheriff's SERT Team was already there and set up with their huge Command Post RV. RMRU had one team in the field, comprised of Patrick, Nick, and Paul. I walked up to the Command Post and Glenn said, "glad you're here, now gear up, and you're going out with Roger. We have a missing hiker, somewhere out there." Glenn is pointing out the door in the direction of two peaks, and three canyons. Awesome, four square miles of nooks and crannys, not to mention impenetrable brush. I suppose it could be bigger.

"Awesome, four square miles of nooks and crannys, not to mention impenetrable brush."

RMRU RESCUER MIKE GEORGE

After packing our equipment and plugging co-ordinates into our GPS's, Roger and I informed Glenn we were ready to go. "Uh, hang on Mike, the chopper is now arriving and maybe they will find the subject." Great, robbed again of another fun hike. These days, missions are the only time I get to come out and play. The Cal Fire helicopter searches, and searches, and searches some more. What started out at 5:30pm, with plenty of daylight, has dwindled.

We had the subject's last cell-phone co-ordinates, but the Helicopter crew still couldn't find him, and now they have 10 minutes of fuel left. So about 75 minutes before dusk, Roger and I have a go from Glenn to start hiking. Glenn will take us

quickly up this 'maintained' road and drop us off, with the instructions to go to his last known position and work down the canyon. After ten minutes on this bone-jarring road, we realized that in no way could this be considered a 'maintained' road. After 20 minutes we were close to our drop off point. As we were surveying how to down climb the steep shrubs from the truck, we started calling out. I yelled out Kevin's name, and heard my echo as it bounced off the many canyon walls and disappeared into oblivion. I thought I heard something, but just attributed to me hearing things. The sound was coming from way, way down in the canyon, behind this grove of trees.

It wasn't until a few more minutes of spirited exchange that his voice became much clearer. He had climbed up the riverbank to where we could see him. I could see his White ball cap, just faintly, amongst this jungle of six-foot tall shrubs. It was not going to be easy getting to him. After confirming his name, we radioed base and let them know we were in voice contact with the subject. Roger and I summed up our trepidation about reaching the subject unscathed: "This will be interesting."

Roger and I let Base know we were heading down the hill to reach the subject. At this moment Team 1, returning from their assignment, arrived at our location and offered to help. Paul joined Roger and I, and we started down, literally bush whacking through these five to seven-foot tall shrubs. Sometimes we were able to climb over it, sometimes able to crash through it, and several times we had to crawl under it. Doing this left a trail of shred clothes and packs, and a blood trail that we could follow on our way back. We keep in contact with Kevin, making sure he wasn't going to move, so we could zero in on him. He told us not to worry: he wasn't going anywhere.



Mike, Subject, Roger, & Paul Photo by Patrick McCurdy

When we finally reached him, my first thought was, WOW, I thought we looked bad. He was scratched up, and torn up from down climbing over 1,000 feet to the riverbed. He was in great spirits. This was the FIRST PERSON I have actually found, on a mission, in the seventeen years I have been on the team. I had always been on a supporting field team before. He was good condition, having had access to water most of the day, and was raring to go. We informed base of his condition, and our intention of hiking him back up the hill. It was a race to get him up to the roadside before it was completely dark. Yes, each of us was carrying at least 2 headlamps, apiece, but the intensity and viciousness of the shrubs, precluded us from using them. I lost count the number of times the shrubs tore my glasses off as we were climbing back up through it. We made it too the road and our truck, no worse for wear, and headed back to base, (Tired, Torn up, and Exhilarated).

RMRU team members present: Paul Caraher, Mike George, Glenn Henderson, Lew Kingman, Roger May, Patrick McCurdy, Nick Nixon, and Dana Potts.

Two Missing Marines

(San Jacinto Mountains)

June 10, 2012

Written by Chad Marler

RMRU is most likely to be called out on a Sunday night after loved ones fail to return home after a weekend of hiking or climbing. Sunday, June 10, 2012 was no exception to the rule and at 9:21 p.m. RMRU members received a text message to search for two missing Marines near the Marion Mountain Trail.

Idyllwild team members Chad Marler, Les Walker, and Lee Arnson arrive to the Marion Mountain trail head at approximately 9:45 p.m. Deputy Horkel and hiking friends of the two lost Marines inform us that their group hiked to the San Jacinto Peak via the Marion Mountain Trail earlier that day. As the group made its way back from the peak, our lost subjects Jason and Brian, decided to leave the group and discover their own way down. Jason's cell phone is able to send text messages to say Brian has injured his ankle and they are in a drainage canyon but can't navigate their way out. They have also managed to make a fire to signal their location.

Lee and I head out on the Marion Mountain Trail while Les takes his vehicle over to the Black Canyon Road to look back to our

location to try to spot the signal fire. After Lee and I hike approximately one mile at a brisk pace we hear a man's voice calling from below our location. We soon realize this is the call of our subjects and decide to leave the trail and hike down the fall line of the mountain to the sounds of the call.

Meanwhile, Les spots a signal fire from Black Canyon Road, which proves to be in the direction we are heading. Les and arriving member Alan Lovegreen plan to drive up Dark Canyon Road to a spot below our location. Member Pete Carlson is now at base with the Sheriff running operations.

Within twenty minutes of establishing voice contact, Lee and I navigate down the steep and loose terrain with our headlamps in the dark still night to find our subject Jason. Jason has a 36" diameter fire that the three of us take great care in putting out. We then head 400 yards downhill to Brian, who has stayed below Jason's location with his own fire. It turns out that their decision to split up, although not usually advised, is beneficial because Jason's location was away from the creek and allowed him to hear our shouts from above. FYI, if you are ever lost, do not hang out near streams where running water sounds dominate any chance of hearing rescue members voices.



Rescuers (Lee and Chad) with Subjects
Photo by Alan Lovegreen

Les and Alan hike up to our location from Dark Canyon Road as the rest of us put out Brian's signal fire. I offer to tape Brian's ankle but he refuses treatment and is able to hike without assistance. Les and Alan lead our group the way out to Dark Canyon Road and the Marines are reunited with their chastising friends at approximately 12:45 a.m. The subjects and their friends are very appreciative of our efforts and offer a sincere handshake of gratitude to each of the RMRU members on scene.

Mission Notes: The subjects thought they would find their own way down the mountain

from San Jacinto Peak and moved off the trail. We found the subjects' location fairly quickly because of little to no wind noise. (If the wind had been blowing we would not have established voice contact and hiked past their canyon location.) This was a well-balanced team effort by RMRU members on scene. GPS coordinates of the two fire locations were given to the Forrest Service as a precaution so they could check them in the morning.

RMRU team members present: Lee Arson, Pete Carlson, Alan Lovegreen, Chad Marler, and Les Walker.

Hiker in Long Valley Drainage (Palm Springs Tramway)

June 14, 2012 | Written by Matt Jordon

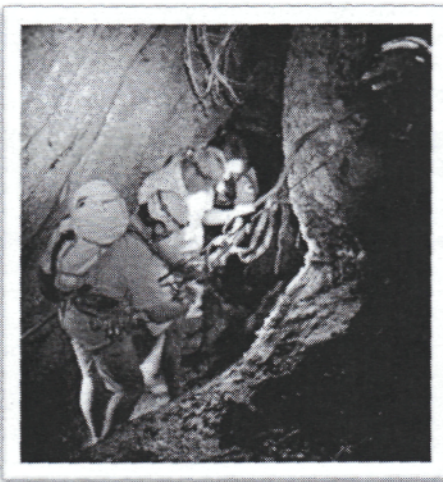
Around 5:30pm Thursday evening, notification was sent out for a technical rescue of two people in Long Valley. Initially it was believed that a father and son had been scrambling and got stuck, but as Les, Carlos, and I responded to the ranger station, (with Kim running Base) it became apparent that it was merely the sixty-eight-year-old that remained stuck. The last known location turned out to be the infamous Long Valley drainage, which is a notorious black hole for disoriented hikers exiting the area. After we finished interviewing the young nephew who had made his way out with the help of State Park rangers, Sheriff Todd Garvin, and other park volunteer staff, we quickly decided to make our way out to conduct an initial search.

Within 30 minutes, Les (coming in from a steeper western approach) quickly made voice contact with the subject. He called on the radio to Alan, who was acting as relay near notch five, to let everyone know he had found the subject. As I continued scrambling down the main part of drainage I noticed smoke that some of the park staff had previously alerted us to and not long after that came upon the subject who seemed to be in relatively good spirits.

While team members Helene Lohr and Lee Arson continued down the drainage toward the bonfire, while Carlos hiked up to take a turn as relay, Les and I conducted a basic interview of the subject and determined that his physical condition was about to play a major factor in easily getting him out of this predicament. Even though there were no serious injuries, multiple conditions proved to be a stumbling block to him being able to hike out. We noticed a strong display of

instability, disorientation, and confusion that became additional challenges to the team in conjunction to the background lifestyle issues already present. When Helene got back to us she took over as lead medical in order to monitor vitals for the duration of the rescue. There were even statements on the part of the subject describing the desire to simply continue all the way down the canyon into Palm Springs.

As the sun faded and the shadows grew long, Lee extinguished the remainder of the fire that I had already begun to put out and the four of us came up with the plan to hike this man out. It wasn't going to be easy as the terrain is rocky, loose and steep, but we were going to give it a shot because no helicopter was going to get into this particular part of the mountain. I volunteered to be a work horse (tying a rope between myself and the subject) and pulling him up the mountain with necessary breaks to monitor his breathing and heart-rate. Meanwhile Les squirreled up the hillside and scouted for the best route while Lee balanced the man's caboose from getting too wobbly and from taking a bone-breaking tumble downhill.



Subject resting on rope with rescuers Lee and Donny. Photo by Helene Lohr

We then decided to take the shorter, steeper way that required the use of additional ropes, anchors, ascenders, and a variety of other climbing gear. When Donny and Alan showed up to help us and bring with water and other snacks, Donny took over as lead technical person. He quickly and professionally re-rigged the scenario with the assistance of Les, Lee, Alan and me.

We all wound up pulling and pushing for the sake of our subject during the course of the next several hours, but all went well without incidence or injury. We wound up getting him on the State Parks Tractor for a ride up the

ramp back to the mountain station. Thanks to Sue -- the helpful lead state park ranger -- for the Tractor ride.

"It was a reminder that deceptively simple rescues can turn out to be real hum-dingers because of unexpected complications."

RMRU RESCUER MATT JORDAN

Looking back, I really appreciated our team's cooperation under stress and how we each wound up supporting each other. There was no arguing, no bad attitudes -- but there was a good amount of humor even though I'm sure some were tired, hungry and very thirsty from donating the majority of the water supply to the subject. Even the subject cracked some jokes despite his unfortunate predicament.

It was a reminder that deceptively simple rescues can turn out to be real hum-dingers because of unexpected complications, but we dealt with the situation to the best of our ability and had a successful mission overall. The best part was pigging out at Denny's after midnight in Palm Springs, all of us making light of the night's events and recounting the best highlights of the experience. One thing I would caution readers in the future is this: take care of your health to the best of your ability, because even though the spirit is willing, the flesh is often weak. Good on the subject for being willing to hike all the way down the mountain, but it would have definitely killed him in the process despite his best intentions.

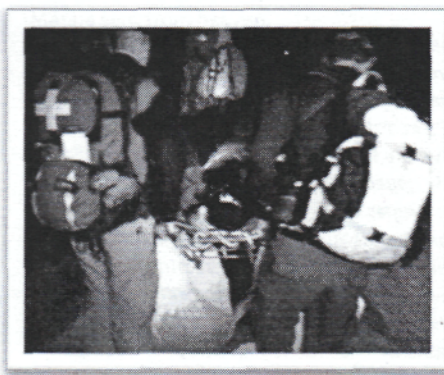
RMRU team members present: Lee Arnson, Carlos Carter, Donny Goetz, Kim Jordon, Matt Jordon, Helene Lohr, Alan Lovegreen, and Les Walker.

Hiker with sprained ankle (San Jacinto Peak)

June 23, 2012 | Written by Patrick McCurdy

On Saturday, June 23rd, an eleven-year-old girl, part of a girl scout troop which had been backpacking in Round Valley a few miles above the top station of the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway, sprained her ankle on the trail between Wellman's Divide and San Jacinto Peak at an elevation of about 10,000 feet. State Park Rangers were quickly at the scene, provided medical care, and got the girl packaged into a Stokes litter. Even with a rescue wheel attached to the bottom, it takes four to six people to move a Stokes litter, and RMRU was called out as State Parks had only three rangers at the scene.

Michael George and I were first to arrive. We checked in with Riverside Sheriff's Corporal Todd Garvin and San Jacinto State Park Ranger Sue Neary at the ranger station at the top of the tram. After verifying we would be able to maintain radio contact with both of them, we headed out as Team 1, trying to quickly make our way off-trail to the location where rangers were waiting with the girl. While we were en route, Riverside Sheriff's Star 9 helicopter had surveyed the situation from the air and landed in Deer Meadow, that being the closest location to the girl where we could safely load her without requiring a riskier hoist operation.



*Patrick and State Park Rangers transporting litter
Photo by Helene Lohr*

As we were only 1/2 mile from the girl at that point and frustrated at our perceived slowness (we had actually run part of the way), Michael stayed with the helicopter while I dropped my pack and ran up slope through thick chinquapin to get to the girl and her ranger rescuers, arriving just about dusk. These rangers had done an excellent job splinting the ankle, wrapping the girl in a

couple of layers of insulation against the night chill, and had her all ready to move.

With four trained rescue personnel on scene we quickly started the slow process of wheeling the litter down the rocky, bumpy, trail while minimizing the bumps and jolts to the girl. We were quickly met by RMRU Team 2 (Helene Lohr and Roger Barry) coming up the trail from Wellman's Divide. This sped things up as we had two fresh rescuers to rotate onto litter duty.

This type of patient evacuation seems easy as all you have to do is have one rescuer at each corner of the litter and roll it down the trail. It is actually quite tiring as the trail is often narrow so that rescuers have to walk on the rocks or brush to the side of the trail. The litter also has to be lifted up over rocks, roots, and branches in the trail, then carefully lowered down the other side. Such a rescue requires six to eight people minimum so that fresh people can rotate onto litter duty while others take a turn at spotting the trail ahead of the litter team, calling out obstacles. Through all of this, girl was a champ. She was cheerful, cooperated in every way, and never once complained about anything.

Meanwhile Paul Caraher had arrived at the ranger station and taken over the job of mission manager, while Team 3 (Nick Nixon and Craig Willis) had headed up the trail and fairly quickly encountered the litter team a little above Wellman's Divide. With two more fresh rescuers to rotate onto litter duty, forward progress increased. Before too long Nick scouted ahead to find us an off-trail route to the helicopter. About two hours after starting the evacuation, we had the girl at Star 9 and turned her over to Pilot Chad Marlatt and Flight Officer Eric Hannum, both very familiar faces to all the rescuers involved.

With the girl quickly airborne and on her way to a local hospital, the rest of us had to get moving quickly. It was 10:30 p.m., and the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway had graciously agreed to keep a skeleton crew on late to allow us to leave the mountain, but they had to close up at 11:30. If we missed the last tram down, we would be spending the night on the mountain. As quickly as possible we stashed the litter and wheel at the unmanned Long Valley Ranger Cabin and jogged the three miles back to the upper tram station. The tram doors closed on us and we were headed down to our vehicles at 11:31 p.m.

A huge thanks to the management of the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway for once again bending over backward to support a rescue operation.

One last thanks goes to the Girl Scout leader of the trip. She stayed every moment with the girl and would not leave her side at the helicopter until she knew there was another scout leader waiting at the hospital. Every scout participating in a trip like this requires a medical history and parental permission form and the leader made very sure these documents went with the girl on the helicopter. The leader's professionalism in a stressful situation made her a pleasure to work with.

RMRU members present: Roger Barry, Paul Caraher, Michael George, Helene Lohr, Patrick McCurdy, Nick Nixon, and Craig Willis. Aviation assets: Riverside Sheriff's Star 9/Chad Marlatt (pilot) and Eric Hannum (TFO). California State Parks: Ranger Sue Neary, Park Aids Rick Hanson & Sam Aguilar & Park Volunteer Willem Pennings. These State Park personnel did a superb job and it was a pleasure to work with such professionals.

Missing Tramway hikers

(San Jacinto Mountains)

July 3, 2012 | Written by Helene Lohr and Pete Carlson

HELENE: It's the evening before 4th of July. We're down in Hemet to grab some goodies for the kids to throw in the Idyllwild parade and pick up the team truck. Our energized litter races are always a big hit with the hometown crowd. Lee grabs a big bag of brightly colored candies out of a deep bin and tosses it into the cart.

As we start walking down the aisle, both of our phones chime with a new text. It's 7:43 pm. "We have a search. 2 lost hikers. Respond to the tram." Dang... We don't have our gear with us. I look at Lee and discussion ensues. Should we drop everything and drive to Idyllwild and then grab our gear and beeline to the tram? There'll be no way to make it in time before the tram closes. Double dang. They'll need the team truck for the rescue. No chance for us to pick it up for the parade, and most of the people responding are those who would be in the parade anyway. They'll be way too beat for anything tomorrow.

Lee reluctantly tosses the giant bag of candy back in the bin. There will be more parades, but we always look forward to the Fourth in Idyllwild.

On our way out of the parking lot Lee calls the rescue line for more information. Gwenda relates that the subjects departed from the tram side of the mountain, but they

remembered traversing Willow Creek trail. If they are correct, that crossing would put them on the Idyllwild side of the mountain. After hearing the description Lee thinks they may have missed the sharp left turn to take them back to the tram and instead headed down Hidden Divide out of the State Park and into the USFS Wilderness. If that's so, we may be able to make it in on the search after all!

We call in and say we're currently unavailable, but we let call captain Gwenda Yates know we could be able to hit the search from the Idyllwild side out of Humber Park. We quickly grab a bite to eat and finish off our last errands in town. Winding our way up the mountain we decide to snag our ready packs and meet up at Humber Park. We hear from Gwenda that several other teams have already responded to the tram and are clearing the upper trails of the State Park.

PETE: When I got the call we the information was that a couple had called 911 after getting a ride to the Palm Springs Tramway in a taxi and going for a hike at 2pm in the afternoon. They had mentioned something about Willow Creek Trail, so we decided to have Lee and Helene, from Idyllwild, stay there in case we needed someone to come in from that side of the mountain. The rest of use came to the Tramway and five of us made it to the Tramway by 9:50 and were ready to go up. The last car is normally at 9:45pm, but a big thanks to the Tramway People who ran an extra car at 10pm to get us up so we could start the search.

The Riverside County Sheriff's Deputy had given us more information and as we rode up Tramway we made our plans. We now had the GPS coordinates from the cell phone company of where the couple had made their call. It now appeared that it was closer to Idyllwild on the Angles Glide Trail about one half mile up from Saddle Junction out of Humber Park. We contacted Lee and Helene, Team 3, who would now hike up from Humber Park in Idyllwild. Since we can never be 100% sure about cell phone GPS locations from the phone company we decided to have the Tramway teams go out hiking to cover all the trails just in case the subjects moved or the GPS location was incorrect.

HELENE: On the way up to Humber a text with GPS coordinates comes through from Les Walker seconds before we go out of cell service. They place the couple far from their last known location. Now they appear to be somewhere along the PCT, a section we refer to as Angels Glide, heading up from Saddle Junction towards Wellman Divide and the State Park. Of course, we have to be careful with this information. Coordinates are

sometimes wrong. We've even experienced them one time placing a subject on the other side of the mountain miles away from their actual location.

"We act efficiently, but don't just rush off down the trail. When you're in a rush you often forget something critical that could bite you later."

RMRU RESCUER HELENE LOHR

It's been dark for a couple hours by the time we hit Humber. We act efficiently, but don't just rush off down the trail. When you're in a rush you often forget something critical that could bite you later. Lee and I cross check that we have the correct gear for the mission before heading out. Sleeping bags for a potential overnight, extra food for us and the subjects, extra water, extra clothing for us and the subjects, 3 headlamps each, first aid basics, plus all the other small and large essentials. It's 10:40 pm and time to go. I swing on my pack and turn towards the trailhead. Our headlamps create swinging shadows as we steam up the familiar trail. As locals, we hike this trail for fun and training enough to have every switchback engraved in our memory. The full moon above silhouettes Tahquitz rock towering behind us and illuminates the face of Suicide Rock in front. It's relatively warm in the mid 50's (if you're hiking that is), with a slight breeze- a good night for a hike.

We make good time up the mountain with the solid crunch-crunch of Lee's footsteps in front of me is my only timekeeper. A short way after Middle Spring we swing off the trail to an outcropping of rocks to call up into the dark ravines. Deep breath and "1....2....3... HELLO!" I listen to the sound of our voices bouncing through the canyons. The mountains call back their echoes for a long time, but there's no response from the subjects. We call another two times. With no response on the third call, it's time to shoulder our packs again and head up the trail. We come up on the 3/4 point at the "Soil is fragile, please stay on trail" sign and decide to call out again. We catch our breath and try again and again. On the third call I think I hear something, but I can't be certain. Either way we'll have to continue up to the Junction to get access to the high country.

Minutes pass as we silently push our way up the trail. Out of nowhere I get an odd feeling and stop mid-step. Lee immediately holds up behind me. "I think I heard something" I say. We listen for a few seconds and I do hear something- a yell from far away, carried by the wind over the ridgeline. "If that's the subjects, they are on Angel's Glide Trail and we have got them." "We call out: "1...2...3... HELLO!" I hear a faint but clear response in between the rustles of pine needles in the wind. I grin broadly at Lee and he also smiles and nods in response. With renewed energy we start up the trail. We hit Saddle Junction around 11:30 and call out again. The response is encouragingly a little louder and a little clearer this time.

"Despite being smart and nice people, they weren't prepared with essentials to keep them on track and safe for an unplanned hike."

RMRU RESCUER HELENE LOHR

PETE: Team 1 was Les and Donny; they went up to Hidden Lake Divide, down to Willow Creek Crossing. Team 2 was Mark and me; we would go to Long Valley, up to Wellman Divide, and see what was going on before continuing. Rob ran base and was Ops Leader from the top of the Tramway. While the teams got hiking the late arrivals (Carlos, Lew, and Ralph) stayed at the bottom Tramway station with the Rescue Van. Around Midnight Team 1 and Team 2 had reached our destinations and could make radio contact with Team 3, composed of Helene and Lee. They were now up on the Angles Glide Trail and had just made voice contact with the subjects.

HELENE: "That's them, it's got to be," I say again. "No one is that persistent in yelling back this late at night unless they have a real good reason." We yell again, identifying ourselves as "Search and Rescue!" and giving instructions: "Stay put!" After dealing with a couple of belligerent yells from a camper we have woken, Lee contacts Base and lets them know that we have voice contact with the subjects.

Rob May at the Upper Tramway Base relays our find to the other teams and gives us an update on their progress and location. Carlos, Lew, and Ralph barely missed the

tram and are waiting at the Lower Tramway with the rescue truck. Pete and Mark have cleared the upper park trails from Long Valley to Wellman Divide. Donny and Les have been blazing along the trail and have already swept Hidden Divide to Willow Creek Crossing. They now are headed towards Saddle Junction. It's agreed that we will proceed to the subjects, with Donny and Les following as back up. Pete and Mark will stay put at the Divide until we're certain we have a handle on the situation.

As we hike up the Glide we stop and call out every few minutes, partly to confirm their position, but mostly to encourage them as they hear our voices getting closer. Finally, near the top of the Glide we hear a very happy shout: "We see your lights!" We ask, "Chris and Victoria?" (The names given to us by the Sheriff.) They answer, "Yes! We're SO glad to see you!" We introduce ourselves and all shake hands. I confirm they have no injuries. Their main issue is being cold. We may be toasty from our hike, but they are wearing only shorts and t-shirts at night in the mountains. That can be dangerous in any season.

Lee and I quickly break open our packs and pass out extra clothing like candy. My lightweight down jacket is a perfect fit for Victoria and my rain pants, wool buff, gloves and beanie work just as well. Chris is quickly outfitted in Lee's jacket, gloves and pants. Lee passes out headlamps to them both and we hand out food and water. They tear into the snack bars and nuts as if they were Manna sent from heaven.

Chris confirms what Lee predicted; they missed the turn off in the State Park for the Long Valley Loop and shunted them down the divide and into the Forest Service wilderness above Idyllwild. Despite being smart and nice people, they weren't prepared with essentials to keep them on track and safe for an unplanned extra-long hike. Despite this they are in good spirits and are unfailingly polite and caring with each other. We learn they're engaged to be married. Lee jokes that this is a good relationship stress test for them that they've obviously passed with flying colors.

PETE: While we wait for Team 3's updates on the subjects, we let Base know that rescuers are needed on the other side of the mountain, and the members at the bottom of the Tramway started driving over to Idyllwild. Within 10 minutes Team 3 was with the subjects and confirmed they were OK, just cold, hungry, and a little tired. Team 1 decided to hike the one and a half miles to Saddle Junction and meet up with Team 3 and the subjects in case they needed any extra help.

Team 2 hiked back to the Tramway and we were a sleep in the upper station by 2:30am. We met the first Tramway car that came up at 6:30am and our old friend Tramway Operator Craig came walking out and said he would take us down in 10 minutes. We had a nice visit with him as the rode back down and even stopped at tower one to pick up maintenance workers who had been greasing the cables.



Lee, Helene, Subjects (Victoria and Chris), Les, and Donny at Humber Park Photo by Riverside Sheriff's Deputy

HELENE: Chris and Victoria are understandably eager to get going, so we start hiking back. We run into Donny and Les back near the Saddle Junction. After a warm greeting for our teammates, we make some quick introductions and head back down the trail to Humber Park. It's a long, dusty hike that always seems longer on the way down. Still aglow from the buzz of a successful rescue, the team reaches a consensus, the parade is still on! We agree we'll be good to go for the litter races up and down North Circle Dr. This is one dedicated group!

Finally, around 2:40 am, I see the lights of the sheriff's car shining in the distance through the dust of the trail and silhouettes of trees. Beat, but happy, it's time to head home. Donny and Les pile in with us for a drop off at their homes. They'll pick up their cars at the tramway tomorrow afternoon. My eyes droop a bit now that the adrenaline has worn off. If I hurry to bed, I might be able to snag a couple of hours sleep before the parade.

RMRU team members present: Lee Arnsen, Pete Carlson, Carlos Carter, Donny Goetz, Rob May, Ralph Hoetger, Mark Houston, Lew Kingman, Helene Lohr, and Les Walker.

Injury on Marion Mountain Trail

July 13, 2012

Written by Frank Snider

It always seems inevitable that rescue calls come in the middle of the night. I had just crashed after a twelve-hour shift in the ER, at about 11:30 pm, and was ready for a good night's sleep. Surprise, a text from RMRU at 1:15am: "Lost hikers on Marion Mountain Trail. Call the rescue line." It took me about five minutes to get my eyes open and realize what was happening. Friday the 13th, perfect!

While looking at the map and chugging three to four cups of coffee, my wife threw my gear bags in the car. Off to the car I go, ready to leave, when a second text comes in "It's raining in Idyllwild." Back to the closet to grab some extra gear and I hit the road about 2 a.m. and soon realize that this may not be a fun night as a lightning show accompanies the light rain that I run into as I start up towards Idyllwild.

I pulled into the parking lot at the Marion Mountain trailhead about 3:15 am and am quickly met by Craig Wills who is ready to go. I quickly pack my bag and get a briefing from Glenn on our subjects: John and his son Justin. They were supposed to return from the peak before sunset and obviously had not made it. The subjects were on the trail and had relayed to 911 that they were OK but not able to continue down trail because of the dark. Cool, this should be easy! Glenn decides to send Craig and myself into the field. Oh boy, the newbies are on their own! Off we head into the dark along a trail we both didn't realize was so steep. Huffing and puffing we stop about a quarter mile up for water and a quick call out. With no response we continue up the trail.

Another call out and we both feel we have heard a faint response from Dark Canyon just below us. Which trail are they on? Craig and I pull out the map as both he and I have never been on this trail. Are they on the Seven Pines trail on the other side of the canyon? We both question at this point whether they are still on a trail or not. Further up the trail we go with the goal of getting to the seven pines trail to search there. During our next water break, we call out again. Now we are getting no response. "That's strange," I commented to Craig.

About that time Team 2 (Les Walker and Ralph Hoetger) has responded to base and contacts us by radio. Les informs us that it is not uncommon for hikers to get lost down in

Dark Canyon and for us to come back down the trail to our last point of voice contact. Both Craig and I now head back down the trail hesitant because we both realize we are giving up some of the ground we had huffed and puffed to get up.

"It always seems inevitable that rescue calls come in the middle of the night."

RMRU RESCUER FRANK SNIDER

Sweating like pigs because of the humid air we make voice contact again and stop. Calling into base I relay my fear that they are down in the canyon off trail and my discomfort in going off trail as newbies. Glenn calls back from base saying "you'll be oldies after this one." Craig and I call in our coordinates and head down the steep hill into Dark Canyon. For about the next forty-five minutes we continue voice call outs adjusting our route up the canyon and then down the canyon, slipping and sliding the whole way until we finally make visual on the son Justin about 5:30 am.

Justin is in great shape and relays to us that he has no injuries. Justin leads us to his father John, who is beat up pretty good after multiple falls and a "roller coaster" ride down the hill. At this point I call in our coordinates to Base. Team 2 indicates that they are just above us on the trail with the litter and wheel and will stay put until further assessment of the subject. John had fashioned his belt into an arm sling for his obviously dislocated right shoulder and had stopped the bleeding from his large puncture wounds on his left leg with some type of cautery powder that they were carrying.

John was having trouble bearing weight and walking because of the large puncture wound and contusions. He also was in tremendous pain from his dislocated shoulder. As a PA in the ER I have seen and reduced hundreds of dislocated shoulders and with John's consent I attempted to reduce his dislocation in the field in the hopes of relieving some of his pain and allowing us to get him off the mountain.

After two attempts with different techniques I realize he most likely has fractured and

dislocated his shoulder and no further attempts are made. A cup of hot coffee is made for John, which he much appreciates. We determine that John will have to be flown out or carried out by litter. A helicopter is about an hour away, so Team 2 leaves the litter and wheel on the trail and comes down to our location.

John is bandaged up and moved very slowly about 200 yards to a small flat rock outcropping. After some discussion between Base and Aviation it is felt by the pilot (Tony) that a screamer suit cannot be used because of the shoulder injury, and that a litter hoist should be done. After what seemed like hours Star g circles the area and decides that he can land on the small rock outcrop and the litter can be loaded. Our subject John remains in good spirits throughout telling multiple jokes and stories. We get the litter from the helicopter and put the subject into it and then load the litter into the helicopter. He is flown to Keenwild Helipad and then the aircraft returns to pick us up and fly us out to Keenwild also. At Base Glenn and Rob hike up the trail and get the wheel and litter to bring it back to the Marion Mountain Trailhead.

RMRU team members present: Glenn Henderson, Ralph Hoetger, Rob May, Frank Snider, Les Walker, and Craig Willis.

RMRU wants YOU!

RMRU is always looking for new Rescue members!

We are an all-volunteer, non-profit team of rescue professionals who are always looking for qualified people to join our team of dedicated members.

As a member of the **Mountain Rescue Association**, we are not your average search and rescue team. In addition to what is expected of most SAR teams, we specialize in high-angle rope rescue and extended backcountry and mountain rescue missions. If you think you have what it takes to be part of an elite mountain rescue team, read on.

Who We Are

RMRU members are volunteers trained and ready to respond to wilderness emergencies. At any hour of the day, law enforcement agencies, national park or military officials may call upon us to aid an unfortunate victim. We are on constant alert to search for and effect the rescue of hikers, skiers, rock climbers and outdoors enthusiasts whenever and wherever tragedy strikes. We perform about ninety-five percent of our missions in Riverside County. We have, however, traveled south into Mexico, north into the Sierras, and into Nevada on search and rescue missions.

We are comprised of over forty volunteers who come from all walks of life. We regularly leave our jobs (or, in the middle of the night, our warm beds) to respond to a call for help.

Each member must provide all of his own equipment and we receive no remuneration for time given to search and rescue.

The members make up a small but spirited group of mountaineers who spend a minimum of one weekend each month training to sharpen our skills. Besides acting as highly competent rescue workers, we also

work closely with school, clubs, church groups, and Scout troops throughout the area to teach mountain safety. Our members have been honored nationally for their contributions to wilderness survival education.

With RMRU, teamwork is key to everything we do. We are not simply a group of individuals, but an integrated team. We train as a team so we can perform as a team. It is only through dedicated teamwork that we can be successful in saving lives, something RMRU has been doing for almost five decades.

Who We Are Looking For

The more experience you have in backpacking, hiking, climbing, or mountaineering, the better. The ideal applicant would be an accomplished mountaineer with years of experience in mountaineering, climbing, and backcountry survival. *Rarely* does anyone like this apply. At a minimum, you should be a very good physical shape.

While we don't have specific requirements for existing skills in new applicants, we are a mountain rescue team, and this implies that the team has certain skills and abilities. You will be expected to *actively train* for certification within the team in the areas of search and tracking, technical rock rescue, and technical snow/ice rescue. Consider if you are up to the physical and mental challenges of this type of training.

The most important things we look for in applicants are a genuine enthusiasm for the outdoors, a desire to help others, a willingness to learn physically challenging skills, and the resources (both money and time) to actively participate on the team.

Members pay for all of their own gear, though we do get discounts from some manufacturers and many members will loan or sell old gear. You need not buy all the necessary equipment at once, though by the time you have been on the team a couple of years you will likely have spent thousands of dollars on gear.



Do not underestimate the amount of time you will have to dedicate to be an effective member of the team. We meet one night per month, train one weekend per month (usually including an overnight trip), and average several missions per month. *Be realistic* about your ability to spend that much time away from work, family, friends, and other personal endeavors. Will your personal and professional life allow you to be away for 50+ hours per month? Will your boss support you leaving work for rescue missions?

In addition to the amount of hours you will be expected to spend with the team is the timing of those hours. **Unlike training, missions are not scheduled conveniently on weekends. They often come at the worst possible time:** When you are asleep, in the middle of family meals, the middle of the workday, during children's birthday parties, and quite often on holidays which you would otherwise spend with family or friends.

Again, *be realistic* about your willingness and ability to break away from whatever you might be doing to respond to missions. Talk this over carefully with family and significant others. Make sure they eagerly support you before committing yourself to being a member of RMRU.

All that being said, we are also looking for fun people to be around. We are a fun-loving group of outdoor enthusiasts and want new members that will fit well within our SAR family.

The Application Process

The application process is roughly as follows:

1. ***You come to your first meeting*** and are given an RMRU application.
2. Fill out the RMRU application and come to the ***next*** monthly meeting. -You will be interviewed by three team members who will make a recommendation to the RMRU Board of Directors. *Come prepared to convince these interviewers of your willingness and ability to spend the amount of time required to be an active member of the team. Expect to be questioned thoroughly on this and be prepared to explain that you have thought about it carefully and discussed it with your family and employer.* If the interviewers recommend you for membership, the board will later vote to either approve or disapprove your application. If disapproved, you will be contacted by phone, otherwise show up at the next (likely your third) meeting.
3. At that meeting you will be given a set of forms for your background check with Riverside Sheriff's Office. After completing these forms you contact our Sheriff's liaison and schedule a time to meet with her for a short interview and to turn in your paperwork. The

Sheriff's background check takes 3-4 weeks.

4. If accepted by the Membership committee and the Sheriff's Department, you will be considered a provisional member in training for the first year. Current completion requirements for participation, training and gear will be explained to you.

Taking The First Step

Again, thank you for your interest in joining RMRU. More information on the team, write-ups on many of our missions, past newsletters, and the history of the team can be found on our web site at www.rmru.org.

If, after carefully considering all the above, you are ready to join a great team of mountain rescuers, you need to come to a team meeting and meet the team.

The team meets at 7PM the first Wednesday of every month at the Sheriff's Office Valle Vista substation at 43950 Acacia Street in Hemet. This is one block south of Florida at the corner of Fairview and Acacia.

Email info@rmru.org ahead of time to make sure there will be someone out front to meet you.

How YOU can help: become a Sustaining Member

Even if you can't join us in the field, your contribution can help make a vital difference to our mission to save lives.

RMRU is a completely volunteer search and rescue team that covers Riverside County and assists other teams with search and rescue efforts in other counties and states. 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. Your donations allow us to keep our training and team gear updated and help us to save lives.

DONATION SPOTLIGHT:



NEW TEAM RADIOS!

Your generous donations last year helped RMRU buy thousands of dollars worth of much needed new team radios and critical team rescue gear.

Thank You!

DONATIONS

To make a donation via
PAYPAL send contribution to:
info@rmru

OR
Mail check to:

Riverside Mountain Rescue
Unit
43950 Acacia Avenue
Hemet, CA 92544

SUSTAINING MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Your Donation is deductible from *both* your state and Federal taxes

RMRU tax ID number for Not-for-Profit status 95-2497048

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Membership Types:

- ☐ Benefactor Club \$1000+
- ☐ Summit Club \$500
- ☐ Patron Club \$200
- ☐ Century Club \$100
- ☐ Supporting Club \$25

Please send your donation to:

Riverside Mountain Rescue Unit
43950 Acacia Street
Hemet, California 92544

or at: www.rmru.org

OUR SUSTAINING MEMBERS

Benefactor Club \$1000+ Dr. and Mrs. John Wilson • Stater Brothers Charities • Sketchers Foundation • Katherine Nixon • Gina M. Allen • Brian Carrico • Lucas Oil Products • Rosemary Kraft • Brad Scott

Summit Club \$500+ Daryl V. Dichek & Kenneth L. Smith • Gerhard & Marie Befeld • Brad and Sally Scott • Mr. and Mrs. Stephen Shibley • Norine E May Biehl • Marvin Matsumoto

Patron Club \$200+ Fern District- snow pack survey • Ming Cao • Norine E. May • Pete Carlson • Hemet Lions Club • Valerie Cottingham • Theodore Young • Valley Water

Century Club \$100+ Idyllwild Water District- snow pack survey • Pine Cove Water – snow pack survey • Paul Caraher • April Chandler-Langford • Mountain High Escrow • Ben Gonzalez • Ellen Coleman • Stephen Bryant • Christopher and Gigi Kramer • Dr. Carol Lovatt • Erin Swinfard • Peter & Patricia Gillies • James Collins • James Taylor • K.M. & M. O. Brass • Ray and Carol George • Rotary Anns

Supporting Club \$25+ Bill and Juanita Starmer • Benjamin Crowell • Gretchen Angelo • Marydoris Powers • Craig and Janice Coopersmith • Erica Sutch • John and Eleanor Giancola • Dora Dillman • Huy Nguyen



Thanks You