

RMRU Member Profile
2012-13 Mission Reviews
RMRU Rock Training



Summer 2013



“Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.” Helen Keller



RIVERSIDE MOUNTAIN RESCUE UNIT

Rescue Committee Letter

This past year has been an eventful one for RMRU. In addition to completing a host of rescues, RMRU is proud to be one of the founding members of the new Riverside County SAR council. We are working with the Riverside County Sheriff and other SAR teams to develop guidelines for Mountain Rescue operations that will help define and standardize the future of SAR in our County.

This year, RMRU has worked hard to deepen our relationship with our closest partners and to expand our range of resources and allies. This year we have completed joint rescues with multiple agencies including: Cal-Fire, CHP, U.S. Forest Service, and (of course!) the Riverside Sheriff's Aviation unit.

In a symphony of interagency cooperation, this year (for the first time) we used Cal-Fire equipment in a rescue conducted by RMRU team members in a Riverside Sheriff Aviation Helicopter. Cal-Fire has been a critical aid to our team in the past. We would like to thank them for their help and we look forward to working and training more with them in the near future.

We would also like to thank our team members for their unfaltering dedication in showing up over and over to the “call in the middle of the night”. As RMRU team members always say in parting: “See you tonight!”

RMRU RESCUE COMMITTEE

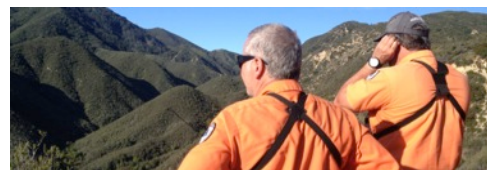
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MEMBER PROFILE: NICK NIXON

Retiring RMRU rescuer Nick Nixon discusses his time on the team and commitment to Search and Rescue.

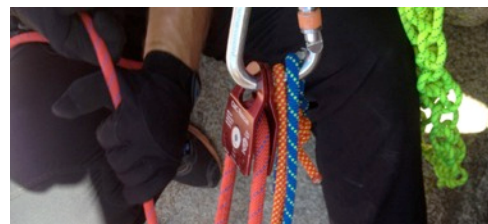
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2012-2013 MISSION REVIEWS

It's been a busy season for RMRU. We've included some of the most exciting highlights.

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RMRU ROCK TRAINING

From helicopter hoist training, to tracing, to snow & ice, and rock, RMRU team members are always busy keeping their rescue skills sharp. Here's an inside look at one of our training days from the viewpoint of a team member.

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Member Profile: Nick Nixon

by Nick Nixon, edited by Helene Lohr



A previous volunteer Ranger for both the Forest Service and State Park System, Nick Nixon is famous amongst RMRU members for his near encyclopedic knowledge of the San Jacinto High Country terrain. This year, after many years of dedicated service to the team, Nick retired from RMRU spend more time in the Wilderness he loves so well. He will be missed, but we look forward to seeing him on the trail!

After the typical Boy Scout experiences as a teenager in the Santa Barbara area, I went off to college and the Air Force and got away from hiking and camping. At about 50 years of age I rediscovered my love of the mountains.

Volunteer USFS & State Park Ranger

I started hiking in the San Jacintos and before long I became a Forest Service volunteer Ranger, hiking all over the area above Devil's Slide Trail. After about four years of doing this, I decided to learn more about the higher country and volunteered with the State Park as a wilderness patroller, first on the Idyllwild side and then off of the Tram.

The senior Ranger at the State Park (Eric Hanson) made technical rescue training a priority. It took me from someone who didn't know a carabiner from a litter, to someone who could be a contributing team member on a technical rescue.

Once again, after about five years at the State Park, I decided to take one more step up and applied for RMRU. This progression just seemed natural for me.

On Lessons Learned

The biggest asset that I brought to RMRU was a solid knowledge of the San Jacinto Mountains. Over the years as a patroller, I gained a pretty good level of knowledge of the Trail system and our local terrain.



Nick familiarizing team members with local trails and terrain.

I have encouraged all RMRU members to get out on the trail as much as in possible. To go to areas they haven't been to before. You don't have to be the fastest on the trail to be important to the team. Often knowledge is more important than speed.

"You don't have to be the fastest on the trail to be important to the team. Often knowledge is more important than speed."

RMRU RESCUER NICK NIXON



Nick leads the way for Team 2 on a mission in the State Park High Country

In my opinion teamwork is one of the most important aspects of being a successful Search and Rescue member. It is a lesson I learned with the State Park and as a member of RMRU I have always tried to always keep it in mind.

"Besides knowing that a subject is safe, there is no better feeling at an RMRU mission than hoisting out a subject."

RMRU RESCUER NICK NIXON

The First Mission

The most memorable aspect of my first mission as a member of RMRU is how it began for me. I had just had a plate of ribs placed in front of me at a restaurant in Temecula where my family was having dinner to meet the guy that my daughter would end up marrying. The text message came, and off I went (I had the ribs the next day).

A father and 3 year old daughter had become lost when wandering off the South Ridge trail. Lee, Patrick, Will, Jim and Grace and I responded that evening. I went out on team two with Will and Jim.

Very quickly we established voice contact with the subjects. Star 9 was up helping us. Unfortunately, there was a very strong wind that made it too dangerous for the helicopter to complete the rescue. Star 9 ended up lowering Will onto the slope with an overnight bag to the subjects where Will spent the night with them. The next morning Will walked (crawled) out with them. All ended well.

On Helicopter Hoisting

Like many RMRU team members, I really enjoyed hoisting from the Sheriff's helicopter (Star 9). Besides knowing that a subject is safe, there

is no better feeling at an RMRU mission than hoisting out a subject.

One of my favorite hoist missions was looking for two senior ranking Marine officers who became lost. They ended up being spotted by Star 9 between Laws Camp and Carumba. Star 9 radioed that they were going to go to Skunk Cabbage Meadow to set up for a hoist and asked for a RMRU member to meet them there. I was teamed up with Paul Caraher, who had not yet had hoist training. It was one of his first missions. Paul and I took off for the meadow and were the first RMRU members there. After making sure that another team was coming to meet Paul, I flew off with the crew of Star 9. It was an exciting and successful hoist and evacuation.

"It took me from someone who didn't know a carabiner from a litter, to someone who could be a contributing team member on a technical rescue."

RMRU RESCUER NICK NIXON

I was fortunate to also do a hoist for a paraglider who crashed on North Mountain north of The City of San Jacinto. It was dark, the slope was very steep and the surface was loose and sliding. Despite the difficult conditions, as always Star 9 did a great job.

Favorite Memories

Often at the end of a mission, many of the team would sit down together to have something to eat. Memories of sitting together with these friends, often exhausted and in need of sleep, knowing we had done something meaningful together as a team, is something I will always remember.

Recently I reached a point that with diminished hearing and an occasional sciatic nerve problem, I knew that I couldn't contribute as much as I would want to RMRU.

So I'm back as a State Park Wilderness Patroller. I look forward to contributing as a hasty responder on search and rescue events up in the State Park before RMRU gets onto the mission. I hope to see new and old RMRU members up on the trail. I'll be checking up on the team now and then. RMRU will always be part of me.

~Nick Nixon



Nick as part of the litter haul team on Big Rock near Lake Perris

2012-13 Mission Reviews

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.



Climber Injured in Fall

September 23, 2012

Tahquitz Rock

Written by Donny Goetz

We got the call around 1 pm that a climber had taken a fall on Angel's Fright, a popular, moderate route up Tahquitz Rock and had sustained injuries to both of his ankles. Les sent me a text immediately to see where I was. I had just walked in to Gary's Deli to grab some lunch. I ordered a hearty sandwich knowing I would need a bit more fuel, said goodbye to my friends, hopped in my truck and made a bee line for Humber Park. I arrived there the same time as Les to find about 5 CDF and USFS trucks on scene.

Idyllwild Fire had a paramedic on his way up the Lunch Rock trail already. I took a look through Les' binoculars and found the injured party being lowered down the route with the assistance of several other climbers. CDF had a helicopter en route but Les and I decided it would be prudent to head up the trail anyway as winds

can often make the seemingly assured success of helicopter missions unpredictable. Chad Marler joined Les and I at Humber and decided to hold back and run base until the truck arrived. Les and I took off with a member of Cal Fire's team and booked it up to the base.

Just as we reached Lunch Rock, CDF's helicopter 301 was preparing to lower their medic to the base. We caught our breath and watched as the medic dropped out of the bird and began his descent. About 50 feet down, he started to swing and we could see the pilot attempt a correction but it was clear that the gusty nature of the wind that day was going to make this quite difficult. The pilot and medic decided that this was too dangerous of a maneuver and they pulled out. So now Les and I knew it was our show.

We hustled the last 100 yards up hill to the base of the rock where Idyllwild Fire's medic was on scene with our subject, Dave.

Dave was in good spirits sitting at the base of the rock after being lowered by his 2 sons and 2 other climbers, Dave C. and Tiffany L. (also good friends of mine), who had been kind enough to assist. Tiffany also happens to be a nurse and was able to administer basic first aid up high on the rock before they began descending with the subject. It appeared that Dave may have fractured one of his ankles. The medic on scene had splinted Dave's ankle and had him ready for transport.



*Subject, Donny, and Les on ledge
Photo by Chad Marler*

The area around the base is very steep and covered in loose rock so we knew carrying Dave out would be quite a challenge. We decided it was prudent to construct anchors on the rock to

allow us to belay the rescue litter down the hill, at least until we were in a position where it was safe enough to handle it all by hand.

We began building our anchors while Chad was leading a USFS crew up the trail with extra rope and about 15 folks who would be there to help us with the carry out. Patrick McCurdy had also arrived at Humber Park along with Gwenda who had brought up the truck. Patrick headed up and met us at the base just after Chad and the USFS crew had arrived. We now had so many people it was almost a challenge just to find something for everyone to do. If that wasn't enough, we were then informed that another crew from the Bautista correctional facility was on their way up the trail too!



Rescuers prepare litter for lower
Photo by Chad Marler

Les and I had finished the anchors and began loading Dave into the rescue litter. We had our lightweight titanium litter with wheel which worked like a champ. I put a harness on Dave and used 2 prussiks affixed to the top end of the litter to keep his body from sliding down and putting pressure on his injured ankles. We tied our ropes onto the litter, checked our anchors one last time and gave the order for some of our massive crew to pick Dave up and begin moving him down the hill. The loose rock proved to be quite a challenge for some of the Bautista crew and we had a few of them slip on a number of occasions.



Patrick and Donny lower the litter
Photo by Chad Marler

At one point, they almost lost control of the litter but our belay line arrested the slip. With so many people there to help, we were able to rotate through and keep everyone tending to the litter quite fresh. As we ran near the end of our rope, we decided the litter was still in a dicey area so Les and Patrick headed down the hill with a rope and set another anchor off a tree and transferred the litter onto their new rope. I stayed up top, broke down the anchors, packed up the remaining

gear, said goodbye to Dave C. and Tiffany and headed down to catch up with the rest of the crew.

As I caught up with Les belaying the litter from his tree anchor, we decided that we should continue this leap frog belay line approach a bit further down the hill, at least to just below Lunch Rock. So I ran ahead to set our next anchor. We did this 2 more times until we were below the short 3rd class area I refer to as "the bowling alley", an area tired climbers often lose their footing and slide a few feet down the hill. At this point we felt it was safe to let the crews carry Dave without the belay line. We continued down the trail at a steady pace and made it back to Humber Park around 6:30, just before sunset.

Dave's 2 sons were there waiting to drive him to the hospital for some x-rays. They were happy to see their comrade down the hill and in good shape. Dave was in great spirits and thanked us all for our help. We then sorted out all of our gear, debriefed with all of the folks involved, and headed out. Our team headed straight to La Casita for some grub!

RMRU team members present: Donny Goetz, Michael George, Chad Marler, Patrick McCurdy, Les Walker, and Gwenda Yates.

Assisting agencies: Engine 23-Pine Cove, Engine 53-Garner Valley, Bautista Crew 5, Engine 56-Keenwild, and Tahquitz Crew from Keenwild.

Rescue Horsethief Creek

October 12, 2012

Palms to Pines Highway 74

by Helene Lohr

It was supposed to be a simple carryout. But if there's one thing you learn in Search and Rescue, you should never believe everything you hear about a call-out.

The "heads-up" text comes in at 12:30 early Friday morning; a warning that a call-out might be on its way. I groan, roll back over and stuff my head under the pillow. The call-out may or may not happen, but I'll catch as much sleep as I can in the meantime. At 1:30 am the sharp "ding" of a text announces that we do indeed have another mission.

Everyone but Craig Wills and I are off the hill tonight. With the team so short-handed, there's no going back to sleep on this one. I roll out of bed and shuffle over to pull on my hiking pants and orange shirt. I load the 4Runner up with gear: my standard call out pack plus additional food, water, medical, warmth and overnighting gear. Even though it's reported as a simple carryout, you never really know what's coming when you hit the trailhead. I swing by Craig's house for a quick pickup and we're on the road with our traditional Rammstein blasting out the stereo.

The request is to assist Cal-Fire with a critical carryout. Intermittent cell service contact with the subject tells the highly

dramatic story of a man with "two prosthetic legs, injured and covered in blood." Cal-Fire is already on trail to his location. We are to provide backup manpower on the litter.

"Intermittent cell service contact with the subject tells the highly dramatic story of a man with 'two prosthetic legs, injured and covered in blood'."

RMRU RESCUER HELENE LOHR

The flashing lights lead us directly to the fire engine at Cactus Spring trailhead. We arrive on scene, ready to spring into action.

Not so fast. We're informed that the fire crew is already on their way back out, but *without* the subject. They hiked in several miles with a heavy litter in their full call-out gear, but were not able to locate the subject at his self-reported location at the crossing with Horsethief Creek.

Apparently the elusive subject has moved (against orders by the deputy) and isn't responding to attempted voice or cell contact. With failing headlamps and sagging energy after a tortuous hike the Cal-Fire crew is not set up for a major search.

What was once assumed a simple assisted on-trail carryout has now become a full-blown search covering miles of wild canyons.

Oh man. I look over at Craig. This is *big* country out here. There's a lot of ground for just two people to cover. I guess we'd better get to it! As Craig and I conduct a last cross-check of our gear and sort out our plan of attack, a paramedic brings the welcome news that DSAR has been contacted to join in on the search with an additional 6 people. We decide to hold off heading into the field until we have the additional manpower.

In the meantime, the RSO deputy has established shaky cell contact with our subject once again. Parked at the Tewanet overlook, the deputy pointed his headlights out into the abyss of canyons south of the 74 and was able to roughly ballpark the subject's location on the trail. The deputy repeats cardinal rule of Search and Rescue to the subject: "*Stay put.* We're coming for you."

"The deputy repeats cardinal rule of Search and Rescue to the subject: "*Stay put.* We're coming for you."

RMRU RESCUER HELENE LOHR

The united RMRU/DSAR Search team decides we will hike in together with CDF along the trail. Once we can see the police vehicle headlights, we should be directly in the subject's vicinity. He's been told to stay put, so we

should be good to go. Great! Sounds simple enough.

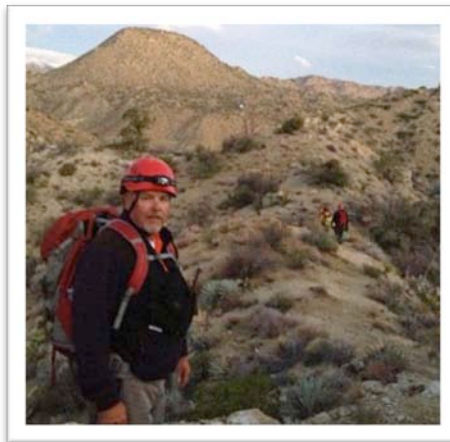
As we head out, the final search party consists of RMRU and DSAR, also jointed by 2 CDF and 1 seriously dedicated paramedic carrying around 60 lbs. of gear.

We take turns trundling the litter and the wheel over the dusty and rocky terrain towards the subject's last reported location. Hiking with a litter can be strenuous, even without a subject strapped in. After several minutes on litter duty the cold night seems suddenly all too warm and we stop to strip down to our bright orange team shirts. After a couple miles we reach the crossing with Horsethief Creek.

Staring up in the moonlight we survey the challenge ahead of us. The ridge looms in front of us, a final extended vertical push of steep and rocky switchbacks up to where our subject supposedly awaits us. We stop to deliberate. Should we lug the litter up this extreme grade without confirmation of the subject's whereabouts? He's already moved on us once. "That could just burn us out... and if he's not there, well..." notes Sharon from DSAR.

We call out towards the ridgeline "1...2...3... Hello!" ...and wait expectantly for an answer. None comes. Calling again produces the same result. The decision is made to leave the litter at the base of the climb until we've confirmed his location. He *should* be nearby. How far could a man with 2 prosthetic legs get in this

sort of terrain? We wind our way up the ridgeline, towards the slowly brightening horizon to the east. We call out once in a while, just in case our subject has gone to sleep or wandered off trail into a nearby ravine.



Craig Wills on Ridgeline just before dawn
Photo by Helene Lohr

Reaching the top of the climb, I look to the North. In the far in the distance the red and blue flashers of the deputy's vehicle are visible, its headlights pointed directly towards us.

Radio contact with the deputy yields disturbing information: He recently saw the subject's light 400 yards below our current location. Since there's another ridgeline between us and the road, the only way the subject's light could be seen below us is if he's ...(sigh) massively off trail!

Oh dagnabit: He's been moving again! I share a look of frustrated understanding with Craig. We both know we're in for a *much* longer night. Looking again to the north, I can understand why the subject would be tempted to make a go of it. The lights from

Highway 74 are so tantalizing. They appear to be so close, almost within reach, especially when the rough terrain and impassable cliffs are concealed under the cover of night. But still- you have to marvel that a man with two prosthetic legs could make it that far off trail in this kind of rough terrain! Something just doesn't seem quite right here.

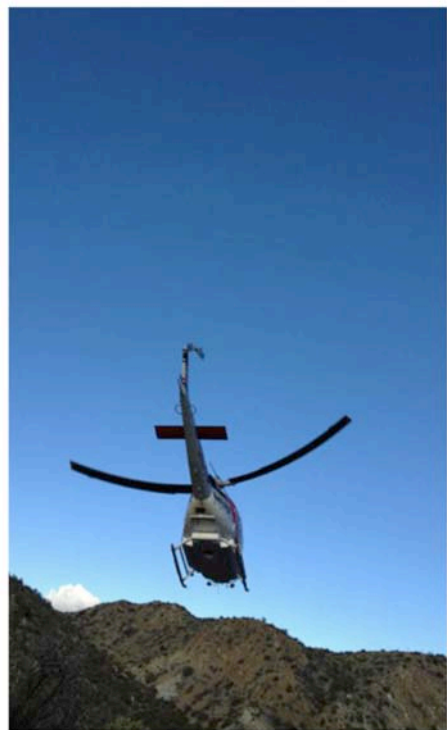
After a brief conference, the decision is made to head back down to the crossing with Horsethief creek. We'll attempt to access the neighboring canyon by following the scar of the boulder-strewn creek downstream. We once again make the wise decision to leave the litter at the crossing.



Cal-Fire, RMRU and DSAR take a much needed break
Photo by Helene Lohr

In brightening light of dawn, we pick our way through the rocks, debris and puddles that clutter the narrow base of the ravine. Just over a mile in we receive encouraging radio contact: "He's on the move! The deputy can see him!" The subject has made his way to a ravine far below the

Tewanet lookout. Of course the canyon is far too steep for him to climb out of, but now we at least have a visual. The deputy establishes faint voice contact and *finally* gets the subject to stop moving.



Cal-Fire Helicopter flies overhead on it's way to the subject
Photo by Helene Lohr

A few minutes later, even better news crackles its way over the radio. A Cal-Fire Helicopter is available and will be here in a few minutes. The relieved team shares a quick celebration as we take a much-needed break from clambering through the ankle-twisting rocky debris. Snacks are passed round and drinks shared.

As the thup-thup-thup of the helicopter approaches our mood starts to lift. Help from the air is *always* appreciated. The Cal-Fire crewman on radio detail reports, "Ground crew is about 1500 feet from him as the crow flies, but

there are some very steep drop-offs between us and him." Getting to the subject on foot would be very difficult and extricating him on foot even worse. Luckily, the weather is calm and clear and the canyon wide enough for the Cal-Fire air-crew to hoist. What a relief. We stand by as the Cal-Fire Helicopter extracts our elusive subject and returns him to trailhead parking lot.

Now all we have to worry about is ourselves. After hiking around all night carrying a full call-out pack and litter after a moving target, we're not looking forward to the long hike out.



Cal-Fire Helicopter extracts grateful Search and Rescue teams
Photo by Helene Lohr

Luckily, our generous friends at Cal-Fire have a greatly appreciated solution: they are willing to spend the extra time and effort to extract the search team as well! The helicopter crew drops a man in along the trail behind us to clear a landing zone. The copter extracts us in groups

of three, cutting an exhausting hike of several hours down to a matter of minutes.

Thank you Cal-Fire!

Back at staging area we get the scoop on our subject (who has refused medical care and already left). The "double amputee" "covered in blood", was actually a guy with a couple of *bad knees* who had gotten a bit scratched up by the brush during his cross-country travels. Craig and I look at each other and can't help but laugh. What a great punch line. Sigh... like I said before... you should never believe everything you hear about a call-out.

RMRU team members present: Helene Lohr and Craig Wills.

Assisting agencies: Desert Search and Rescue (DSAR), Cal-Fire, and California Division of Forestry (CDF).

Search South Ridge Trail

October 13, 2012
by Helene Lohr

I look down at the text, sigh and kick off the high heels I had just slipped on. Dinner down in the desert can wait; we have a call out. 15 minutes later my heels and black dress have been exchanged for an orange shirt and hiking boots. I'm sitting in the passenger seat of Lee's truck as we bounce up the rutted dirt road leading to South Ridge Trailhead.

It's a search. Out from the East coast for a relaxing time camping in the mountains, the subject (Herb) had wandered off to the south to meditate, became disoriented and used his cell to call his friend back at camp. As Herb told his friend he was becoming increasingly lost, his friend hung up and made the call to contact 911.

We see the red and blue flashers ahead and pull up parallel to the Sheriff's car. Mark Young is the Riverside Sheriff's Officer deputy on scene. He's in contact with the subject by cell and already has a good handle on the situation.

"Point your chest to the setting sun and describe what you can see in front of you."

DEPUTY MARK YOUNG

Young uses his previous military experience to help pinpoint Herb's location. "Point your chest to the setting sun and describe what you can see in front of you." Having the subject turn in a circle and relate what he sees at each 90 degree angle gives Young a good idea of Herb's location. This helps him guide the Sheriff's helicopter Star 9 rapidly to the spot. Star 9 hovers above Herb for several minutes, allowing us to get a bead on the direction and distance we'll need to go.

We get the news that several members of the team from off

the hill are on their way. Gwenda is bringing our RMRU Rescue Truck, Dana is heading up the mountain and Paul is already on the way out from Orange County. Good to know- if anything goes wrong we may need additional people. Since we still have daylight, Lee and I make the call to head out as a hasty team and see if we can locate the subject before nightfall complicates the matter. After a quick cross-check of our gear, we swing on our packs and head out cross country through the heavy brush. Thick stands of Manzanita, Chinquapin, and various other thorny and spiky obstacles have us swerving off course more than once. We note landmarks along the way to keep us on track for our way back.

Once the helicopter peels away and the forest becomes quiet again, we yell ahead to establish voice contact. "1...2...3... Hello!" Herb responds loudly and boisterously "Hey, Hey, Hey! I'm over here! I'm here!" His voice is coming from a few hundred yards directly ahead.

"Stay put! We'll come to you!" We start out again, picking our way through the brush and calling out once in a while to make sure we stay on course. Within a matter of minutes we crest a hill and come across a thankful Herb. He's dressed in tattered blue sweat shorts, his arms and legs covered with scratches from forcing his way through the sharp foliage. After shaking our hands, he gratefully guzzles the Nalgene bottle of water Lee passes his way. "Man, I'm soooo glad to see you! I was waving at the

helicopter, but then he flew away. If the deputy wouldn't have kept telling me to stay put, I would have definitely moved!"

After giving Herb a few minutes to drink and eat, we make the call to head back quickly. We might still be able to beat the sunset. Herb certainly isn't dressed for nighttime in the mountains and the temperature will be dropping quickly.

Lee is familiar with the area, and after a few minutes of hiking he locates an unofficial mountain bike trail. Having a nice, smooth, brush-free trail makes the going much easier for our exhausted subject. We reach the truck and load Herb into the back seat. We pull up next to Deputy Young as the last fading rays of the sun disappeared in the west. Mission accomplished.



Lee, Subject, Helene, and Deputy Young at Base Photo by Gwenda Yates

RMRU team members present: Lee Arnsen, Paul Caraher, Helene Lohr, Dana Potts, and Gwenda Yates.

Climbers Rope Stuck

October 21, 2012

Tahquitz Rock

by Les Walker

It was a typical Sunday evening. I was hanging out with my wife, and my fellow team member and neighbor, Donny. We had just finished dinner and were winding down from the weekend while Donny prepared to head to Orange County for his workweek. Donny and I had been discussing that we had not been on a rescue in a while and that it seemed we were due. He even had his team jacket on as if predicting the night's events to follow.

Well, at 8:30 p.m. the call came in from Glenn Henderson, "Hello Les, you ready for a mission? We have two climbers trapped on Tahquitz Rock and they need help." Before Glenn could tell me anymore, I told him to hang on as I need to catch Donny before he left. I ran to the door and yelled across the street to Donny, "RESCUE on the rock, GEAR UP." I then called Glenn back and got the full briefing. Two climbers had got their rope stuck on their climb and were unable to ascend or descend from their position on a climbing route called the Finger Trip.

With that information Donny and I rushed to pack our gear and prepare our climbing equipment for the rescue. We loaded up and got to Humber Park where we were briefed by the Sheriff Deputy on scene. During that time local Idyllwild team

members Lee Arnson, Helene Lohr and Ralph Hoetger arrived and we laid out our plan of action together. Donny and I would head out up the access trail to the base of Tahquitz to establish voice contact with the stranded climbers while Lee and Helene would be close behind bringing up the ropes and other technical gear that we might need. Ralph would run Base (base operations).



Les, Donny and Lee at the base of Tahquitz Rock. Photo by Helene Lohr

Donny reached the base of the rock first. He was able to establish voice communication with the climbers and to get an idea of where they were and if anyone was in need of medical attention. They were not hurt, just stranded. I joined Donny and we began to separate out our gear as Lee and Helene arrived.

Donny and I discussed the fastest way to the subjects and we

agreed that the fastest way to reach them would be to climb up a parallel route to the summit and rappel down to them. We would then bring them back to the top of the rock and eventually walk around and down the Friction descent route. The up-route that best matched this plan was The Trough, a 5.4 rated climb that Donny and I have done many times. But this time would be a little different in the dark and completely loaded down with gear.

Lee and Helene helped us get our gear sorted and prepared the extra rope to be worn like a backpack up the route. Donny had a full rack of cams and nuts, plus runners and slings; I had the exact duplicate set up. We just did not know what we might need, but all this gear did not make for a nimble climb! With headlights and helmets on, Lee and Helene joined us on the way to the start of The Trough to wish us good luck.

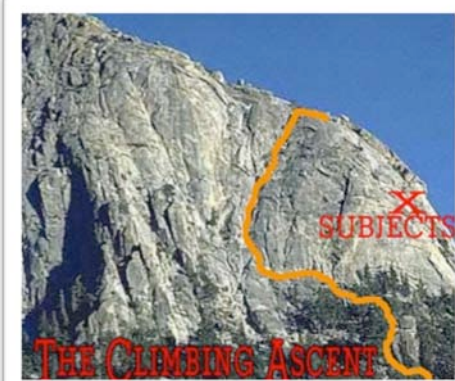


Les and Donny start their climb. Photo by Helene Lohr

Donny took the lead up and I tied into the rope as we began to Simul climb. Simul climbing is a climbing method or style where

both climbers climb at the same time while tied into the rope. Protection is placed by a pseudo-leader and the second removes the pieces of gear. The length of rope used during simul-climbing varies but is often between 15 and 30m. In most cases the climbing team maintains multiple pieces of protection between them to prevent a system failure if one of the pieces was to fail.

Donny made quick time of the first half of the climb. There were spots that would normally be very easy to climb but with all of our gear it turned what would normally be a 5.4 climb into something a little harder. I reached Donny at Pine Tree Ledge where he had set up a fast belay in case I needed it. I took the lead from there up to the summit, which was another 200 feet above.



The Path of Ascent to the Subjects.
Photo by Les Walker

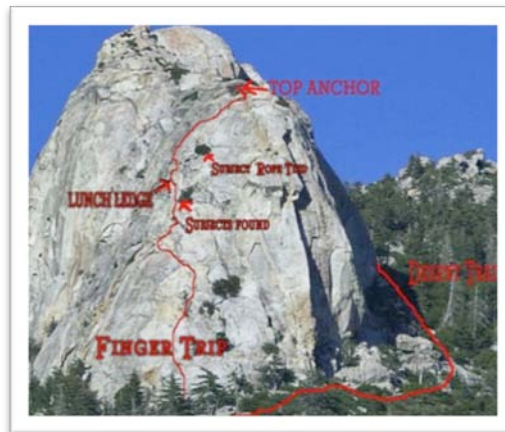
As Donny and I both reached the summit we were met in the face by 30 mph winds and very cold temperatures. The climb up The Trough had been protected from the wind, so this was a real surprise to us. We wasted no time in getting over to the top of the

route that the subjects were on. Donny set up a system of redundant anchors and I flaked out the ropes and prepared the gear for the subjects.

Donny tied in one rope and began his rappel over and into the darkness holding on to the rope until he was able to throw the rope without the wind tangling it all up. I waited to hear from Donny as he made his way to "Lunch Ledge", which was just above the subjects. Donny radioed that he was in voice and visual contact.

Donny advised me he was all anchored in down there and it was OK for me to start my rappel. It was not an easy rappel due to the wind at the top. It wanted to push you in the opposite direction of where you needed to go, but as I made it further over the ledge the wind backed off and it was smooth going. I stopped and set in a directional anchor to help guide the ropes the way we wanted them to go for the ascent. As I reached Donny he had already started the anchor system to rappel to where the two subjects were stranded.

Donny made quick work of that and he nimbly rappelled down to the subjects and radioed back that they were all in good health and ready to "get off this rock"! Donny then proceeded to get the subjects prepared for the climb back up as I set up the belay system to haul them up the short 50-foot crack to what we call Lunch Ledge.



The route down. Photo by Les Walker

Donny untangled the subjects gear and the mess that led to them being stranded in the first place, and got one of them tied-in short on the rope. Donny gave me the OK to start hauling the first climber up. The first climber made it up fine and anchored in behind me.

Donny tied in the other climber and once again the haul up the crack began. The second climber also made it up fine, anchored in, and took a seat next to his partner behind me. Donny then made his way up to the ledge. While he worked on getting the belay anchors cleaned up, I went up our top rope and traversed over to the top of the subjects rope that they had abandoned, which was tied to a tree about 50 feet to our south. I gathered the rope and made my way back to Lunch Ledge to hand off their rope. I then climbed my way to the top to set up the long belay for the subjects.

Donny was preparing the subjects for the long climb up by giving encouraging guidance and instructions as to how to pass the directional anchor we had placed. I topped out into 30 M.P.H. winds

again, and switched over to my belay system to bring these boys up. Donny had set up a bomb-proof anchor and it was going to be needed; the route that we were bringing the boys up was well beyond their ability to climb, so it was going to be more of a haul than a belay.

Donny tied in the first guy and gave me the OK to start pulling him up. The wind was so strong that I could not hear what was going on 200 feet below me, so I had to rely on feeling the rope as if I had a fish on the end and was reeling it in. It was slow going as each climber was in well over his head on this route and had to rely on the belay to make it up the hardest sections. But after 30 minutes of arm-stretching pulling, both subjects were on top with me. I gave the word to Donny that all were up and he was free to climb when he was ready.

Donny made it up the route in minutes with no help from me needed. He nearly ran up that section as I pulled the rope through my belay devices as fast as I could. Donny crested over the lip with his headlight blazing and a huge smile on his face! "Let's get off this rock," he said and directed the subjects to help us gather up our ropes while Donny and I pulled our anchors.

We radioed Base with the good news that all were on top, but the mission was still not over. The descent down the back side of Tahquitz is as tricky as some of the climbing routes. We made our ways through the maze of cracks,

ledges and a few trees to the trail that would eventually lead us back to the main trail. We meet up with Lee and Helene and they helped share the weight of our gear and lead the way down the steep trail back to Humber Park and Base. It was great when entering the parking lot with the two subjects to see six waiting team members who were all ready to help if needed.



Les, the Subjects and Donny safely back at base. Photo by Helene Lohr

RMRU team members present: Lee Arnson, Paul Caraher, Pete Carlson, Donny Goetz, Glenn Henderson, Ralph Hoetger, Helene Lohr, Dana Potts, Les Walker, and Gwenda Yates.

Tin Mine Canyon Trail

**January 18, 2013
Cleveland National Forest**

by Alan Lovegreen

Helicopter hoists are one of the more exciting parts of mountain rescue. For many people on our team they are the unicorns of callouts - rare creatures that one may wait decades to glimpse, so when Gwenda sends the callout text for a helicopter hoist, mid-evening in mid-January, I jump to

phone in to the rescue line. Ten minutes later I am en route to the Sheriff's Aviation Hanger at Ryan-Hemet Airfield.

I learn additional details about the mission while I am driving. RMRU has been asked to assist in the hoist rescue of five people stuck in the shrubbery in the hills above Tin Mine Canyon Trail. Their story, as I later learn, is that of many of our rescues in this area: people find out about an informal series of plastic rope-lined game trails and mountain bike trails above Tin Mine Canyon Road, follow one of many rabbit holes, and end up in a macabre wonderland of impassible brush and impossible terrain. This is perhaps the fifth such callout to Tin Mine that I've been on in the last twelve months, but usually we just have to hack our way through the bushes and walk the subjects out to safety.

I arrive at the airport. The helicopter is resting on its wheeled trailer, and the familiar mug of RMRU member Les Walker is there to greet me. Even though we had received helicopter training as a team a

month ago, Les expertly reviews the application of the screamer suit with me.

Les has seen his share of unicorns.

We're soon airborne, cutting across the city lights between Hemet and Corona. As we near the Cleveland National Forest we can see the lights of the subject's cell phones dotting the dim contours of the hill. The pilot makes a landing zone, or LZ, out

of a graded subplot adjacent to the trailhead, and dust billows out from the rotor wash as we descend. Les jumps out. He will unpack each subject upon the aircraft's return. Our technical flight officer, or TFO, moves the hoist system into place and hooks himself to the outside of the aircraft.

"Helicopter hoists are one of the more exciting parts of mountain rescue. For many people on our team they are the unicorns of callouts - rare creatures that one may wait decades to glimpse."

RMRU RESCUER ALAN LOVEGREEN

We lift back off and hover over the hillside that is less than a mile from the LZ. I hook my climbing harness to the cable and step out onto the landing skid. The TFO and I nod, and down I go. I lose sight of the group as I am lowered into the brush.

It takes me a minute to get my orientation back and begin fighting my way through the Chinquapin. I'm not surprised to find out that the huddling group of five is, like most we rescue above Tin Mine Canyon, dressed in casual clothing ill-suited to the conditions. They are cold but unhurt, and I talk them through what will happen next. We will use screamer suits to extract them. A screamer suit is worn like an oversize vest with steel

connecting rings. Two will go up with each run, and I will go out with the last subject on the third and last pass.

I package up the first two subjects into their suits, hook the screamer suit bag to the first subject, and then motion to the TFO and pilot that we're prepared to hoist. The Star-g Helicopter moves to hover over us, lowers the hook to me, and waits for my sign. I hook in the screamer suit, triple check all of the connections, and tap my helmet with exaggerated movements, the sign that the subject is safe to hoist. And up he goes. The hook returns, and I repeat the process. Two down, three to go.

The helicopter heads back over to the LZ, and touches down long enough for Les to extract both subjects. I know that Les is removing their screamer suits and checking the subject's condition. While we wait, I pass out water and snack food to the remaining three, and we chat about what had gone wrong with their excursion. In a few minutes the helicopter returns, drops me and the duffle bag with the two screamer suits, and in minutes I am sending two more into the inky ether.

Now we wait again. The subject I've saved for last is the one that talked her friends and family members into their adventure in pursuit of plastic ropes. She is embarrassed, and I think back to all of the times I've been disoriented in a mountainous area: too many to count. When the helicopter returns I send her up and follow with one of the

subject's backpacks slung across my chest. Les helps her out of the helicopter back at the LZ and the pilot shuts down the engine. Mission accomplished.

"As we near the Cleveland National Forest we can see the lights of the subject's cell phones dotting the dim contours of the hill."

RMRU RESCUER ALAN LOVEGREEN

We still have the return flight, our informal debriefing with the pilot and TFO, and a greasy post-mission meal at the local sports restaurant, where Les and I will chat about the operation. Not a bad way to spend a Friday night.

RMRU team members present: Alan Lovegreen and Les Walker.

Search-Rescue Fallen 80 Year Old Man

April 24, 2013
Ortega Highway Candy Store

by Mark Houston

Wednesday night we were called out for a lost hiker off the Ortega highway. A group of friends went on a hike together. The youngest of the group was 74 and the oldest was in his 80s. They planned a hike to the Simmons Summit.

The last half mile to the summit can be very steep and the group had thinned out with one of the friends making it to the summit before the rest. After waiting some time for the rest of the group to summit, he decided to head back. On his way back he took the wrong path, which lead to him getting engulfed in Manzanita trees and completely losing his way. The rest of the group made it to the top and began to call out. Locating the missing man by voice, they realized no one from their group had the ability to descend to help him and the lost man was too exhausted to make his way back up.

They all agreed the best course of action was to have the lost man stay where he was and to get help. They left a metal pole they found pointing in the direction of their friend's voice and returned.

When we meet them at the candy shop, they were very helpful, giving us exact location of where he had left the trail, what he had with him and offered whatever other help they could provide.

Paul and I started our hike at 10 P.M. The weather threatened rain but it did not come, which was a mixed blessing--this meant the subject would not be stuck out in the rain but on the other hand, the overcast conditions made it impossible for the helicopter to pull him out. When we reached the summit, we found the pole and began calling out his name in the direction it pointed. To our surprise, that is exactly where he was. He had stayed where they had left him. We still had a tough

route ahead of us, but at least we knew where he was.

For the next hour we swam our way through Manzanita trees periodically calling out to the subject and asking him to shine the light from his walky-talky to help us stay on track. We reached him and found him more beaten up than we had expected, yet in good spirits.



Mark with subject laying in green sleeping bag for warmth
Photo by Paul Caraher

He had fallen at some point and chipped a tooth and, either from the fall or just the climb through the trees, cut his hands up and torn his pants.

I dressed his hands as best we could and Paul lent him some gloves. We used a pair of personal rain pants to keep him warm. He had plenty of water with him so we warmed up some cocoa and food. He was too exhausted to move so we made camp.

The next morning was still overcast, so with no guarantee of a helicopter, we began our long trip back. By a stroke of luck, we were convinced to bring a machete before leaving base. This made a huge difference. Paul spent the whole time chopping a path through the trees while I dug makeshift steps in the loose ground. Every 15 feet or so, we would stop and push/pull the subject to another resting spot. Finally the weather broke, and we got word that the helicopter was on their way. We kept climbing until we reached a good spot for the helicopter to pick us up.

The helicopter lowered the screamer suit and we had the subject out within minutes. A few more minutes, and they were back to pick us up. AMR checked the subject out and decided to bring him to the hospital to make sure he was okay. The last update we received was from his son, saying his dad was back to his old self and hiking again--this time, however, he plans to stay *on* the trail.

RMRU team members present: Paul Caraher, Glenn Henderson, Mark Houston, Roger May, and Gwenda Yates.

Rescue Tahquitz Rock

April 27, 2013
Idyllwild

by Lee Arnson & Helene Lohr

RMRU has just been called out for a helicopter rescue on Tahquitz rock. I swing my truck into place below the Helipad at Keenwild

and breathe a sigh of relief as I see Les, one of our most capable Technical Rock Rescuers, already deep in conversation with the Technical Flight Officer (TFO) of the Sheriffs Aviation Unit.

A rock climber has taken a serious 40 foot plus fall onto a small ledge about 300 feet up from the base of the rock. He was initially unconscious and is now reporting severe head, neck and chest pain. Cal-Fire flew in to assess, and rightly deemed the situation too dangerous to approach with a larger helicopter and no high angle rock experience. The decision was made to call in RMRU and the Riverside Sheriff Aviation Unit, but to use CDF's litter and packaging system.

This will be the first time ever that we are sharing gear with CDF. Les and I kneel down with their crew to receive a hands-on tutorial on their litter system. I'm impressed with its straightforwardness. The strapping system is efficient and will be an asset in the conditions we're expecting on the rock. They supply us with a c-collar and additional medical supplies tailored to deal with the expected trauma from our subject's fall.

"I have a gut feeling that all our years of experience are going to come to a head right now."

RMRU RESCUER LEE ARNISON

RMRU Rescuer Craig Wills is on scene to serve as communication

with our call captains and ground crews, while Ralph Hoetger and Helene Lohr will work base at Humber Park.

After the tutorial I grab my backpack. Les and I do a quick cross check of gear. We'll be going in loaded for bear, backpacks bulging with more than 60 lbs. equipment. We are fully geared to be in and out within the hour, or to stay for the next 2 days. Between us we have hundreds of feet of rope in case we need to do a full technical lower.

"The wind pouring over the ridgeline and the rotor wash against the rock cause unpredictable conditions that even the best pilot can't predict."

RMRU RESCUER LEE ARNISON

We board the A-star with our packs already strapped on and good to go. The back seats have been removed to make room for the litter. I reach behind me for the end of the seat belt protruding from the deck. As it clicks together I give the TFO thumbs up, ready to go. Within moments we're surging into the air.

With our huge packs and rescue gear Les and I are wedged into the small cabin like sardines. Manny, our TFO balances himself outside on the skid, securely

clipped into the helicopter with a bird's eye view of the pine covered ravines rushing by below.

"Oh man, what am I getting myself into this time?"

RMRU RESCUER LEE ARNISON

The bird turns to the North. I see Tahquitz Rock lit by the afternoon sun ahead of us. 'Oh man, what am I getting myself into this time?'

As a rescuer you never really know what lies ahead. All you know is that somebody is hurt, and it's your job to help them. As the rock looms in front of us, I have a gut feeling that all our years of experience are going to come to a head right

now. We fly up near the massive face of the rock. Kevin, our pilot, circles the helicopter, searching the surface of the rock for our subject.

Manny points him out, wedged on a tiny ledge several hundred feet up. His climbing partner waves her arms in wide arcs at us. Kevin puts us into a hover that seems impossibly close, blades spinning a mere 20 feet off of the rock. The courage and skill it takes to fly a mission like this are incredible. The wind pouring over the ridgeline and the rotor wash against the rock cause unpredictable conditions that even the best pilot can't predict.



*Lee being lowered in as Les (orange shirt) waits in tree clump on ledge.
Photo by Cid Castillo*

Les clips into the hoist and scoots past me towards the open door. Kevin holds position, while Manny lowers Les into a bushy scrub oak sprouting precariously out of the ledge. Les uses its branches to pull himself into relative safety and quickly anchors himself in. As soon as Les unclips from the hoist, Kevin pulls the helicopter off to a safe distance.

Underneath the thick overgrowth I can just make out Les greeting the subject and his wife. He immediately secures them safely to the face of the rock and then sets anchors for me. He looks up and waves to the copter to signal that he's ready for me to be lowered.

We carefully approach the face of the rock again. Manny hands me the hoist hook. I clip it into my harness and double check that my carabiner is locked, before I undo my seat belt and scoot forward across the floor. I sit on the edge, put my feet on the skid,

stand, and pivot to face the TFO, my hand gripping his chest carabiner for support.

Now the only thing keeping me from falling hundreds of feet is the connection of the hoist hook to one locking carabiner on my belay loop.

" Suddenly the world jerks, sways and drops. The rock swings away from my view and I'm flying backward."

RMRU RESCUER LEE ARNSON

I take a slow deep breath, look at Manny and nod. I drop smoothly into the open air, the rotor wash reflecting back from the rock and buffeting my body. My full pack is a constant heavy pressure on my shoulders pulling me backward. I tighten my grip on the cable to keep myself upright. The ledge approaches quickly and I can see Les below me in the branches, leaning forward, ready to clip me in to our safety line.

Suddenly the world jerks, sways and drops. The rock swings away from my view and I'm flying backward, wind whistling in my ears and boulders and pines rushing past below my feet. A drastic change in the wind has hit the helicopter, radically cutting its lifting power. The pilot's only choice is to peel away from the rock or risk crashing into its face.

His quick action and skillful flying have saved us, but now I'm in a wild pendulum underneath the copter on the hoist line. My heart

pounds, but I feel strangely calm inside. Flying like a bird, I see Idyllwild spread surreally out far below me. On the tail end of each upswing I powerlessly watch as the blades get closer and closer.

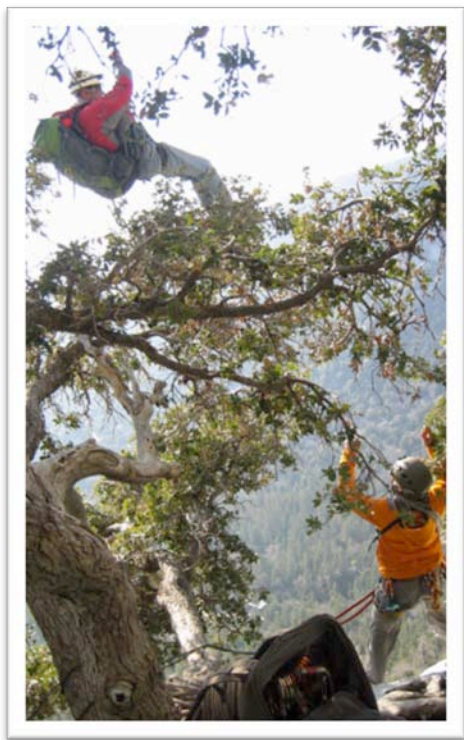
Manny quickly recognizes the risk and sets to work lowering the hoist at the apex of each swing to stop my upward momentum. Finally quieting my swing, he hoists me back up into helicopter. As I climb back into the helicopter Manny yells over the thrum of the blades to see if I'm alright, I give him the thumbs up to let him know I'm OK and good to go for another attempt.

Kevin makes another couple of passes to get a feel for the wind and then sets the helicopter into a hover again. Out the door I go.

"After several seconds of lowering, the subject blurts out; 'I'm losing blood pressure, I'm going to faint...'"

RMRU RESCUER LEE ARNSON

This time the hoist goes smoothly and before I know it I'm landing deep inside the scrub brush. Les clips me into the safety line right away. I release the hoist and the helicopter pulls away. Once we are safely situated I radio in to confirm we are both on the rock and secured. The helicopter edges in again to lower the CDF litter and we lean out from our anchors to grab it as it spins in the



Les prepping to secure Lee as he is lowered onto the ledge. Photo by Subject's wife & Climbing Partner

wind. We unclip it and secure it to our line. With a wave and a nod Star-9 peels away, heading back to Keenwild to conserve fuel until we call them for pickup. We make our way down onto the belay ledge, the area about size of large coffee table, with vertical rock on all sides and a sheer 300 foot drop off.

Les briefly introduces me to subject and his wife. We immediately begin packaging him into the litter. It's difficult work. The litter takes up the floor of the ledge. We are left perched on the edge of a sheer drop, leaning into our anchors while working to strap him in. Despite the warmth of the day the subject is shivering uncontrollably, a potential sign of dangerous hypovolemic shock. I give him my coat before we tighten the 3 layers of webbing

and buckles to secure him for the hoist.

We have him strapped in, but now have to find a way to bring the hoist hook far enough in to attach to the litter. The helicopter won't be able to get close enough to the rock to lower it directly to us, besides; we can't hoist the litter through the thick shrub engulfing the ledge. We need to get him out in the open. We'll have to slide the litter down off the ledge onto the face of the

“ The rotor wash is so intense it feels like you are just going to be blown right off the face of the rock and never heard from again.”

RMRU RESCUER LEE ARNISON

rock so that the hoist can reach the spider attached to the litter.

Les calls in to the helicopter to stand by for a hoist. We set up a lower, with the amazingly calm and collected wife acting as belay. As we slide him off the edge of the sheer drop off the litter tilts slowly forwards. The subject's feet go down, and his head tilts up. After several seconds of lowering, the subject blurts out; "I'm losing blood pressure, I'm going to faint..." His face goes slack. Les and I make eye contact. Oh man. We immediately start to raise the litter back up.

Les radios in to call off the bird. Without saying anything to each other, we know this is going to be a very tricky maneuver to get this guy off this rock. Les now has the weight of the foot end of the litter balancing on his knee, while I am holding down the head end; all the while we are both at the end of our anchors hanging on for dear life.

The subject regains consciousness and we tell him this is going to be one wild ride getting on board the helicopter, and we feel our next attempt will be successful. Les and I look at each other, and because of friendship and training we know we can pull this rescue off safely.



Les and Lee packaging the Subject into the litter. Photo by Subject's wife & Climbing Partner

We call for the bird to come back, and as it goes into a hover, Manny starts to lower the hoist cable, Les and I are trying our best to keep the litter as level as possible, while at the same time we are both extending our arms as far out as possible to catch the hoist hook. The rotor wash is so intense at this point it feels like you are just going to be blown right off the face of the rock and never heard from again.

Les does this amazing move while the litter is still balanced on his knee and somehow he is able to reach out and grab the hook, I have the spider in my hand and Les automatically clips into it. The litter is now safely clipped to helicopter, but we need to unclip it from our system so it can be raised up.

There is no slack- our belay is maxed. Every time we rise to get slack the heavy weight of the litter plus subject slides forward and takes up the excess. In order to get the slack we need to free the litter we need precise timing.

Everything happens in quick succession. Les yells for slack over the pelting roar of the rotor wash, the subject's wife gives us rope; Les unclips the litter while giving the helicopter the hand signal for a raise. The litter lifts and swings smoothly out and up away from the rock. I let out a long sigh and realize I've been holding my breath. What a rush!

Star-9 disappears over the forested ridge into the direction of the Keenwild helipad to transfer our subject to Mercy Air. Before it even seems possible the helicopter is hovering over us again for a pickup. One by one we are hoisted back to safety. I smile and Les slaps me on the shoulder, "Good job buddy!" We grin at each other. It's time to head back to La Casita for a celebration with our team and some retelling of an incredible experience.

RMRU team members present: Lee Arnsen, Ralph Hoetger, Helene Lohr, Les Walker, and Craig Wills.

Assisting agencies: *Riverside County Sheriffs Department (Pilot Kevin Boss and TFO Manny Romero, without whom this rescue would not have gone down in this fashion) and Cal-Fire. Thank you!*

The Subject's Account.

NOTE: The following excerpt was written by the subject of the previous rescue about his experience:

Last Saturday, April 27th, around 1:30 PM I fell on Tahquitz rock above Idyllwild in South California, on a route called Fingergrasp, the 5.8 slab/dihedral pitch above the "Jungle Ledge", a very easy climb for me. I was a hand's reach from the bolted anchor when I slipped. I was injured in the fall and quite helpless after it. I had to be rescued.

This was my first climbing injury. I've been a climber since the high school days in the late 70's. I climbed around the world alpine, trad and sport, at all elevations on rock, ice and snow. My pastime used to be soloing 300 meter faces in the 5.9-10 range.

As if my past was my warranty, as if I were entitled to safety, I optimized my climbing to that, to "it won't happen to me."

RESCUE SUBJECT

As if my past was my warranty, as if I were entitled to safety, I optimized my climbing to that, to "it won't happen to me." I wasn't there 100% on Fingergrasp. I didn't visualize a few moves ahead. I didn't check how I executed them.

"Half an hour passed at the margins of consciousness, hours shaking in shock."

RESCUE SUBJECT

This is how the fall felt:

My left foot slipped, not a problem. Then - with increasing interest - I looked at my hands as they pulled from the rock, too. I was suspended and surprised in the thin air like a cartoon character for that one moment and it felt like this is how it's going to stay. Plenty of time to ask myself how many times have I corrected an imperfect move just a bit, without a glitch. I thought this part of my character.

Then the slow motion kicked in: I gradually peeled off. Lost contact with the rock. Took the rope to keep it up. Looked down the slab to see the path I was to pass inevitably. Checked the last protection. The orange Alien was well wedged in the crack below me. 30 feet below me.

For I'd decided to runout a 5.8 and take a risk of a 60-70 foot fall,

not a matter of great concern or even choice in many harder climbs, but this time - was I lazy? Cocky? Feeling invincible? I remembered talking to myself during the last 30 feet: don't fiddle with the nuts, your smallest cam is not small enough, it's easy enough and you're almost there.

What bothered me now was the lack of a safe plan for this long, non-vertical slab fall. I hate doing things without a plan.

No whistle of wind picked up with speed, no hit, no nothing. I just woke up in terrible pain hanging by a screaming rib-cage a few feet above the belay stand. Kathryn remembers me moaning like an animal. I remember begging her to be lowered to the ledge to relieve the suffering.

Half an hour passed at the margins of consciousness, hours shaking in shock. Kathryn hovered over me, profoundly soothing and calm. Lei too, a solo climber who came to help and called the rescuers. Time and pain were one and the same. The sky was a blue lid over it. Then two shadows lowered from this lid, from a big bird cutting its blades into the cliff. One said, I'm Les - he's Lee. They strapped me carefully into a gurney, with inhuman effort got me into a position to be hauled up to the bird.

Kathryn operated the GriGri. I was utterly helpless. Full of gratitude. Thank you Les and Lee, thank you Kathryn and Lei, thank you pilot and copilot.

I was rushed into the Riverside hospital where they suspected broken hip, ribs, fingers, neck and brain hemorrhage. Quite a list, so they kept me. The kind hospital personnel dismissed one suspicion after the other, until on Sunday afternoon I was cleared to go home. The fall truly spared me - I was just bruised like hell.

We'll never know what happened in those 2-3 seconds it took me to fall. I was knocked out, Kathryn was breaking the fall and watching the rope. It seems plausible that the rope tightened and pulled me backwards into the dihedral where I hit my right side and my head.

Lessons learned?

I felt entitled to climb this climb with ease. This was based on things I climbed in the past. Yet I was supposed to earn it. We earn each climb, again and again. The climbs go through their subtle changes, get dirty, wet, holds get loose and break, and I'm certainly not the same from day to day.

I should have been focused, and if not, be frank about it. Take a rest, take a whole day.

Climbing takes constant optimization. (Body positions, power output, rest, protection placement, time, weather assessment, steering clear of falling rock/snow/ice, positions of the belay stations and overnight camps, things you carry, etc.)

What was I optimizing for when I placed no gear for 30 feet? I was sure I wouldn't fall. Hubris,

invincibility - I chose to optimize for that, rather than safety.

Now it will be interesting to see how will I deal with and optimize all the runouts where the first ascenders left potentials for truly long falls.

Thank you for all your good thoughts. Happy climbing! And obligatory: climb safe.

"I was rushed into the Riverside hospital where they suspected broken hip, ribs, fingers, neck and brain hemorrhage."

RESCUE SUBJECT

RMRU Technical Rock Training

By Helene Lohr

"Make sure to bring your rescue gear". Lee says on the phone Friday night- I've called him to ask if I can borrow his ascenders for the team training tomorrow. "Really? You think I'll need it?", I say.

Saturday, 7:30 am. My wheels kick up gravel along a dirt road deep in Indian Cove campground. The sun rises behind me, painting the faces of the rock a golden red, promising a warm day ahead. Dust follows the 4Runner up the road towards our team campsites. The familiar RMRU Rescue Trucks and a scattering of orange shirts says I've arrived.

Les Walker, Alan Lovegreen, Donny Goetz and a few other team members are already working on personal skills high up on the steep rock walls surrounding the campsites. More cars pull in. We exchange warm

welcomes and start gathering our team technical rock gear to start training.

Pete Carlson gives a brief intro and then we break off into groups. Donny peels off to the southwest with those who want to practice setting anchors. Pete collects the more advanced technical crew to dive immediately into setting up raises and lowers for our litter system off of a steep rock wall to the southeast.

"Rock crystals that break off or flaking sections can allow the anchor to shift and put you at serious risk of the piece failing."

RMRU ROCK TRAINING

I'm new to technical rock so I head off to practice anchors. Donny thoroughly reviews the use of cams, hexes and nuts.

How do you evaluate the rock for the most secure placement?

Donny runs us through different scenarios, covering the possible pros and cons. Place the anchor in a crack that flares outwards towards the direction of pull and the piece will be at risk of walking and yanking free. A crack with parallel, or better yet, walls that come together along the direction of pull will yield a bomber hold.

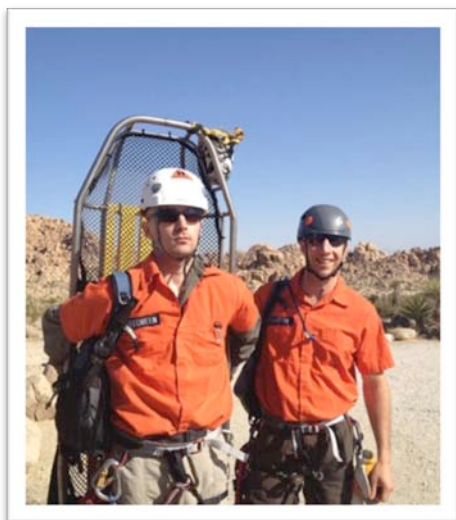
We learn to check the quality of the rock, watching for potential crumbling or flaking. Rock crystals that break off or flaking sections can allow the anchor to shift and put you at serious risk of the piece failing.



Donny reviews the use and proper placement of cams. Photo by Helene Lohr

The strength and angle of placement are critical. Even though anchors have flexible stems, their angle to the fall line (the angle at which you are placing the most weight/force) is important. If you place the piece too far off angle the torque can cause the piece to rotate, 'walk', and potentially pop out of position. Just in case you were wondering, this is *not* good.

Donny shows us how to assess placement of multiple cams in order to maximize the strength of the system. Once again the angle is key. A wide angle running from the anchors to their point of attachment weakens the entire system. Donny explains how lengthening the runners along the fall line can create a tighter angle



Alan and Mark Prep for raises and lowers. Photo by Helene Lohr

and also help equalize the load for a stronger system. When we are low on runners, placing the cams closer together can yield the same effect.



Donny guides Team member in proper cam placement. Photo by Helene Lohr

I listen intently. Not only my own life, but those of my teammates and subjects will be at risk if I get this wrong later. The weight of several rescuers, their heavy team gear, full rescue backpacks, a sturdy stokes litter and a subject will all hang from our placement of these pieces. We split up to practice, with Donny coming over to critique our anchor placements and test their strength.

The call comes in around 9:30 am. Team President Rob May comes over to let us know. *"Collect your gear and clear out. We've got a rescue! Meet at the base of the tram. No other details yet"*. Glenn and Gwenda head out first to see if they can get more info, while the rest of the team packs up the technical gear and sorts it into the truck.

Dang it, Lee was right! I start mentally berating myself for bringing *everything but* my winter gear. If this turns into a mission in

the high country out of the tram I very well may need the crampons and ice axe nestled deep in my gear closet. *Dang*. One more lesson learned.

The team peels off one by one and makes an informal caravan heading towards Mt. San Jacinto. I fall into line behind Paul Caraher and Matt Jordan on the highway. Traffic that was tolerable this morning now seems to creep as we cruise along behind cars forming a slow moving roadblock. Midway through the drive a cell phone chain carries the news to the team- our base has changed to Whitewater.

Just a few minutes after we pull into base we get the news. Aviation has scooped up the "disoriented PCT hiker" from high on Fuller Ridge and is already en route to our location. Bewildered grins are passed around. 20+ rescuers and no rescue!



Aviation lands with a "disoriented PCT hiker". Photo by Helene Lohr

We hear the "thup thup" of the copter within minutes. Star 9 sets down a few hundred feet away. As Tony and Juvien from RSO Aviation escort the subject to the

waiting rescue crew, I can't help but notice that the he doesn't seem well prepared for a long backpacking trip. He is wearing a dusty cotton Tshirt and cotton pants. His backpack is old and from a distance doesn't appear to have a sturdy waist strap to properly distribute the load. An old Walmart style sleeping bag and mattress are rolled up together on top to form a bedroll.

I don't get a chance to talk to the subject, but it's pretty likely he didn't have the necessary gear for the mountain. Mt San Jacinto is the first serious non-desert challenge along the route of the PCT. A lot of thru-hikers gravely underestimate the conditions. We've already had a rash of heads-ups and rescues due to ill prepared PCTers this season.

The "nearly a rescue" has eaten hours of our time. When we get back to Joshua Tree our prime location for training has been taken by eager rock climbers. After some time for lunch and personal skills Pete and Donny scout out a new location for litter raises and lowers. The rock at the new location is more complicated, but we take on the challenge and start setting up our anchors to get into litter raises and lowers.

The DG (decomposing granite) rock makes setting anchors challenging. Obvious cracks end up being too unstable to rely on. Despite the crumbling cracks we manage to securely place a selection of cams and hexes. We tie in our red and blue runners and equalize them, distributing

the weight leading toward the fall line where we will tie in the litter.

I volunteer as the first Litter



Helene as litter attendant, waiting for her "subject". Photo by Chad Marler

Attendant. With experienced guidance from the senior members I clip into the litter in the middle and guide it down the face of the rock, using the weight of my body and leg strength to guide it over the uneven rocks.

The litter must be held as level as possible in order to not endanger



The team uses a 3-1 to raise the litter. Photo by Chad Marler

the subject. The Litter Attendant not only guides the litter, but must keep constant tabs on the condition of the subject. If they are in shock it's important to keep

the head tilted slightly down to increase blood flow to the brain. If we suspect a traumatic brain injury we tilt the litter slightly up to reduce swelling and hopefully buy them some more time.

I call out the orders loudly, "down slow..." Holding the litter with both arms I lean back with my full weight and let the strength of my legs, the tension of the rope and the team above do most of the work. We hit a tricky spot along the route that threatens to throw the litter off kilter. "Stop!" I look back over my shoulder, decide to head for the rocks to my left and readjust my grip. Chad relays the orders to the rope team at the top. Good communication is key. Down we go.

Guiding the litter back up is good practice in how to work with the litter system. With Kelly securely strapped in as my "subject" I use the Prussik knots to adjust the angle of the litter and keep her level as we ascend the uneven rock faces. I reach up and pull my line to the litter, lengthening it in order to give my legs more purchase as we head back up. "up, slow!"

At the top I unhook and climb into the recently vacated litter for my turn as subject as Matt Jordan takes the lead as Litter Attendant. Mike George and Frank Snider follow us up, while the rest of the team take turns running the rope system and trying out some of our expensive new team gear.

By the end of the day we are all hot, dusty and in need of a comfy camp chair and a cold beverage. The moon rises to the east as we eat, relax and stare into the campfire. It's time for stories, laughter and pranks on those who go to bed early. Definitely a day



The moon rises over Joshua Tree as the team relaxes around the campfire. Photo by Helene Lohr

well spent, despite the snag of the "nearly a rescue" incident of the morning.

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