

## Man stranded on ledge

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**Strawberry Creek**  
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By Glenn Henderson

Sunday evening just sitting down for dinner when the pager goes off; "all RMRU members 10-21 Walt Walker for an Idyllwild rescue." I think there must be a law somewhere that says the pager may only go off at dinner time or in the middle of the night. Walt says that there is a hiker stranded on a ledge in the Grotto area below Isomata school. I tell Walt that I MUST be at work at 8:00 am Monday morning, and what do you think? Walt says "hey - no problem, a couple of hours and we'll be out." It's 8:00 pm now so double what Walt says and I should be home by midnight at the latest so I roll.

The team met at the Isomata outdoor theater where Kevin Walker took charge as operations leader. He quickly found out the scenario - two men; Hal Ingram and Scott Minesinger had left highway 74 at the Strawberry Creek bridge and were going to hike up the creek to Idyllwild. They were attempting to bypass a large waterfall when Hal became stranded in a small ledge unable to go up or down. Scott was already past this point and had no equipment to help his friend out. He took off, continuing on upstream for a short ways, then cutting up to the top of a ridge and on out to Idyllwild for help. Scott said that it only took a little over an hour to hike out so we determined that he couldn't be too far down canyon but he must be past the Grotto area. Team members Henry Negrete and a man from the Isomata staff tried to find Hal by going down the ridge and calling out but to no avail. They were also not able to determine exactly where Scott had come up to the ridge top.

Kevin decided to send out four teams and drop them into the canyon at different intervals from the Isomata area starting at the top so as to be positive that we didn't miss Hal. My team was Bernie McIlvoy, Ray Hussey and Scott who insisted on going along on his own to try and help us locate the area his friend was in. We were put in as the furthest downstream team. Bernie had been in the Strawberry Creek area numerous times so he kept us high on the ridge-side to go around major waterfalls before we dropped down into the stream bottom. We kept on going down at a pretty good pace. We had been hiking for over three hours when we got to Hal.

We radioed out to base that we had made contact with the subject and to stop all teams where they were. We were so far downstream that we wanted to assess the situation to see if we could get him out with the personnel and gear we had with us.

We decided we could do the job but kept all field teams where they were in case of a problem.

Bernie got set up to rappel down to Hal as Ray and I set up anchors for him. The fall line went directly down the waterfall and below Hal, but Bernie thought he could stay dry and then climb up to him via a small fingertip size crack in the rock wall. Bernie did this making it look easy but I know it was an extremely hard lead to get to Hal. Bernie took some of our gear down with him, so he quickly had him in a sit harness, helmet and extra clothing as he was in good shape but extremely cold.

To get Bernie and Hal back up to us looked like a problem as the route went through the waterfall. We opted for plan two which was to have Bernie lower him down about 40 feet to the creek bottom, cross the creek where we would pull up the ropes and toss them down to them on the other side. Using the rope as a top-rope they both climbed up to our position.

Since Ray and I both had to be at work at 8:00 am we all quickly packed up our gear and headed back up canyon. We followed the stream bed until we ran into an impassable falls where we climbed out and headed up for the ridge-top where we figured we could make better time back to base camp. Well - good idea in theory, bad idea in practice. The brush was so thick that we gave up trying to find a way around it and started taking turns crashing through it. The brush was continually grabbing and tearing at anything that was loose sleeves, headlamps, packs, arms, etc. It was real slow going but finally we made the top where we ran into the other field teams waiting for us in the cold. They looked strange all bundled up in their down winter gear, and us clad in shirt sleeves like it was summer time.

Well, the sun would be up soon so we all took off for the 15 minute hike back to the vans. Someone had some hot coffee waiting for us which was greatly appreciated. After a short critique of the mission we all headed home for some much needed sleep. I got home at 6:30 am. My wife Robin, got me up at 7:15 and got me off to work so that I was there by 8:00 am. All I can say is "Thanks Walt!". At least I did get to work on time but your credibility is teetering on the edge of a bottomless pit.

RMRU is a volunteer search and rescue team that covers Riverside County and assists other teams with search and rescue efforts in other counties. Each member purchases their own equipment and takes time off work, without compensation, to participate in search and rescue missions. Team equipment is purchased from contributions from the community. We are a non-profit organization and are funded by [donations](#) from people like you.