

## **Climbers Rescued on North Face of Mt San Jacinto**

**March 3, 2009  
Mt. San Jacinto  
2009-004**

by William Carlson

It's six o'clock in the morning and I find myself standing with a group of friends. The wind is gusting and the first rays of light are revealing clear skies. I look up at the 10,000 feet we could potentially climb and briefly think about the warm bed I left at 4 a.m. We are standing at the base of the North Face of San Jacinto Peak and the friends are all members of the Riverside Mountain Rescue Unit.

We received a call Monday night that two climbers were twenty-four hours overdue from a climb on the North Face. The climbers, Chris and Andrew, had left early Saturday morning in an attempt to climb the North Face. The two climbers expected to finish by Sunday evening. By Monday night, family members were beginning to worry.

Standing in the blustery pre-dawn conditions we worked to formulate a plan. We already had team members Nick Nixon and Tom Mahood hiking toward the summit of San Jacinto from the top of the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway. Their primary goal was to search the summit hut and look for tracks leading out of the North Face route. At this point we also had our Riverside Sheriff's Office helicopter flying a search pattern up the North Face. Upon an initial search the helicopter did not locate our subjects but had located two sets of footprints leading into avalanche debris and disappearing.

We wanted to get a closer look at the avalanche debris to try and see if the tracks walked over the debris and also to get into the area and check the current snow conditions. Lee Arnson and I were flown into the 7,000-foot level on the North face, just above where the footprints disappeared. We quickly located faint tracks walking over the past avalanche. We then spent some time digging a snow pit to check the snow stability allowing the helicopter to continue searching further up the North Face. We found the snow to be stable and well consolidated which allowed us to continue up.

We began climbing the mixed snow and ice slope mentally preparing for a long day. We were both excited to be climbing in such beautiful conditions. With every step came the crunching sound of ice beneath our crampons. We were making good time and hoped the two sets of footprints would lead us to the overdue climbers. We climbed 300 feet in just over five minutes and took a quick break to take off some layers. The climbing was steep and we did not want to overheat.

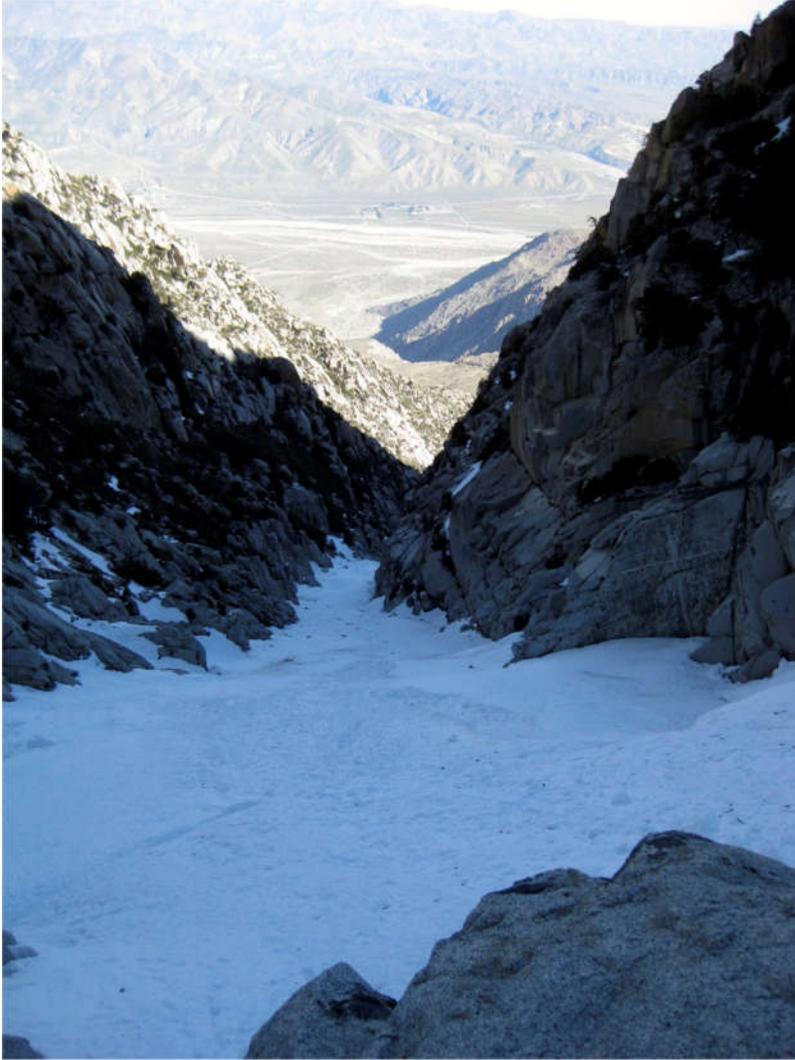
Just then the helicopter spotted a lone person waiving from up on a rock. Hopeful this was one of our climbers we waited to hear from the helicopter. A drop bag was lowered to the lone climber with a radio and water. We learned that Chris and Andrew were not injured, just tired and hungry. The snow was soft which made for slow going. They were just below Kristen Peak and we told them to continue up to that summit.

The helicopter returned and picked up Lee and I and took us to a clearing on the ridge above Kristen Peak. We were lowered by hoist and walked down the ridge to meet and confirm that we had located Chris and Andrew. We broke trail for them back up to the helispot. The sun was now out in full force and the snow was very soft. The view was spectacular. Clear skies and snow all around. We would have loved to have stayed out and climbed the rest of the day. However, Chris and Andrew were hungry and really wanted to go to Sizzler, so we waited for the helicopter to return from refueling.

The helicopter returned and, after two successful trips, brought us safely back to basecamp on Snow Creek Road. We talked to Chris and Andrew briefly and watched as they were reunited with their families. We were once again a group of friends standing beneath an intimidating mountain face in the gusty desert winds.

Members Present: Nick Nixon, Tom Mahood, Kevin Walker, Chad Marler, Lee Arnson, William Carlson, Pete Carlson, Rob May, Pilot: Tony Bowen and TFO: Erik Basham, Andy Rasmussen.

Photo by William Carlson shows the avalanche debris field from the top.



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.