



## **Injured Hiker Angels Glide Trail**

**February 11, 2012**  
**Wellman Cienega**  
**2012-005**

Written by Matt Jordon

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 66 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 around and began heading 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.

2-16-2012 Update:

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.

Special thanks to Cal-Fire, Riverside Sheriff's Department, The San Jacinto State Park, Desert Search And Rescue, and of course all the RMRU members who participated in one form or the next. Thank you everyone for your very helpful participation in this challenging mission.

**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).

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.