



Rescue Soboba Hills

February 18, 2012
Soboba Hills near Hemet
2012-006

Written by Lew Kingman

I was called at home at approximately 7:30 p.m. to respond to a request from the Riverside County Sheriff's Aviation Unit to assist with a helicopter/hoist rescue in the hills above Soboba Springs. The two people needing rescue, a mother and her twenty-year-old son, were at the 2,500 foot level of the hills above the Country Club at Soboba Springs. They were stuck in the dark on a steep slope where they had found a small ledge. I drove to the Hemet-Ryan Airport where I met the helicopter crew, Chad and Eric. We reviewed the rescue harnesses, safety procedures, and the plan for the rescue. The deputies let me know that they had contacted the two subjects and told them to stay where they were, and that they would return for them soon.

The subjects' exact location was marked with GPS coordinates. Chad, the pilot, let me know that he was heavy with fuel, thus limiting the load he could carry, and clouds were building up in the area. He said that after hoisting the two aboard the helicopter he might not be able to take us all back to the airport on the first run. They would have to come back for me on the next round trip. With that possibility in mind I wore several layers of clothing and stuffed some essentials into my pockets before donning my helmet and harness.

As the helicopter lifted off and flew towards the hills, I could see that we were flying just beneath the cloud layer, and I was wishing that I had brought a little more gear in case it would prove to be a long night. As the lights of San Jacinto slid behind us, it became pitch black below. As we went into a hover above the location, a spot light came on and illuminated the two subjects. They were sitting on the small rock. Eric handed me the hoist and I hooked it to my harness. Going out the door, Eric lowered me to the rock ledge beside them. It looked like it would be an easy landing, but when I contacted the rock on the slope, the rocks rolled out from under me, and I did a less than graceful landing at the subjects' feet!

The two were in good shape and uninjured, so at the request of the mother her son

was placed in the first rescue harness and hoisted up into the helicopter. As the son was getting secured inside, I got the mother into the second harness and she was quickly on her way too. At this point I figured that I was going to be here for a while, if not the whole night, so I was happily surprised when I saw the two glow sticks attached to the hoist descending towards me! Once inside the helicopter, we were on our way back to the airport, and arrived just a few minutes later.

Though I have been on the team for over 22 years, and been in and out of helicopters on several missions, this was the first time that I had ever participated in a night operation. It went just as smoothly as our trainings that we conduct each year, and I was thankful for the skill and safety practices of the Sheriff's crews that we operate with. I believe I was just as elated as the two we had just brought back!

RMRU team members present: Lew Kingman.

Aviation assets: Riverside Sheriff's Star 9/Chad Marlatt (pilot) and Eric Hannum (TFO).

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.