



## **Hiker Sprained Ankle San Jacinto Peak**

**June 23, 2012**

**San Jacinto Mountains**

**2012-023**

Written by Patrick McCurdy

On Saturday, June 23rd, an 11-year-old girl, part of a girl scout troop which had been backpacking in Round Valley a few miles above the top station of the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway, sprained her ankle on the trail between Wellman's Divide and San Jacinto Peak at an elevation of about 10,000 feet. State Park Rangers were quickly at the scene, provided medical care, and got the girl packaged into a Stokes litter. Even with a rescue wheel attached to the bottom, it takes 4-6 people to move a Stokes litter, and RMRU was called out as State Parks had only three rangers at the scene.

Michael George and I were first to arrive. We checked in with Riverside Sheriff's Corporal Todd Garvin and San Jacinto State Park Ranger Sue Neary at the ranger station at the top of the tram. After verifying we would be able to maintain radio contact with both of them, we headed out as Team 1, trying to quickly make our way off-trail to the location where rangers were waiting with the girl. While we were en route, Riverside Sheriff's Star 9 helicopter had surveyed the situation from the air and landed in Deer Meadow, that being the closest location to the girl where we could safely load her without requiring a riskier hoist operation.

As we were only 1/2 mile from the girl at that point and frustrated at our perceived slowness (we had actually run part of the way), Michael stayed with the helicopter while I dropped my pack and ran up slope through thick chinquapin to get to the girl and her ranger rescuers, arriving just about dusk. These rangers had done an excellent job splinting the ankle, wrapping the girl in a couple of layers of insulation against the night chill, and had her all ready to move.

With four trained rescue personnel on scene we quickly started the slow process of wheeling the litter down the rocky, bumpy, trail while minimizing the bumps and jolts to the girl. We were quickly met by RMRU Team 2 (Helene Lohr and Roger Barry) coming up the trail from Wellman's Divide. This sped things up as we had two fresh rescuers to rotate onto litter duty.

This type patient evacuation seems easy as all you have to do is have one rescuer at

each corner of the litter and roll it down the trail. It is actually quite tiring as the trail is often narrow so that rescuers have to walk on the rocks or brush to the side of the trail. The litter also has to be lifted up over rocks, roots, and branches in the trail, then carefully lowered down the other side. It is quite tiring and such a rescue requires 6-8 people minimum so that fresh people can rotate onto litter duty while others take a turn at spotting the trail ahead of the litter team, calling out obstacles. Through all of this, girl was a champ. She was cheerful, cooperated in every way, and never once complained about anything.

Meanwhile Paul Caraher had arrived at the ranger station and taken over the job of mission manager, while Team 3 (Nick Nixon and Craig Willis) had headed up the trail and fairly quickly encountered the litter team a little above Wellman's Divide. With two more fresh rescuers to rotate onto litter duty, forward progress increased. Before too long Nick scouted ahead to find us an off-trail route to the helicopter. About two hours after starting the evacuation, we had the girl at Star 9 and turned her over to Pilot Chad Marlatt and Flight Officer Eric Hannum, both very familiar faces to all the rescuers involved.

With the girl quickly airborne and on her way to a local hospital, the rest of us had to get moving quickly. It was 10:30 p.m., and the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway had graciously agreed to keep a skeleton crew on late to allow us to leave the mountain, but they had to close up at 11:30. If we missed the last tram down, we would be spending the night on the mountain. As quickly as possible we stashed the litter and wheel at the unmanned Long Valley Ranger Cabin and jogged the three miles back to the upper tram station. The tram doors closed on us and we were headed down to our vehicles at 11:31 p.m. A huge thanks to the management of the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway for once again bending over backward to support a rescue operation.

One last thanks goes to the Girl Scout leader of the trip. She stayed every moment with the girl and would not leave her side at the helicopter until she knew there was another scout leader waiting at the hospital. Every scout participating in a trip like this requires a medical history and parental permission form and the leader made very sure these documents went with the girl on the helicopter. The leader's professionalism in a stressful situation made her a pleasure to work with.

**RMRU team members present:** Roger Barry, Paul Caraher, Michael George, Helene Lohr, Patrick McCurdy, Nick Nixon, and Craig Willis.

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

**California State Parks:** Ranger Sue Neary, Park Aids Rick Hanson and Sam Aguilar, and Park Volunteer Willem Pennings. These State Park personnel did a superb job throughout and it was a pleasure to work with such professionals.

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.