



Lost Hikers Marion Mountain Trail

July 13, 2012

Marion Mountain Trail

2012-027

Written by Frank Snider

It always seems inevitable that rescue calls come in the middle of the night. I had just crashed after a 12 hour shift in the ER about 11:30 pm and was ready for a good night's sleep. Surprise, a text from RMRU at 1:15am "Lost hikers on Marion Mountain Trail. Call the rescue line". It took me about 5 minutes to get my eyes open and realize what was happening. Friday the 13th, perfect! While looking at the map and chugging 3-4 cups of coffee, my wife threw my gear bags in the car. Off to the car I go ready to leave when a second text comes in "It's raining in Idyllwild". Back to the closet to grab some extra gear and I hit the road about 2 am and soon realize that this may not be a fun night as a lightning show accompanies the light rain that I run into as I start up towards Idyllwild.

I pulled into the parking lot at the Marion Mountain trailhead about 3:15 am and am quickly met by Craig Wills who is ready to go. I quickly pack my bag and get a briefing from Glenn on our subjects: John and his son Justin. They were supposed to return from the peak before sunset and obviously had not made it. Craig and I are told that the subjects are on the trail and had relayed to 911 that they were OK not able to continue down the trail because of the dark. Cool this should be easy! Glen decides to send Craig and myself into the field. Oh boy the newbies on their own. Off we head into the dark along a trail we both didn't realize was so steep. Huffing and puffing we stop about ¼ mile up for water and a quick call out. With no response we continue up the trail.

Another call out and we both feel we have heard a faint response from Dark Canyon just below us. Which trail are they on? Craig and I pull out the map as both he and I have never been on this trail. Are they on the Seven Pines trail on the other side of the canyon? We both question at this point whether they are still on a trail or not. Further up the trail we go with the goal of getting to the seven pines trail to search there. During our next water break, we call out again. Now we are getting no response. "That's strange" I commented to Craig.

About that time Team 2 (Les Walker and Ralph Hoetger) has responded to base and contacts us by radio. Les informs us that it is not uncommon for hikers to get lost down in Dark Canyon and for us to come back down the trail to our last point of voice contact. Both Craig and I now head back down the trail hesitant because we both realize we are giving up some of the ground we had huffed and puffed to get up. Sweating like pigs because of the humid air we make voice contact again and stop. Calling into base I relay my fear that they are down in the canyon off trail and my discomfort in going off trail as newbies. Glen calls back from base saying "you'll be oldies after this one". Craig and I call in our coordinates and head down the steep hill into Dark Canyon. For about the next 45 minutes we continue voice call outs adjusting our route up the canyon and then down the canyon, slipping and sliding the whole way until we finally visualize the son Justin about 5:30 am.

Justin is in great shape and relays to us that he has no injuries. Justin leads us to his father John who is beat up pretty good after multiple falls and a "roller coaster" ride down the hill. At this point I call in our coordinates to base. Team 2 indicates that they are just above us on the trail with the litter and wheel and will stay put until further assessment of the subject. John had fashioned his belt into an arm sling for his obviously dislocated right shoulder and had stopped the bleeding from his large puncture wounds on his left leg with some type of cautery powder that they were carrying. John was having trouble bearing weight and walking because of the large puncture wound and contusions. He also was in tremendous pain from his dislocated shoulder. As a PA in the ER I have seen and reduced hundreds of dislocated shoulders and with John's consent I attempted to reduce his dislocation in the field in the hopes of relieving some of his pain and allowing us to get him off the mountain. After two attempts with different techniques I realize he most likely has fractured and dislocated his shoulder and no further attempts are made. A cup of hot coffee is made for John, he much appreciates this. We determined that John would have to be flown out or carried out by litter. A Helicopter is about an hour away, so Team 2 leaves the litter and wheel on the trail and comes down to our location.

John is bandaged up and very slowly moved about 200 yards to a small flat rock outcropping. After some discussion between base and aviation it is felt by the pilot (Tony) that a screamer suit cannot be used because of the shoulder injury and that a litter hoist should be done. After what seemed like hours Star 9 circles the area and decides that he can land on the small rock outcrop and the litter can be loaded. Our subject John remains in good spirits throughout telling multiple jokes and stories. We get the litter from the helicopter and put the subject into it and then load the litter into the helicopter. He is flown to Keenwild Helipad and then the aircraft returns to pick us up and fly us out to Keenwild also. At base Glenn and Rob hike up the trail and get the wheel and litter to bring it back to the Marion Mountain Trailhead.

RMRU team members present: Glenn Henderson, Ralph Hoetger, Rob May, Frank Snider, Les Walker, and Craig Willis.

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.