



Climber Injured in Fall

September 23, 2012
Tahquitz Rock
2012-036

Written by Donny Goetz

We got the call around 1 pm that a climber had taken a fall on Angel's Fright, a popular, moderate route up Tahquitz Rock and had sustained injuries to both of his ankles. Les sent me a text immediately to see where I was. I had just walked in to Gary's Deli to grab some lunch. I ordered a hearty sandwich knowing I would need a bit more fuel, said goodbye to my friends, hopped in my truck and made a bee line for Humber Park. I arrived there the same time as Les to find about 5 CDF and USFS trucks on scene.

Idyllwild Fire had a paramedic on his way up the Lunch Rock trail already. I took a look through Les' binoculars and found the injured party being lowered down the route with the assistance of several other climbers. CDF had a helicopter en route but Les and I decided it would be prudent to head up the trail anyway as winds can often make the seemingly assured success of helicopter missions unpredictable. Chad Marler joined Les and I at Humber and decided to hold back and run base until the truck arrived. Les and I took off with a member of Cal Fire's team and booked it up to the base.

Just as we reached Lunch Rock, CDF's helicopter 301 was preparing to lower their medic to the base. We caught our breath and watched as the medic dropped out of the bird and began his descent. About 50 feet down, he started to swing and we could see the pilot attempt a correction but it was clear that the gusty nature of the wind that day was going to make this quite difficult. The pilot and medic decided that this was too dangerous of a maneuver and they pulled out. So now Les and I knew it was our show.

We hustled the last 100 yards up hill to the base of the rock where Idyllwild Fire's medic was on scene with our subject, Dave. Dave was in good spirits sitting at the base of the rock after being lowered by his 2 sons and 2 other climbers, Dave C. and Tiffany L. (also good friends of mine), who had been kind enough to assist. Tiffany also happens to be a nurse and was able to administer basic first aid up high on the rock before they began descending with the subject. It appeared that Dave may have fractured one of his ankles. The medic on scene had splinted Dave's ankle and had him ready for transport.



**Subject, Donny, and Les on ledge
Photo by Chad Marler**

The area around the base is very steep and covered in loose rock so we knew carrying Dave out would be quite a challenge. We decided it was prudent to construct anchors on the rock to allow us to belay the rescue litter down the hill, at least until we were in a position where it was safe enough to handle it all by hand. We began building our anchors while Chad was leading a USFS crew up the trail with extra rope and about 15 folks who would be there to help us with the carry out. Patrick McCurdy had also arrived at Humber Park along with Gwenda who had brought up the truck. Patrick headed up and met us at the base just after Chad and the USFS crew had arrived. We now had so many people it was almost a challenge just to find something for everyone to do. If that wasn't enough, we were then informed that another crew from the Bautista correctional facility was on their way up the trail too!



Les and Donny preparing subject for litter
Photo by Chad Marler



**Rescuers getting litter ready to be lowered
Photo by Chad Marler**

Les and I had finished the anchors and began loading Dave into the rescue liter. We had our lightweight titanium liter with wheel which worked like a champ. I put a harness on Dave and used 2 prusiks affixed to the top end of the liter to keep his body from sliding down and putting pressure on his injured ankles. We tied our ropes onto the liter, checked our anchors one last time and gave the order for some of our massive crew to pick Dave up and begin moving him down the hill. The loose rock proved to be quite a challenge for some of the Bautista crew and we had a few of them slip on a number of occasions.



Patrick and Donny lower the litter
Photo by Chad Marler

At one point, they almost lost control of the litter but our belay line arrested the slip. With so many people there to help, we were able to rotate through and keep everyone tending to the litter quite fresh. As we ran near the end of our rope, we decided the litter was still in a dicey area so Les and Patrick headed down the hill with a rope and set another anchor off a tree and transferred the litter onto their new rope. I stayed up top, broke down the anchors, packed up the remaining gear, said goodbye to Dave C. and Tiffany and headed down to catch up with the rest of the crew.

As I caught up with Les belaying the litter from his tree anchor, we decided that we should continue this leap frog belay line approach a bit further down the hill, at least to just below Lunch Rock. So I ran ahead to set our next anchor. We did this 2 more times until we were below the short 3rd class area I refer to as "the bowling alley", an area tired climbers often lose their footing and slide a few feet down the hill. At this point we felt it was safe to let the crews carry Dave without the belay line. We continued down the trail at a steady pace and made it back to Humber Park around 6:30, just before sunset.



**Fire Crews do carryout from Lunch Rock
Photo by Chad Marler**

Dave's 2 sons were there waiting to drive him to the hospital for some x-rays. They were happy to see their dad down the hill and in good shape. Dave was in great spirits and thanked us all for our help. We then sorted out all of our gear, debriefed with all of the folks involved, and headed out. Our team headed straight to La Casita for some grub!

RMRU team members present: Donny Goetz, Michael George, Chad Marler, Patrick McCurdy, Les Walker, and Gwenda Yates.

Assisting agencies: Engine 23-Pine Cove, Engine 53-Garner Valley, Bautista Crew 5, Engine 56-Keenwild, and Tahquitz Crew from Keenwild.

Climbers: Tiffany L. and Dave C.

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.