



Climbers Rope Stuck

October 21, 2012
Tahquitz Rock
2012-040

Written by Les Walker

It was a typical Sunday evening. I was hanging out with my wife and fellow team member and neighbor, Donny. We had just finished dinner and were winding down from the weekend while Donny prepared to head to Orange County for his workweek. Donny and I had been discussing that we had not been on a rescue in a while and that it seemed we were due. He even had his team jacket on as if predicting the night's events to follow.

Well, at 8:30 p.m. the call came in from Glen Henderson, "Hello Les, you ready for a mission? We have two climbers trapped on Tahquitz Rock and they need help." Before Glen could tell me anymore, I told him to hang on as I need to catch Donny before he left. I ran to the door and yelled across the street to Donny, "RESCUE on the rock, GEAR UP." I then called Glen back and got the full briefing. Two climbers had got their rope stuck on their climb and were unable to ascend or descend from their position on a climbing route called the Finger Trip.

With that information Donny and I rushed to pack our gear and prepare our climbing equipment for the rescue. We loaded up and got to Humber Park where we got briefed by the Sheriff Deputy on scene. During that time local Idyllwild team members Lee Arnson, Helene Lohr and Ralph Hoetger arrived and we laid out our plan of action together. Donny and I would head out up the access trail to the base of Tahquitz to establish voice contact with the stranded climbers while Lee and Helene would be close behind bringing up the ropes and other technical gear that we might need. Ralph would run Base (base operations).

Donny reached the base of the rock first. He was able to establish voice communication with the climbers and to get an idea of where they were and if anyone was in need of medical attention. They were not hurt, just stranded. I joined Donny and we began to separate out our gear as Lee and Helene arrived.

Donny and I discussed the fastest way to the subjects and we agreed that the fastest way to reach them would be to climb up a parallel route to the summit and rappel down to

them. We would then bring them back to the top of the rock and eventually walk around and down the Friction descent route. The up-route that best matched this plan was The Trough, a 5.4 rated climb that Donny and I have done many times. But this time would be a little different in the dark and completely loaded down with gear.



**RMRU Les, Donny, and Lee Planning Rescue
Photo by Helene Lohr**

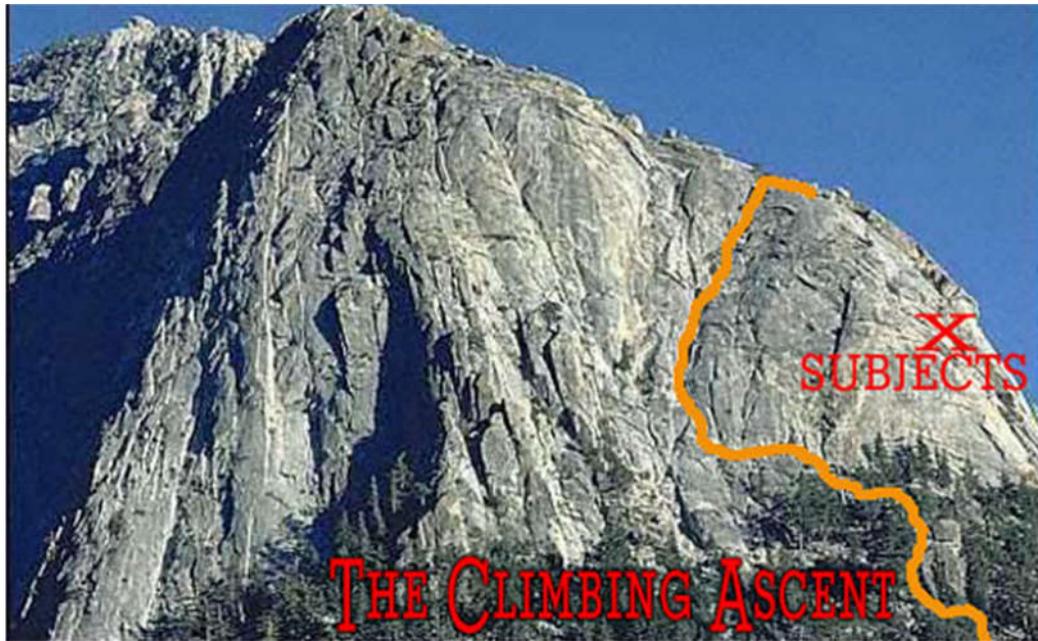
Lee and Helene helped us get our gear sorted and prepared the extra rope to be worn like a backpack up the route. Donny had a full rack of cams and nuts, plus runners and slings; I had the exact duplicate set up. We just did not know what we might need, but all this gear did not make for a nimble climb! With headlights and helmets on, Lee and Helene joined us on the way to the start of The Trough to wish us good luck.



Donny and Les perparing to Climb
Photo by Helene Lohr

Donny took the lead up and I tied into the rope as we began to Simul climb. Simul climbing is a climbing method or style where both climbers climb at the same time while tied into the rope. Protection is placed by a pseudo-leader and the second removes the pieces of gear. The length of rope used during simul-climbing varies but is often between 15 and 30m. In most cases the climbing team maintains multiple pieces of protection between them to prevent a system failure if one of the pieces was to fail.

Donny made quick time of the first half of the climb. There were spots that would normally be very easy to climb but with all of our gear it turned what would normally be a 5.4 climb into something a little harder. I reached Donny at Pine Tree Ledge where he had set up a fast belay in case I needed it. I took the lead from there up to the summit, which was another 200 feet above.



Rescuers Route up to Top of Rock
Photo by Les Walker

As Donny and I both reached the summit we were met in the face by 30 mph winds and very cold temperatures. The climb up The Trough had been protected from the wind, so this was a real surprise to us. We wasted no time in getting over to the top of the route that the subjects were on. Donny set up a system of redundant anchors and I flaked out the ropes and prepared the gear for the subjects. Donny tied in one rope and began his rappel over and into the darkness holding on to the rope until he was able to throw the rope without the wind tangling it all up. I waited to hear from Donny as he made his way to "Lunch Ledge", which was just above the subjects. Donny radioed that he was in voice and visual contact. Donny advised me he was all anchored in down there and it was OK for me to start my rappel. It was not an easy rappel due to the wind at the top. It wanted to push you in the opposite direction of where you needed to go, but as I made it further over the ledge the wind backed off and it was smooth going. I stopped and set in a directional anchor to help guide the ropes the way we wanted them to go for the ascent. As I reached Donny he had already started the anchor system to rappel to where the two subjects were stranded.

Donny made quick work of that and he nimbly rappelled down to the subjects and radioed back that they were all in good health and ready to "get off this rock"! Donny then proceeded to get the subjects prepared for the climb back up as I set up the belay system to haul them up the short 50-foot crack to what we call Lunch Ledge.



Subjects Route and Rescuers Decent Route
Photo by Les Walker

Donny untangled the subjects gear and the mess that led to them being stranded in the first place, and got one of them tied-in short on the rope. Donny gave me the OK to start hauling the first climber up. The first climber made it up fine and anchored in behind me. Donny tied in the other climber and once again the haul up the crack began. The second climber also made it up fine, anchored in, and took a seat next to his partner behind me. Donny then made his way up to the ledge. While he worked on getting the belay anchors cleaned up, I went up our top rope and traversed over to the top of the subjects rope that they had abandoned, which was tied to a tree about 50 feet to our south. I gathered the rope and made my way back to Lunch Ledge to hand off their rope. I then climbed my way to the top to set up the long belay for the subjects.

Donny was preparing the subjects for the long climb up by giving encouraging guidance and instructions as to how to pass the directional anchor we had placed. I topped out into 30 M.P.H. winds again, and switched over to my belay system to bring these boys up. Donny had set up a bomb-proof anchor and it was going to be needed; the route that we were bringing the boys up was well beyond their ability to climb, so it was going to be more of a haul than a belay.

Donny tied in the first guy and gave me the OK to start pulling him up. The wind was so strong that I could not hear what was going on 200 feet below me, so I had to rely on feeling the rope as if I had a fish on the end and was reeling it in. It was slow going as each climber was in well over his head on this route and had to rely on the belay to make it up the hardest sections. But after 30 minutes of arm-stretching pulling, both

subjects were on top with me. I gave the word to Donny that all were up and he was free to climb when he was ready. Donny made it up the route in minutes with no help from me needed. He nearly ran up that section as I pulled the rope through my belay devices as fast as I could. Donny crested over the lip with his headlight blazing and a huge smile on his face! "Let's get off this rock," he said and directed the subjects to help us gather up our ropes while Donny and I pulled our anchors.

We radioed Base with the good news that all were on top, but the mission was still not over. The descent down the back side of Tahquitz is as tricky as some of the climbing routes. We made our way through the maze of cracks, ledges and a few trees to the trail that would eventually lead us back to the main trail. We meet up with Lee and Helene and they helped share the weight of our gear and lead the way down the steep trail back to Humber Park and Base. It was great when entering the parking lot with the two subjects to see six waiting team members who were all ready to help if needed.



RMRU Les, Two Subjects, and RMRU Donny at Base
Photo by Helene Lohr

RMRU team members present: Lee Arnson, Paul Caraher, Pete Carlson, Donny Goetz, Glenn Henderson, Ralph Hoetger, Helene Lohr, Dana Potts, Les Walker, and Gwenda Yates.

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

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