

Stranded Climbers Tahquitz Rock

April 15, 2014
Tahquitz Rock Idyllwild
2014-012

Written by Les Walker

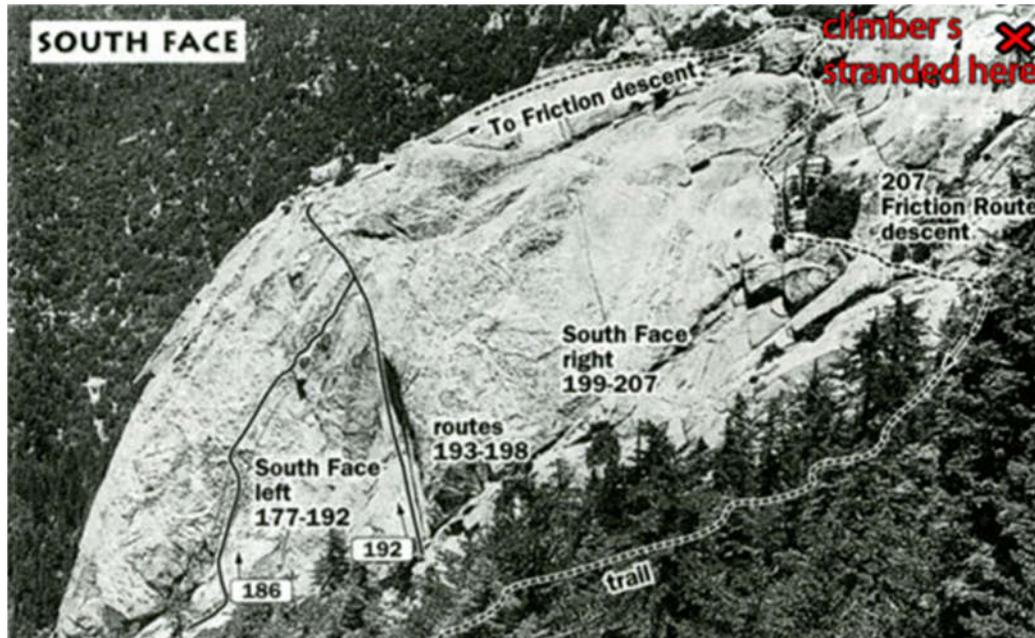
The phone rang around 8:45 pm on April 15th. It was Glenn Henderson on the line asking me if I would go in and access the situation with two lost climbers/hikers. According to Glenn who had been in phone contact with them, they could not find the friction decent route down off of Tahquitz rock. Glenn and I felt that it would be an easy mission, “just go in and direct them out of the forest on the south side of Tahquitz.” Glenn gave me the subject’s cell number and I gave them a call.

I asked them where they thought they might be. There was a long pause with no response. Are you in the forest I asked? No they said. Are you on low angle rock? No was their answer again. Are you still on Tahquitz Rock? Yes, they replied. They had not relayed this info to Glenn as to where they were. They were a little embarrassed about their situation. OK, I said, stand by, we will get to you. At this point I gave Gwenda our call Captain a call and asked her to put out a team stand by until we could figure out where these two were. I then gave Eric Holden a call, and asked him to back me up. Eric is a competent canyoneering guy and I knew he would be familiar with my gear if needed.

So with back up on the way and the team on stand-by if needed, I make my way to Humber Park and waited for the Sheriff Deputy to arrive. I arranged all my gear in the parking lot while I wait. I pack a small rope, a hand full of locking carabineers, some webbing, runners, harness, helmet and headlamps. Just for good measure my trusty climbing shoes get added. Plus all the gear I normally carry on a mission, first-aid, water, food, some sort of shelter. Just as I was loading all that in my bag the deputy shows up and I was able to let him know what was going on and to give him a team radio so I could stay in contact. I arranged all the gear I needed Eric to bring up when he arrived and advised the deputy to give it to him upon his arrival. Eric would have a huge load of an 80 meter climbing rope and a huge rack of cams, nuts, and ascending gear to bring me if this mission turned out to be a much bigger challenge than we thought.

I hit the trail and within 40 minutes I make my way around to the south face of Tahquitz

rock and give a yell out to the subjects. They respond back that they can hear me but not see me yet. So I make my way around and up the friction descent expecting to find them just above the tree line in on the rock. “It is easy to get lost there if you have not been shown the way.” But I can’t see them yet so I yell out again and they yell back, we can see your headlight! Awesome, I am close! Turn on a light or something I yell back, they turn on their headlight and yell back. WE ARE UP HERE!



Spot Climbers Stranded

I look around and then finally way up toward the summit blocks I see there light. I see you I yell! And then yell, “How the heck did you get there”? We rappelled here they answered! Dang, they look to be pretty high up on a small ledge. I make my way up the descent route and get myself where I can talk with them without yelling. From there I can see they are about one pitch above the top of the descent route. I asked them if they felt confident in rappelling down. No, was the reply and that they did not feel their rope was long enough! OK, stay there I yell up. At that moment it was good to hear Eric on the radio telling me he is just around the corner from me and is on his way up. I let Eric know of the situation and tell him to check back with me when he gets to the “Open Book” area of the rock. I was very happy to know that Eric was just minutes away if I needed him!

Meanwhile I made my way along a ledge and up a trough so I can see the climbers a little better and decide that I can make it to them with a small scramble over a steep section and on to their ledge. I let Eric know what I am doing and that I feel confident I can reach them. So with a little sure footedness and a bright headlamp I make my way up and over

to them, as I crested over the ledge to them I could see two huge smiles. They were as happy to see me as I was them! From there I just organized a rappel and used their rope and anchor to rappel off and over to see if I could reach the bottom. If I was unable to, I had equipment with me to ascend the rope if needed. But I made it over and down with 3 foot of rope to spare. I then directed the two climbers to rappel to me as I did a fireman's belay on them for backup. Both got down to me and we pulled their rope. There where hugs all around. We then walked down to Eric and down the trail to the awaiting Deputy.



**Eric left, Subjects center, Les right
Photo by Sheriff.**

What they did wrong: The climbers did not know the area or the way off the rock, they did the research on the climb up, but not how to get off. They were not equipped to spend the night on the rock. They did not have the right clothing or enough water.

What they did right: Stayed put, when they knew they were in over their heads and called for help.

RMRU Members Involved: Eric Holden and Les Walker.

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.