



High Country Rescue-Hike

May 2, 2016

North Slope of Marion Mountain

2016-017

Written by Lee Arnson

As I was home for a late lunch at 2:30 pm, I received a text from Deputy Eric Hannum, one of the Technical flight officers for the Sheriffs aviation unit, that they were flying over the local high country searching for a missing Pacific Crest Trail hiker, and he wanted to give me a heads up that the team might be activated. This time of year, Idyllwild and the nearby high country is inundated with hikers from all over the world as they are passing thru this area in the hopes of completing the 2,600-mile journey from Mexico to Canada. Eric then sent me another text saying the search was a “go” and to notify the team, of which I did by contacting our call captain Gwenda Yates. All we knew at this time was that our subject was a woman who had called for help.

The initial call-out was to respond to Humber Park and head to Saddle Junction and search that portion of the wilderness. Shortly after, we were re-directed to The Marion Mountain trail head because she had been spotted by the aviation unit somewhere above the Fuller Ridge trail in an area that was still completely covered with snow.

The next text I received is the one that all rescuers dream of, and that was to respond to Keen Wild helicopter base, where I would be met by Deputy Hannum and Chief pilot Andy Rasmussen where we would be flying in to hopefully get our subject out before it got dark and the weather changed for the worse. While this was going on, Glenn Henderson was at the Marion Mountain trail head waiting for other team members to show up and eventually get some team some teams in the field if we could not get our subject out with the helicopter.

While flying in with Eric and Andy, I got briefed on the situation. Eric had spotted her on a fly over earlier and locked in the coordinates, and told her to stay put. Upon arriving at the general area, we could still see her below us, but we were now faced with the task of getting me on the ground so I could get to her. There was no place to land the helicopter so it was decided we would do a hover step onto a large boulder, where I would get out and work my way down to the stranded woman. Well, as it turned out, the rock they put me onto was huge, and very tricky to get off of, and I knew there was no way I was going

to get our subject back to it so she could get on board and be flown to safety. This was discouraging due to time constraints and dark clouds on the horizon. I waved Eric off, in the hopes of maybe we could get her out by a hoist instead. I finally made it to the woman, who had no injuries, but was stuck in the snow and disoriented.

Eric was now in the process of lowering the “screamer suit”, a large body harness we will be using to hoist out our stranded hiker. I briefed the young lady on how this was going to work, as this point in the rescue is very high energy. There is a very strong rotor wash from the helicopter, we are knee deep in snow on a 30-degree slope, there is no room for error or time for questions, it’s just go time.

Because of the superb flying on Andy’s part, and Eric’s great timing of running the hoist cable out, the hoist hook was put right into my hands. (These guys are amazing) I clipped the subject to the hook, and her pack onto a secondary hook, and away she flew. Mission accomplished. Except Eric was now able to send me another text, the one most rescuers don’t want to receive, that they could not return back to fly me out due to weather conditions. I was going to have to hike out. Not a big deal really, I know full well that just because you fly in, it does not mean that you are flying out. So after getting my bearings on where I actually was, I headed to the Marion Mountain trail head, about a two-hour hike, and all downhill. I met up with Glenn towards the end and we had a nice hike out.

RMRU Members Involved: Lee Arnson, Cameron Dickinson, Gary Farris, Glenn Henderson, Eric Holden, and Kevin Kearns.

Riverside County Sheriffs Aviation Unit: Chief pilot Andy Rasmussen and Technical flight officer Eric Hannum.

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.