



Stranded Climbers Tahquitz Rock

April 22, 2018
Tahquitz Rock
2018-006

Written by Eric Holden

Sunday morning, I had just finished making breakfast for my family when at 8am the callout came. Two climbers have been stuck on the side of Tahquitz Rock since yesterday. They had been climbing Whodunit, a 5.9, 5-8 pitch climb up the northwest recess and got off route. I quickly tossed all my personal climbing gear and ropes into the car and headed out. I met with Glenn at Keenwild heliport and we get the information from the Riverside Sheriff's Aviation Unit (Star-9) who had flown over the subjects. They were approximately 200-300ft from the summit and under a roof.

We come up with a plan to move personal and gear to the top of Tahquitz Rock via helicopter and then would perform a pick off once on top. I would go over the side and Glenn would run operations, Ray was down at Humber Park with binoculars to run communications and base. Glenn grabbed some gear and was the first to be inserted. While Glenn was dropped off Mike and Pete arrived at Keenwild. After Star-9 returned I loaded it with more ropes and gear. A quick flight later and Star-9 was expertly hovering above Tahquitz to allow a "Hover Step" of about 5 feet.

A couple more trips and we had all the ropes, gear and personnel at the top of the rock. Anchors were set up and I rappelled down to the two subjects.



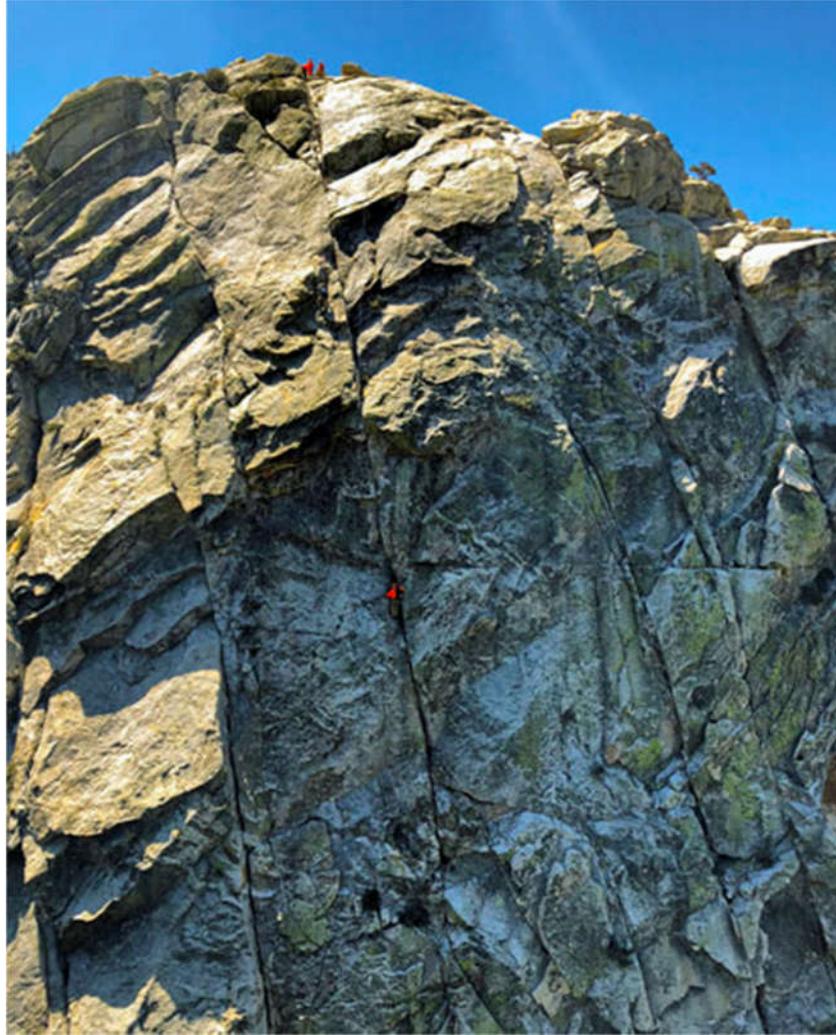
Eric Reppalling Trailing Two Ropes
Photo by Glenn Henderson.

As we didn't know their exact distance from the top I had an extra 200ft of rope on my back in case it was over 200ft. Turns out, it was almost exactly 200ft and we could perform the rescue without having to tie ropes together. The two subjects, Zach and Tom, spent the night wedged in a crack about a foot wide on a route called The Consolation Direct (5.10a/b).



**Subjects Zach top and Tom bottom where they spent the night
Photo by Eric Holden.**

After a quick assessment neither was injured, both well hydrated and fed. I attached Tom to our two rescue lines and we had him start climbing up while Glenn, Pete and Mike used a 3:1 haul line with backup belay line to assist. While Tom was being raised, Star-9 came in and dropped off Tony (one of our two Yosemite big wall climbers on the team).



**Eric on Face with Tom Climbing Up and Rescue Members on Top
Photo by Eric Humman TFO from Helicopter.**

Once Tom was successfully raised, Tony was able to get both rescue lines back down to me. I hooked Zach up and he repeated his partners climb to the top of the rock. Hooking up my ascenders I began the fun process of jumaring back up the rope carrying a full pack, an extra rope, and the rope I was jumaring on. Once back on top I learned Corey had arrived and was making his way up the climber's trail to assist with carrying gear out. Corey quickly met up with the team and we all made the hike back down to Humber Park.



Rescuers and Subjects at Base
Photo by RSO Deputy.

What went wrong? Our subjects got off route which put them in terrain that was out of their ability. They didn't feel they could safely descend, ascend, or get back on their target route and called 911. Having personally pulled two fatalities off the rock in less than 9 months, I am very glad they chose to sacrifice some pride instead of risking the consequences.

Things to learn? Always carry a good route description. A quick beta printout weighs next to nothing and can be carried by the lead climber if any questions arise. Have a bailout plan and know where good rappel stations are. Know that on any climb you may have to sacrifice gear to make the bailout plan work.

RMRU Members Involved: Pete Carlson, Corey Ellison, Glenn Henderson, Eric Holden, Tony Hughes, Michael George, and Raymond Weden.

Riverside Sheriff's Aviation: Andy Rasmussen (Pilot) and Eric Hannum (Technical Flight Officer).

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.