



Apache Peak Injury

April 11, 2019

PCT Trail below Apache Peak

2019-021

Written by Eric Holden

I had just gotten home from work, when @1630 the call came out for an injured PCT Hiker near Apache Peak. This immediately made me think of a rescue just 7 days ago, see Mission 17-19. I start on my way to Lake Hemet and we get the subject's lat/long. Turns out they are on the other side of the mountain, the west side, the easy side, the one that will take us 2 hours to get up and 2 to get back. "Thankfully this mission isn't in the same place as last time," I thought to myself, knowing how difficult of a rescue this would be if it was.

After arriving at RSO's Mountain Station at Lake Hemet I met with Cameron and we spoke with Cal Fire who was attempting to perform a hoist of the subject. "Even better," I thought, "the mission will be over soon." Unfortunately, they could not perform it due to high winds, but would be willing to land us about ½ mile away from the subject. When they came to pick us up, we received a briefing of what they saw. They spotted him about 200ft down a snow slope... wait snow... there is no snow on the west side. I ask Cal Fire to show me on map where the subject was and sure enough, it was in the exact same location at the mission 7 days ago. I quickly repack all my gear making sure I have my ice axe and crampons.

With daylight fading, Cameron and I boarded the Cal Fire helicopter and got dropped near the saddle of Apache peak in 40-50mph winds. Good job to the pilot for landing us in some white knuckled major chop. They flew back down to try and drop Blake and James off, but even after multiple attempts, the winds were just too strong.



Eric at drop off point at Sunset
Photo by Cameron Dickinson.

With Glenn running base, Cameron and I started hiking to our subject, knowing we would be out of radio contact until team 2 hiked up. We crossed the snow slopes and found our subject, Ross. He had fallen ~120ft down a 40-degree snow slope and was only stopped by the large amounts of chinquapin bushes. Luckily, two PCT hikers had watched him fall and were already with him rendering aid. He had multiple lacerations, an injured knee, an injured foot, but nothing seemed broken and Ross thought he could hike back out.



Raise at Night back to Trail
Photo by Eric Holden.

Our first step was to raise Ross back up 120ft to the trail using a 3:1 haul system. Thankfully the two other PCT hikers helped us out and after 1 reset (only 100ft of rope) we got Ross back to the trail. The sun had long gone down, and winds were still 40mph with temps now in the 40s. We wrapped Ross in down sleeping bags and re-rigged our rope as a hand/safety line to cross the dangerous ice slopes that Ross had fallen on. Unfortunately, at this point Ross had deteriorated and was suffering from Hypothermia and could barely stand, let alone walk. We abandoned the thoughts of getting out tonight.

Using my ice axe, I leveled out a 6x2ft wide section of ice and dirt to set up the tent on the steep mountain face. We got Ross into the tent with many down sleeping bags, keeping him roped in and anchored to a tree because if he rolled during the night, it would be a long way down. We made some hot food and Cameron went back across the ice slopes to speak with Blake and James who were now close to our position and to let base know our new plan. One of the PCT hikers had to continue on the trail to meet up

with his partner and the other joined Cameron to head back along the snow slopes. Once Cam made it safely, it was determined that Blake and Cam would have to return to base and James would stay on the other side to be able to communicate with base if needed. Base said they would try to get another hoist at 9am the next morning. I signed off for the night and joined Ross in the tent.



Tent on Trail
Photo by Eric Holden.

I spent the next 8 hours with Ross, making sure he ate, drank, and stayed warm. Throughout the night I would check his vitals every hour and CSM of his badly bruised ankles and legs. Winds were 30-40mph throughout the night with temps in the high 20s. At one point, the tent had slid down the slope some, with a corner floating over the edge and a lean of about 60-degrees. Getting up, I made a few more Deadman anchors in the snow and secured the tent. Almost falling once myself, I grabbed the tent for safety and quickly felt the pole snap under my weight. Using some spare poles, I made a makeshift

repair that would hold the rest of the night. I took a few minutes for myself and gazed at the glittering lights of Palm Springs before returning to the tent.

At first light, I got out of the tent and wrapped Ross up nice and snug in my sleeping bag as well as the two other down bags. I got on the radio and was so thankful to hear James's voice on the other side. He was doing well, but unfortunately didn't have spikes or crampons. I let Ross know that I had to leave for a few minutes. Grabbing our spare micro spikes, I made my way back over to James. Once traction had been secured, we both got back to Ross who was now snoring away. Turning on my phone for the first time, I realized I had 4G!!!! A couple of calls later we were now in communication with base. We let them know our subject's condition and the plan was still to have a helicopter try another hoist at 9am.

Due to our current location, a hoist would not be possible, and the only tree opening was about 100ft back down the ice slopes, the way Ross had fallen yesterday. James went down and using his ice axe, made a flat 4'x2' area in the 40-degree snow slope. I rigged a lowering system and at 8am we woke Ross up, made sure he was fed and watered, and began the lowering process onto the perfect waiting location James had made. We wrapped him in down bags and awaited word on the possible hoist.

Unfortunately, there were multiple issues with getting a helicopter out. I had James start preparing for "Plan B", which would involve multiple diagonal raises and lowers to get Ross to the other side of the snow slopes, with Shani and Cal Fire ground personnel hiking back up the mountain. Thankfully our brothers from Cal Fire 301 were ready to assist. At 11am we finally heard one of the most beautiful sounds that a rescuer can hear in the back county, the whoop whoop whoop of a helicopter's blades echoing off the mountains. At this time, the winds had died down to under 10mph. Cal Fire dropped two rescuers off who quickly hiked over to us. They loaded Ross in a screamer suit and expertly performed a hoist rescue. We took down our ropes and other gear and met with the Cal Fire crew for a quick hike out to the landing zone near the saddle. Within minutes we were back at base, greeted by Glenn and Shani.



Cal-Fire 301 at Base with Subject on Board
Photo by Glenn Henderson.



Sheriff getting Information from Subject with Shani checking vitals
Photo by Glenn Henderson.

RMRU would like to thank all those that assisted in this rescue, from the two PCT Hikers, Cal Fire 301, and the Riverside Sheriff's Department. Without all these individual teams working together this rescue may not have turned with such good results.

RMRU Members Involved: Cameron Dickinson, Blake Douglas, James Eckhardt, Glenn Henderson, Eric Holden, and Shani Pynn.

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.