



Broken Wrist Devils Slide

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Humber Park, Idyllwild
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Written by Blake Douglas

The message on the rescue line was "two lost and injured hikers, possible broken leg or arm, report to Humber Park". I kissed my wife and daughter goodnight, knowing I'd probably be out until dawn; broken limbs, combined with three or more hours just to reach the subjects, were likely to make this one difficult. Fortunately, when we (Glenn, James, Cameron, and myself) arrived at Humber Park, we were told that the injury was actually a hand or wrist problem...much less life-threatening, and it was nice to head up Devil's Slide knowing the subject's life wasn't immediately in peril.

A few minutes up the trail we encountered a team of firefighters in full BDUs headed down; they had hiked all the way to Saddle Junction and performed extensive callouts, but because they weren't authorized to travel beyond the junction, they had to turn around. It was a clear, still night, ideal conditions for callouts, and it was disappointing that they had no luck. Callouts often feel like an exercise in frustration because there are so many ways for them to go wrong. Was your call loud enough to overcome the terrain? Were you even facing toward the subject? Are they conscious, and if so, are they capable of a response? Did that rustle of your pack, or the sound of your own breath, drown out their reply? Usually it feels like callouts never work until they do, and that was the case again here.

As we neared Saddle Junction, Glenn advised that Kaitlyn Purington had joined us and would be heading up the trail soon, and that we should leave one person at the junction to form Team Two with her. Cameron needed to be on Team One, as he was the only one with MRA certification, whereas James and I are still trainees. One round of rock-paper-scissors later, Cameron and I continued as Team One, doing frequent, but unsuccessful, callouts. James waited for Kaitlyn and became Team Two.

On arriving at the coordinates, our callouts were met once again with silence. We kept hiking, deliberating on whether to continue all the way to the peak and the rescue hut there, but our calls were finally answered only a few moments later, 200 feet in elevation above the coordinates provided by the deputy. Our subjects hadn't heard a single callout except the final one, presumably because the ledge they were on deflected or blocked them. Both subjects looked to be in good shape and more than ready to get out of the forest. As reported, the female had a wrist injury that, while painful, wasn't debilitating, although she had snapped one of her hiking poles in half from the force of the fall that

caused the injury. Cameron dressed her arm with a sling while we discussed their predicaments.

As best we could put together from their recollections, our subject's struggles began when, following the injury, they missed the sign at the Wellman Divide junction. There just seems to be something about this junction, missing it is one of the most common wayfinding errors in the San Jacinto high country. Our subjects, thinking they were headed east toward the tram, were heading south toward the state park border and a junction locally referred to as Annie's Junction. At Annie's they headed west, and made it all the way to the Strawberry Junction with the Deer Springs Trail, before second-guessing their route and heading back the way they came, returning to Annie's and heading south again, on Angel's Glide (the local name for the PCT connector between Annie's and Saddle Junction). They eventually ran out of daylight, found a relatively flat outcropping, and called for help.

Once we had reached them, it was a simple matter of hiking them back out the way we came. We met up with Team Two (James and Kailyn) at the Saddle. They were in good spirits and it was a pleasure to enjoy their conversation among the six of us as we headed down Devil's Slide with an abundance of artificial light.

What went wrong: Our subjects had extensive hiking experience, a map, and equipment for a day hike, but did not have a GPS, light sources, or overnight gear. It's essential to plan around the possibility of injury, losing your way, or being out after dark, and packing the appropriate equipment. Fortunately, the weather cooperated on this mission, but if this had happened in winter, or a storm had come up, things would have been much less pleasant.

RMRU Members Involved: Cameron Dickinson, Blake Douglas, James Eckhardt, Glenn Henderson, and Kaitlyn Purington.

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.