

SAR rescue from White Rock Hills Peak Trip Report

by Chris Meyer

I enjoy this peak since it offers a great advanced scrambling experience to the top of a Red Rock NCA peak. Although, we didn't make it to the peak because we needed help from Search and Rescue (SAR). I've been to the top of this peak twice before. Both times following a route along the west side starting from Rocky Gap Road after the Willow Springs Picnic Area. Although, this time I wanted to follow a route from the south side along a ridgeline to the left of the peak closest to the Lost Creek parking area.

Dave Luttmann, Colin Okada, and I met at the Red Rock parking area before the fee station at 07:00 on April 5, 2008. Dave volunteered to drive to the Lost Creek parking area.

We started the hike about 07:30. We proceeded up the White Rock Hills loop trail until we were close to the scrambling route. We enjoyed some class III scrambling. Even taking a photo in front of an over 5 foot tall barrel cactus. I was even surprised to discover small patches of ferns in crevasses along the sandstone. Although, soon into the hike (about 08:00) Dave realized we were heading up terrain that was more than his comfort level. He decided to turn back and hike something easier while Colin and I agreed to continue. We agreed to use our radios to communicate with each other. Dave would meet us back at his car. Dave told me to use ch 18 subch 0.

Colin and I continued up the ridgeline enjoying great class III and IV boulders and chutes. Several areas we had to stop and think of the best route up. Everything was going well until about halfway up. After traveling through manzanita and scrub oak brush I stopped to relieve myself. Colin was going to continue to climb over a boulder. Once I turned around towards Colin all of a sudden I noticed he had just impacted to the ground. A handhold thought to be secure broke loose. Colin fell almost three feet down. When falling backward Colin used his right arm to brace himself. Although, the angle of impact unfortunately dislocated his right shoulder. At first we both thought it was a soft tissue injury. I asked him to raise and move his arm to loosen it up. Although, he was not able to lift his arm past his neck and there was a lot of pain. I then felt his shoulder feeling a bulge. We concluded his shoulder was dislocated and there was absolutely no way we could make it down the mountain via the route we followed. There was no way to get higher to reach an easier way down either. The only way down was with the help of SAR. The accident occurred at 5,385 feet at N 36 degrees 09' 46.5" W 115 degrees 29' 37.4". This position was about 1200 feet from the parking area after traveling about one mile.

Thankfully both of us had our cell phones with us. I didn't have a signal from our location so I moved to another location with a line of sight view of Blue Diamond. I called SAR at about 09:15. I was surprised to discover they can ping my cell phone to determine the GPS coordinates. I confirmed them using my GPS. Although, they don't have the final decimal reading like my GPS.

I went back to Colin to check how he was doing. I suggested he eat his sandwich to keep his energy up and because he won't be able to do so once SAR arrives. I had told SAR I would lay out red webbing on a rock I had brought for this trip near our location. I then sat in the open away from Colin talking to him to wait for a SAR helicopter to arrive. SAR spotted us about 10:00. They circled around our location trying to find a good spot to land. It sure is amazing how well the pilot is able to maneuver in such confined space. These people are very highly trained and experienced. Colin and I thought they would land in the area above us, then down climb. The helicopter found a spot over a hundred feet away (at the same level of us) dropping off a SAR rescuer. After a few minutes I hadn't seen the rescuer so I started heading his direction to help him find a route to us. The rescuer assessed Colin's situation and used a triangular bandage to secure his shoulder. I then realized I should have thought of that as I had a triangular bandage with me in my first aid kit. The SAR rescuer was

happy Colin was able to walk because otherwise they would have to use a basket. He then let us know we get a free ride on a helicopter. Nice gesture, but we never intended for such to occur.

Since Colin was able to walk, there was no need to extract him using a basket. Therefore, we would hike to the landing zone (LZ). I broke off the brush we traveled through to provide a clear path to the LZ. A little up climb was necessary with help from the both of us. The SAR helicopter hovered away from the LZ in the area over the Lost Creek parking lot. I was told to wait while the SAR rescuer led Colin to the LZ area. The helicopter slowly approached the LZ. I then realized the only way to land was for one of the skids to be placed on the rock while the other was floating on air. The pilot did a phenomenal job of keeping the helicopter completely level while Colin and the SAR rescuer boarded the helicopter. Very amazing flying skills! The helicopter then took Colin away to the ambulance.

I was alone on the peak waiting for the helicopter to return for me. Once Colin was hurt I continually tried to radio Dave to let him know what was occurring. Unfortunately there was no response. The helicopter took me down to the Red Rock loop in front of the Sandstone Quarry. The loop was closed to all traffic until the helicopter left. I thanked the SAR rescuer then joined Colin in the ambulance. We were then taken the wrong way on the loop back to the parking area so I can drive Colin's car to Summerlin Hospital. I couldn't drive my car because my keys were in Dave's car.

Colin was in great spirits the entire time. Although, his shoulder was throbbing. The doctors confirmed via x-rays his shoulder was dislocated. My wife Kristi had to meet me at the hospital with a spare set of keys to my car. She then took me to my car. I then went out onto the loop to find Dave. While traveling the loop I tried to reach him on the radio with no luck. I finally found Dave sitting in his car at the Lost Creek parking area. It turns out his radio only went up to ch 14. I told him the situation. We then went to the hospital. By the time we arrived Colin's shoulder was back in place and he was sleeping. We left the emergency room about 15:00. I drove him to my house to watch over him, had dinner, and then determined he could be left alone for the night. We went back to the hospital to get his car and drove him back to his house.

The next day I asked another Pink Jeep Tour guides who was at Red Rock that morning for tour about the rescue from their perspective. I know they would have been in the Rocky Gap/Willow Springs area at the time of the rescue. They of course had no idea what had happened. A guide told me there was a fire truck in the area and that a BLM Ranger approached him stating something in a derogatory manner indicating something to the effect of that this incident was a tour guide's fault. Since SAR asked me my occupation, I told then I was a tour guide. The SAR rescuer then asked if Colin was a client. I told him no way. A tour company would never take someone up this peak and they wouldn't have permits to do so anyway. Apparently, word spread that a tour guide was involved and blame was directed to the first tour company seen by a ranger – Pink Jeep Tours.

In any case, Colin is doing well and he is in great spirits. He had a great time with the route and he has no regrets knowing full well the risks for these kinds of activities. He will recover and be out on the mountains again in the near future!