

Hello Fellow Hikers!

I'm writing you today to share an experience we had in the "X" Hiking Club on Thursday May 22, 2008 during the Babad Do'ag hike.

One of our excellent hikers (Chris) fell off a ledge and had a 63 foot fall. This fall caused Chris to experience 11 broken ribs, (some broken in multiple places) a shattered scapula (shoulder blade), two punctured and collapsed lungs, a compression fracture in his L1 vertebrae and a laceration to his head. We had to airlift him out of the canyon on a direct flight to UMC where he was cared for and is now recovering! YIPPEE!

After visiting with Chris at the hospital this evening, he said he wanted people to learn from his experience and to BE SAFE. Chris was NOT hot-dogging or taking unnecessary chances. He was simply boulder climbing and slipped. Accidents happen just as if you drive a car long enough you will have an accident. If you walk enough steps, you will trip and possibly fall. There was nothing Chris or any of the group could have done to prevent this!

However, being prepared for something like this can be the difference between life and death! We were prepared and came together as a team with an end result of our friend Chris surviving this dramatic fall.

I'd like to share the details of the event so you know what happened and how to create a team to handle a situation like this. Below is my story of what happened and how we addressed each part of the rescue. We want all of our members to learn from our experience as we fine tune our rescue techniques even more.

So, with that said ... I'm sure most of you are chomping at the bit wanting to know what happened, how it happened and how we handled it. Here are the details, hot off the press.

### **CHRIS'S ADVENTURE!**

As we crested the waterfall area at Babad Do'ag, we decide as a group to explore further. We trekked up the wash and around the backside of the next highest peak. Climbing to this new peak required some straight forward hiking, bushwhacking and boulder climbing. I kept close to the two females (Kim and Nicole) asking if they were comfortable with the path we chose to which they replied yes.

It was another beautiful hike as we took our time and crested the next peak. As we were enjoying the views, we looked at the dirt foot trail we would be taking to the trail head. Chris started down first with Bob close by. What happened next, we don't know for sure, but Bob

explained it as Chris jumping to a ledge and then losing his balance after trying to reach for something to hold on to. One second he was there and the next second he vanished from our sight like a snowflake on a hot summer's day.

We believe he may have gone over backwards tumbling over 60 feet to the ground bouncing off boulders on the bottom. Bob yelled to everyone on the summit that Chris had slipped and isn't responding. Kim immediately kicked into gear and told John to call 911. Bob scrambled one way toward Chris and I another. I reached him first in about 30 seconds but playing it safe not wanting to hurt myself. Sometimes we get so caught up in getting to someone in a hurry, we will injure ourselves. Slowing down will only shave a few second off your arrival and reduce your chance of getting injured up to 50%

When I arrived to the lower level where Chris was, I heard him asking for help. I told him to stop using his energy and I would return with Kim. I scrambled back up the mountain where I informed Kim to come with me. John was to stay at the top with a cell phone while Nicole would work her way down at her own speed.

It was brutally windy and cold at this point. In fact, it was windier at the lower level than at the peak where John was. Kim and I arrived where Chris was in record time while she assessed the situation. She immediately saw his head bleeding and asked for someone to give her a shirt so she could apply direct pressure. Bob (first time hiker with the club) pulled off his only shirt without thought exposing himself to the bitter cold and willingly passed his shirt over to Kim.

After the bleeding had mostly stopped, Kim sat down on one side of Chris and Nicole on the other. They watched his breathing, asked him questions and kept him alert. Kim knew what to look for and kept him calm. She assured him over and over again he was okay and everything would be all right. She kept him in the position he was in and wouldn't allow him to move. (Rule number one, when you are in a situation like this...DO NOT MOVE THE VICTIM) I radioed John asking for the status of what the 911 personnel was saying.

John was repeating questions to me via our two way radios and I was relaying the answers back. After a few questions, the 911 operator said they would contact the Sheriff and have them hike in to our location. We knew Chris was in pretty bad shape and time was our enemy so we ramped it up and "demanded" an air lift. It's better to have more equipment and personnel than you need, than to not have enough. Don't be afraid to embellish the story to get someone out there when you're not sure of their injuries.

John had left his phone number with 911 and was waiting for a call back with instructions and/or information. Minutes now turned into hours according to our internal clocks as we screamed from within asking ..."where's that chopper?" Our friend was breathing with much labor and he felt his broken ribs. I was getting ready to radio John once again when he called me to inform us a chopper was blasting off from the Tucson airport and would be here shortly.

I was huddled in a corner of some rock formation keeping the radio far away from Chris in case the answers we wanted weren't as positive as they should be. Kim taught me it was vitally important to set the tone and keep the mood very positive. When I heard the news of the chopper lifting off, I quickly ran over to share the great news!

Waiting for what seemed like eternity, we finally heard the drumming noise of the chopper blades ripping through the air. I asked anyone of them had a mirror and Bob pulled a survival mirror from his pack. As I looked up into the sky, I saw the clouds come rolling in and was uncertain if the mirror would be useful.

My next thought was a bright colored shirt or piece of material that would allow the chopper to see us. Nobody had anything that would be noticeable other than the small yellow gloves I was wearing. I was waving my arms to the chopper while telling John to relay our position. "3:00 o'clock John, tell them we're at 3:00" I yelled into the 2 way radio. The chopper seems lost in a mirage of rock, boulders and dirt that seemed to be camouflaging us against our wishes. There we sat like the perfect Chameleon blending into the mountain side wondering if they would ever see us. John was waving a white shirt tied to a stick while trying to stay in the sweet spot where the cell phone would work. I kept telling John to tell them what position we were at until they finally spotted us WHEW!

As the chopper approached us we sat here with deep anticipation of what the rescue would bring next. I didn't have my amateur radio so I wasn't able to communicate with them directly. I used hand signals pointing to the two areas I suggested for landing. They hovered for two minutes and then flew around looking for a place to land. I watched intently as they moved closer to the lower landing spot I had pointed to. The chopper was still five feet off the ground hovering what seemed like a lifetime. "Land, you silly pilot!" I thought as the wind blew me off my stance.

What I saw next had to be the most discouraging sight someone in Chris's position could ever experience. We all watched as the chopper ramped up his engines and flew further off the pad where we thought

he would land. As he climbed into the sky we thought he wasn't happy with that spot and would choose another landing area. However, and much to our surprise, he had left and completely flown out of sight.

I immediately called John on the radio and asked him to call 911 and get an update. John had two cell phones on two different carriers trying to find that sweet spot on the summit where he could keep a connection. The wind fiercely blew across his body pushing him out of the zone and made it impossible to hear or speak to the emergency crew. He finally radioed me back to inform me the chopper needed more staff and equipment and would be back.

I was furious with this inadequate part of the operation but my hands were tied. I realized I had to stay calm and tell everyone the chopper would be back before you could say "boo!" About 10 minutes later, the chopper reappeared and once again hovered over us for another evaluation. The next move would be touchdown at the lower level landing area I suggested. John was on the summit while Kim, Nicole and I were huddled together sharing what body heat we had left. My legs were numb from the cold and from being in the fetal position for so long. I'm sure Kim and Nicole felt the same way but they were determined not to leave Chris' side.

Our next glimpse of hope was seeing two people emerge from the chopper with a ton of gear. Bob decides to scramble down to the paramedics with thoughts of helping them get back up to our location. They were far off in the distance and I couldn't see what they were carrying so I asked Kim if she could handle the radio and take care of Chris so I could go help the paramedic up the hill. It had been about 5 minutes since Bob left so I figured I would catch up with him by taking a more direct path. I handed her the radio and shot down the mountain like a rocket. I had to keep reminding myself I had to stay calm and focus on my footing. I couldn't afford to be careless and take any unnecessary chances jeopardizing the rescue of my friend Chris.

When I arrived at the landing zone, the two paramedics were just leaving the drop off point. I introduced myself and asked if I could help them with anything. One of them handed me a large heavy medical bag to which I replied ..."are you hikers?" to which they said ..."kinda." I scoured the horizon for Bob but he was nowhere to be found. Did I lose another hiker to this mountainside? As I turned around, starting my venture up the hill, Bob poked his head out from down below. I told him to come back on my route and had the paramedics follow me.

The only thought in my mind is their last answer to my question which was "if they were hikers." Okay so I'm thinking they're "kinda" hikers

but I knew I could motivate them into becoming “real” hikers and really soon. I took off like a bullet up the mountain and when they lagged 20 feet behind, I would stop and give the “hurry up” look hoping to shame them into not stopping. This happened several times up the mountain until we came to a place where we lost sight of Chris and the two girls. I asked them to call the chopper which had been hovering over us for directions. I heard him say they were to the NE but I knew there was no direct way they could get there. I quickly scanned the mountainside eagerly looking for the path I came down. There it was ... the crevasse I had slid down. I recognized an old dead cactus near the trail so I led them up and around the bluff where we could now see our party.

When we arrived, Chris was starting to labor more with his breathing so we knew we had to speed up this rescue to give him every chance. The paramedic placed Chris on oxygen and starting taking his vitals. Another person did the charting for the paramedic as they asked Chris some more questions. I helped hold the oxygen bottle while the paramedic assembled the apparatus in the cold blustery wind. Nicole, still bundled up in a ball had one arm stretched out in the cold so she could hold an extra shirt over Chris' legs to help keep him warm. Kim and Nicole wouldn't leave Chris' side until the paramedics asked for more room.

The paramedics then radioed the chopper to bring the back board and bag so they could take Chris to the lower level before placing him in the chopper. I decided to clear the area and help the girls down the mountain to a flat surface near the chopper. Bob helped as we guided everyone down to a place about 100 feet from the chopper. John stayed up top to help with the backboard and stay in radio contact with me. I radioed back to John asking if they still needed extra help to load Chris on the backboard, but he said other rescue hikers had come to the site and they were set.

The rescue party brought us jackets and pants to put on so we would be warmer and out of the wind. We dug through their bag discovering whatever we could to get our body heat back to normal. As we were putting our new digs on, we heard the chopper spin his blades up taking off to where Chris was. This is when he would be dropping off the backboard that would soon be Chris's saving grace. After the drop-off, the paramedics waved the chopper off and would radio him when they were ready with Chris strapped in for the ride of his life.

They moved Chris from his sitting position and started working him toward the backboard. He was not a happy camper and voiced his

pain as he was telling the paramedic he couldn't breathe. After assessing him once again, they decided to needle him allowing the air trapped in his chest cavity to escape. This gave him enough relief to get on the backboard and get strapped in.

Chris was now ready for that ride "for" his life as they called the chopper back in. The pilot swiftly maneuvered the chopper into place as if he had landed it on a stationary cloud. The wind was bucking hard with gusts up to 45 mph but the pilot would not submit the chopper to Mother Nature. Listening for radio contact from the ground, they were able to secure Chris and one of the paramedics to the apparatus as lift-off commenced. The chopper flew Chris over to the original landing area, setting him down on the ground like a feather floating to its resting place.

The team immediately disconnected the tether and stuffed Chris into the chopper. The blades spinning up once again as he blasted off in the direction of UMC. They were originally going to fly him down to the outlook and send him in an ambulance. However, we kept indicating UMC would be a good choice and we were very adamant about our concerns. Once again, you have to take charge when in a situation like this and when time is working against you!

The reason for all these details is to share the magnitude of what happened and what "could have" happened had we not been prepared or stayed calm. It was a close call, but staying calm and focused with a plan was what made this happen. Team work is vital in situations like this and decisions have to be made effortlessly and quickly. Someone has to TAKE CHARGE and be a leader. This gives the other people on the team a sense of security while under the stress of an unfamiliar situation.

I hope Chris's experience is a great lesson to all of us. The "X" Club members who were on this trek are all helping in formulating even better safety precautions for our future hikes. We will be announcing some of the changes in future e-mails, letting you know how these safety changes will enhance and assure maximum safety for all of our hikers!

Chris says hello to everyone and we will be giving updates of his hospital stay as we see fit. He's asked that everyone gives him his privacy until he is ready for visitors. At that point, we will share his information if you care to visit, write or call.

We will also be holding a fund raiser for Chris to pay for expenses that he will incur from this unfortunate accident. He does have insurance but there is a deductible. The "X" club has a strong reputation for

taking care of their members and we're not about to stop now. We ask for your prayers for Chris and to ponder how you can help him with some of his financial burden.

We are hiring a professional fund raiser who will be implementing a plan that we will share with you in a future email. If you know of a fund raiser, please contact me.

On a final note, thank you for taking the time to digest this experience and realize that accidents do happen. Even though it's unfortunate, some things are just out of our control in the game we call life. We feel the most important thing is to stick together and support Chris, or any other member, to the best of our ability. Safety is first in our club and always will be. We are adding even more safety equipment and precautions to our procedures so we can all feel comfortable on future hikes.

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Warmly

Steven

THANK YOU to everyone on this team for an OUTSTANDING rescue!!!!

KIM, NICOLE, BOB and JOHN!!! YOU ROCK!!!