

Red Mountain Bus over the Side FTX

Norm Rooker – Chief, Ouray County EMS
Mark Miller – Lead Instructor, Rigging For Rescue

Ouray County, located in the southwest corner of Colorado on the northern edge of the San Juan Mountain range is 542 rugged square miles of mountains, valleys and high mesas. The stretch of Highway 550 that runs south from the City of Ouray to Silverton is 27 winding and twisty miles. Most of them running along cliff face on one side and sharp canyon drop offs on the other. Some as deep as 410 feet with nary a section of guard rail anywhere along the way.

While area emergency services have routinely responded to numerous cars, vans, SUVs and motorcycles that have run off the road, it has long been a concern that a tour bus would “go over the side”, creating an entirely different set of rescue problems. The Greyhound Bus line runs two buses a day on this route when the passes are open and there are numerous private/contract tour bus companies that also travel this route.

On Sunday, May 18, 2008, emergency services in Ouray County, Colorado held a joint Field Training Exercise, FTX to test their system in response to a “bus over the side”. Developing a rescue strategy for this kind of emergency, integrating various rescue services, for instance Ouray County EMS’s Vehicle Extrication had the tools and training for bus extrication but not for operating or setting up on a steep canyon side. The Ouray Mountain Rescue Team had the equipment and experience to rig and run the rope systems required for an operation like this but not the vehicle extrication training or equipment. And neither had the EMS/medical for patient treatment, triage and packaging.

And overhead management, the IMT, Incident Management Team lacked the experience in running an operation this big or complex.

OC EMS took the lead in creating this FTX, working with the various players, developing a plan and training up the respective participants.

A two Guiding Line rope system was selected as the primary method of moving equipment and supplies to the rescue site and for bringing the “rescued” victims and equipment back up.

While the primary rescue teams involved Vehicle Extrication and Mountain Rescue, a number of other organizations were also involved. OC EMS provided 3 ambulances, established a site triage, treatment and packaging team down below and a patient receiving/CCP, Casualty Collection Point at the top. The EMS portion of the FTX ended when the patient was ready for transport as the scope of this drill was on the initial MCI rescue and movement of the victims and rescuers

and not on patient transportation from the scene, which would also have involved testing the area mutual aid system.

We elected to limit the drill to the access, vehicle stabilization, vehicle extrication, patient packaging, movement and on-scene treatment components only, which was challenge enough.

We ran 5 radio/comms nets for the various operations including the actual FTX system between the FTX IC and the FTX safety officers as opposed to the IMT IC and the various Rescue, Fire, EMS and law enforcement tactical channels.

The Guiding Line Systems worked very effectively. One of the lessons learned was to take advantage of as much height as you can reasonably get when establishing these systems. More height translates to less work for the tensioning/slacking teams.

The mainline systems were a simple wrap around a standing friction device for controlling the descent of the rescue loads on the “Down” Guiding Line. A simple 1 –1 Merry-Go-Round haul system was used for the mainline on the “Up” Guiding Line.

We utilized the aerial device on Ouray Volunteer Fire Protection District’s Truck 11 for an artificial high point. As long as the correct angles are maintained, the aerial device is correctly aligned so no torque is created on the ladder; there is no problem as the forces being placed on it are less than 2 kN.

The FTX was a great success. Many lessons were learned or reinforced. And rescuers and their leaders/managers came away with the belief and confidence that an incident of this type could be successfully handled with some simple, “battle tested” strategies and techniques.

Guiding Line

Definition: A variable tension high line system created by Arner Larson for moving rescue load(s) across a moderate slope or rough terrain.

Rigging:

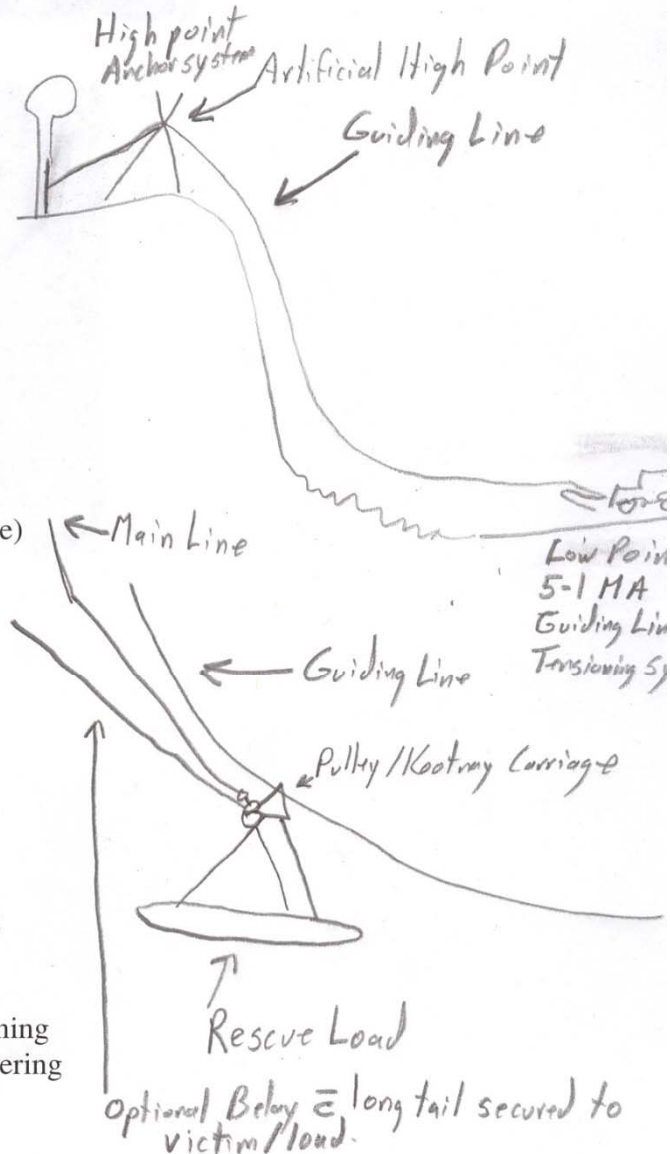
- High points both top & bottom Guiding Line
- Tensioning/slack system for Guiding Line
- Main Line
- Raising/lower system for Main Line
- (optional - Belay Line)

Operating:

- Grab as much height at top as possible. (Want nice slack belly in Guiding Line)
- Keep line just taunt enough to keep rescue load approx 1 meter from ground.
- Litter attendant just walks with with load and is there to guide it around obstacles.
- Guiding Line tensioning system can be at top or bottom as Needed.

Smooth communications:

- Between litter attendant & Edge person
- Between Edge person & both Guiding Line Tensioning team as well as raising/lowering Team.



Properly rigged & operated guiding line places less than a 2 kN load on system.



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