

## Thanksgiving in Behunin by Tom Jones

Ranger Jill Woods was just settling down with a book and an evening cup of tea when the callout came. Employees from the Zion Lodge had been hiking up by the Emerald Pools, heard shouts for help coming from the end of Behunin Canyon, and alerted the Zion SAR team. With snowmelt adding a little flow to the canyon and temperatures on this night in the twenties, this callout in late November, 2004 was much more serious than a similar callout would be in the middle of summer.

Behunin is a moderately difficult technical canyon with ten rappels and is usually dry, making it a popular choice with experienced canyoneers in late fall. With a bit of snow, the canyon runs with water that gets canyoneers and their gear wet, and seriously complicates a descent.

The SAR team assembled, grabbed gear and hiked the mile or so to the bottom of the last rappel. What they found was chilling, literally. A little water was flowing out of Behunin and forming ice, including icicles hanging off the backpack of the young canyoneer hanging on a rope, halfway down the last rappel.

Jason and Sarah (not their real names) had started the descent that morning, expecting a dry canyon and few difficulties. Close to dark, when setting up the rope for the last rappel, Jason had secured one end of the rope to the anchor, then tossed the rest of the rope into the air. The other end of the rope, which should have reached the ground, had stuck itself in a crack a few feet below the top. Jason had rappelled halfway down the last drop before noticing that the rope end was stuck, and was unable to pull it free. Without the tools or training to ascend the rope, the canyoneer was left hanging in space, 80 feet above the ground and 80 feet from the top.

At the top of the rappel, Sarah had been unable to assist her friend other than by shouting for help. With the waterfall flowing a few feet away, ice had formed on Jason's back and backpack. Only a stint in the Army gave him the toughness to hang there for four hours, and only luck had their calls for help heard by some of the few people in Zion Canyon that evening.

Luck was on their side that night in another way. Hiking around to the top and descending the canyon to reach the stranded canyoneers would have taken four hours at least - time Jason did not have. By a stroke of luck, hanging from the anchor was a second rope left by another party earlier in the month. The rope had an inch-thick coating of ice on it, so Jason and Sarah had not thought of using it, but it now provided a way to send gear up to Sarah.

The SAR team quickly got to work. They sent a radio up to Sarah and determined she was in good enough shape and competent enough to help with the rescue. They then sent up a large rescue pulley, loaded with a 300-foot rope, that Sarah secured to the top anchor with locking carabiners. Jason was still coherent enough to clip himself into the end of the 300-foot rope, and the rangers lifted him a few feet so he could unclip from his tangled rappel rope. They lowered him to the ground and wrapped him in blankets. The team then pulled the rope up and lowered Sarah to the ground. Pulling the rescue rope was easy, but the tangled rope, the ice-covered rope that saved Jason's life, and the pulley were left to winter-over at the end of Behunin, and provoke curiosity in the first canyoneers to descend the canyon in the spring.

( c) 2005 Tom Jones. Rescue in late November 2004. Information from Zion NP Staff. If you are "Sarah" or "Jason", please post your version of this event, or shoot me an email - [tom@canyoneeringusa.com](mailto:tom@canyoneeringusa.com)).