



Missing Backpacker

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San Jacinto High Country
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At the January regular meeting Walt informed us that Chief John McCoy of the Riverside County Sheriff's office had requested RMRU to continue its search for Mike Self, missing on San Jacinto since Thanksgiving. It was decided that we could utilize our regular January training time for the search, so two separate teams were organized: one group was to approach the peak from the west side and search on Saturday and Sunday, and the second group was to search the area between the Tram and the peak. The West side team consisted of Pete Carlson, Bud White, Ed Hill, Larry Roland, Gary Anderson and Hal Fulkman, while the Tram side team was composed of Rick Pohlars, Rich Quackenbush, Jim Fairchild, Tom Aldrich, John Dew, Walt and Kevin Walker, myself, and two members of the Hemet Valley Search and Rescue team.

The Tram team assembled Saturday morning at the lower station (elev. 2500) at 0630, and after riding up the first car at 0700 departed from the upper station (elev. 8500) by 0730. However, it became obvious the moment we left the top that the lingering snow pack would hamper the search. We had all assumed that the unseasonably warm weather experienced in Riverside during the month would have melted all the snow from the Thanksgiving storm, but the amazing amount still on the ground was the subject of conversation throughout the day. There were drifts up to 3 or 4 feet deep in places from that storm in which Self was reported lost, so his body could very easily still be buried under the snow.

The entire team traveled the icy trail to Round Valley (elev. 9100) where plans were made to split the team into two smaller groups. The one group, led by Jim, was to sweep up through the rocky outcrops on Bud White Ridge to the Wellman Divide trail and on over to the junction with Tamarack Valley trail, where we were to rendezvous with Walt's group, which was going to search around the trail through Tamarack Valley up to the junction.

We left Round Valley at 0915, and Jim's group decided to press up to the peak (elev. 10804) rather than wait for Walt, so we had lunch at the summit around 1145. There was less snow on the west face of the peak, so we swept down through the rocks to the saddle between San Jacinto and Jean peaks (elev. 10400) where we waited until Walt's group arrived at 1300 and ate their lunch. At

this point we were in a good position to establish radio contact with the West side team. They verified that they too were encountering more snow and ice than anticipated, and their pace was pretty slow.

At 1400 the Tram team reassembled at the saddle and headed down the trail toward Bud White Ridge. We decided to sweep down the relatively snow free section between the ridge and Wellman Divide to Round Valley. We spaced ourselves between 50 to 100 yards apart and beat through brush most of the way, but to no avail. We met at the ranger's hut in Round Valley at 1600 and set out for the Tram, prepared with crampons for the trail which had become even more treacherous during the day by thawing and freezing. We assisted several people hiking back to the Tram who were wearing street shoes and slipping on the ice, which ended up being the only concrete accomplishment of the day. We arrived back at the upper station at 1700 and caught the next car down. It was decided to delay any further searching for Self until later in the Spring when there isn't the problem of snow to deal with.

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.