

Body Recovery

15 & 16 May, 1977
Mt. San Jacinto
1977-014

Ed Hill

A solo climber on a non-standard route of the North face of Mt. San Jacinto found a human skeleton and a backpack at the 8000 foot level. He reported it to the Banning station of the Riverside County Sheriff's Department.

RMRU member Al Andrews was contacted by Capt. Ray Canova of the Sheriff's Department. He requested a veteran RMRU member to meet with the informant that afternoon (Sunday). Al put out a pager call and Walt Walker responded. Al explained the situation and asked Walt to standby as the Sheriff's Department was trying to contact helicopter pilot Don Landells.

Walt was contacted by Capt. Canova and asked to meet at the Banning Airport with him, Don Landells and the informant. The four of them flew up the north face and the informant pointed out the skeleton and the pack. It was decided that RMRU would meet in the morning.

The team met Don Landell's helicopter at Snow Creek Village at 8 a.m. The wind was howling through the pass, pushing my Volkswagon beetle around as I drove up the road. Bernie, Walt and I were to be the first load of men to be flown up the mountain. Don wanted to try a one runner touchdown in the alcove near the body with only one man, so Bernie and I were let out at one of the heliports used in the 1973 fire on the North face. Don was able to let Walt out on a ledge just above a waterfall in the alcove. Fortunately there was no wind once you got well into the canyons. He then returned for Bernie and me. We hiked up into the alcove and found a skeleton lying face down about forty feet from the base of a 200 foot cliff. Nearby was a smashed Kelty pack. The frame itself had been bent and twisted; the forces on the pack must have been considerable.

We carefully searched in and around the pack and found clothing, a blanket, and a book but no identification. The next step was to bundle everything up and fly it out as a sling load beneath the bird. As we started to move the skeleton, a small rat peeped out of his hole directly underneath us. We scared him back into his hole, and continued making up the sling load.

Don flew back in to the alcove, this time with a hundred foot rope weighed down

by a gallon water bottle tied on to his bomb hook. We clipped the load in and watched Don fly it down the mountain. Sometimes the helicopter appeared to be flying sideways as the wind caught it.

We searched the area again while waiting for Don to come back and get us. When he lifted us out, he flew up the peak a ways, so we could see where the small alcove was in relation to the whole face. We were in the next gully over from one of our climbing routes on the face.

It was a roller coaster ride back down to Snow Creek. I was glad for my seat belt. Just before we landed, Don slowed down and almost stopped. I looked at the air speed indicator, and it read 60 knots. We were heading directly into a 60 knot head wind.

The Sheriff treated us to a midmorning meal. Midway through the meal, he joined us and told us that the skeleton had been identified as Ray Blauhaus, whom we had unsuccessfully searched for in June 1976.

The identification of Blauhaus explained why our June search had been unsuccessful. We had been told that his plans were to climb Tahquitz peak and descend one of the 'Indian' canyons to Palm Springs. Tahquitz peak and the 'Indian' canyons are in the South Eastern portion of the range. Blauhaus was found in one of the canyons on the North side of the range about ten airline miles from the search area. This again points out how vital it is to accurately tell someone where you are going when you are hiking or climbing.

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.