

Fallen Climber

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Tahquitz Rock
1977-017

by Walt Walker

Four o'clock in the afternoon on a warm pre-summer day with two hours of work yet to do, the phone rings and you are asked if you can roll on a mission, you guessed it, - I said "Yes!"

After phoning the RMRU members that were my responsibility, I drove home, changed clothes and started loading gear, with my son Kevin who would be going on the mission also.

We jumped in our Jeep Wagoneer and hurried across the Hemet-San Jacinto Valley to pick up fellow team member John Dew. When we turned the corner onto John's street we could see him waiting at the curb. We stopped, loaded his gear, and were on our way up the hill towards Idyllwild.

When we arrived at the Humber Park road head we were met by Capt. Ray Canova of the Riverside County Sheriff's Department. He told us that a young man had fallen while climbing, was not hurt, but was stranded. We checked our packs, handed Capt. Canova one of our radios, swung on our packs and started hiking.

While we were hiking up towards Lunch Rock we radioed the rescue van and told Jim Fairchild that we were on the trail and would relay information as it became available.

Arriving at Lunch Rock, we stopped for a minute and had a drink of water. We started around to the south side of the rock as the climber was reported to be on a climb called the Ski Tracks. Just as we rounded the corner we met two climbers and they said the climber was still stranded. Going a little further up we met a young man and he told us he had been the lead climber when the incident happened. He was almost to the top of the climb and belaying the second climber when he slipped and fell. This had been the fallen climber's first try at rock climbing and he was understandably uptight after the fall. The informant had tried to do everything he could. Then he tied off the climbing rope and free-climbed upwards. He descended via another route and ran down the trail for help.

Just a little further and we saw the stranded climber, about halfway up the climb. It was decided that Kevin would stay at the base of the rock, while John and I continued

on. We quickly were on the Friction Route and then up on to the main rib. We down climbed the rib until we could look down on Kevin. He yelled up to us that we were almost right above the stricken climber.

Just before we had reached Lunch Rock, Jim had arrived at Humber Park with the rescue van. Jim asked via the radio what equipment would be needed. I radioed back for two 300 ft. ropes, four 150 ft. ropes, all the hardware slings, runners and the small 5-watt radio used on technical missions. As Jim readied this equipment other RMRU members were arriving.

The equipment requested was loaded into and onto packs and the heavy loads began their journeys to the top. As the equipment was being carried up, John and I started looking for anchors for the best route down to the climber and generally how the mission would be carried out.

As the members reached the staging area they were given assignments. Anchors were set, I was already into my swami belt and ready to rappel. I attached a rope to the back of my swami, clipped into the rappel rope and started down the side. About 175 ft. down I reached the stranded climber. I stopped, tied my rope off, and told the young man what we were going to do to get him down to the bottom. I then secured the second rope to him and untied his climbing rope. He was now on belay which was being handled by Bernie McIlvoy. As Bernie lowered the climber I rappelled along side of him and gave instructions and encouragement. In a very short time we were at the base of the rock.

The rest of the mission was the usual packing of gear, coiling of ropes and the long hike back to the road head, which was completed by flashlight.

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.