

Five hikers caught by snow storm

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San Jacinto Mtns
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By Tom Aldrich

Actually, one o'clock in the morning isn't a bad time for a rescue if you went to bed at 7 PM. However, for Steve Jensen and Steve Zappe who rode out with me to Palm Springs, one o'clock was a bad time for a rescue and while I drove they made like buzz-saws. Perhaps looking for four young ladies aged 17 to 19 was a help in motivating them.

Five people in all were overdue: Bob Davenport, his two daughters Cathy and Barbara, Susan Cassman, and Carol Barton. They had left the tram on Saturday morning, hiked down the Willow Creek Trail towards Willow Creek and cut down to Laws Camp. When the storm hit Saturday afternoon they wisely looked for a place to pitch tents and sit it out. Cathy, who had a pack on her back for the first time, found a fine spot for their tents and they sat out the storm for that night. Sunday they stayed around their camp. Susan, Cathy, and Barbara had only tennis shoes. Not wanting to risk frostbite in the snow, they sat out Sunday also and decided to move out Monday morning. To some of the parents, however, Monday was a bit late. For us it was a bit early.

Actually, hiking at 5 AM is quite rewarding. As your boots crunch upon the light snow cover, guided by the light of your flashlight, your eyes are treated to as clear a view of the stars as can be had. Within a few moments the black of night gives way to light blue in the eastern sky. Flashlights are turned off as a bright orange band in



Jim Fairchild

The overdue hikers posed for the photographer, as they were hiking back to the tram, along with RMRU members Steve Zappe (far left) and Tom Aldrich (third from the right).

the east begins to cast a faint shadow. When we left Hidden Lake, Steve Zappe and I hiked down towards Caramba. Bernie McIlvoy, John Muratet, Ed Hill and Rick Pohlars went up from Idyllwild.

The frozen trail gave no distinct prints as we moved to Willow Creek. Near the creek, however, snow on the trail betrayed what we felt were prints the size appropriate to a woman's size 7 shoe. As we stopped at the creek, Steve heard voices from a knoll just east of south, down stream from where we were standing. We worked towards the knoll, Steve in the drainage, I on the ridge. I soon spotted the size 7 tracks which led to their camp.

Greeted by warm smiles and offers of breakfast by 5 eager, energetic backpackers whose names matched those of our searchees, led us to conclude that most of our worries were over. The rest of the morning can only be termed enjoyable.

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.