



Hiker slipped and injured leg

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Near Tahquitz Valley
1978-012

By Walt Walker

With a paintbrush in one hand and a bucket of paint in the other, I just stood there and listened as the pager went off. For the second time in as many days it announced there was a rescue. However, today, we had the front door back on its hinges when the call came.

Leaving the paintbrushes for my wife, Sondra, and daughter Lisa to clean (waterbase paint), my son Kevin and I began to load gear into the Wagoneer. We changed into our orange shirts and green pants and headed for the Banning airport.

Capt. Ray Canova, of the Riverside County Sheriff's Department, had called Don Landells and he was on the way, with his Bell Jet Ranger helicopter. As Kevin and I pulled off the freeway we could see the bird descending towards the airport. We drove into the parking area as Capt. Canova walked out to the bird.

During a discussion with Capt. Canova, we found out that two young men had hiked out of the backcountry to report that a friend of theirs had slipped, while descending an icy slope, below Tahquitz Valley. The accident had occurred on Saturday morning but the young man did not think he had broken his leg. He thought if he rested until Sunday he would be able to hike out. When Sunday morning arrived he was still too sore to hike.

Kevin and I loaded our packs with normal gear that might be needed for a winter mission. We also put in a large first aid belt, full leg airsplint and a RMRU HandiTalkie. After putting on our hiking boots, we grabbed our packs, and headed for the bird. We climbed in, buckled up, Don applied the power and we lifted off.

As we neared the Black Mountain Lookout Tower, the RMRU radio came to life, Riverside 2 (the new van) with Jim Fairchild at the wheel, reported being only 10 minutes from the airport. We advised Jim of our plan and that possibly we would be able to handle the situation.

In a short time we were over Tahquitz Valley, but there was only one tent, and it was not the color of either of the tents we had been told would be there. Don circled wider and we checked Little Tahquitz Valley, no tents. We then headed over to Skunk Cabbage Meadow, same thing, no tents.

Talking it over, we decided to return to Tahquitz Valley, land and talk to the people we had seen there. The tent was near the edge of the trees and Don landed about 100 feet away. Kevin climbed out and headed over towards a young man walking in the direction of the

bird. After a quick discussion, Kevin returned and told us that the young man that needed help was below Tahquitz Valley. We took off again and headed down the Tahquitz drainage. After a brief search we located the two tents on a small ridge about a quarter of a mile above Reeds Meadow. Another discussion, this time we decided that Don would land at the low end of Tahquitz Valley, Kevin and I would hike down towards the tents, give first aid and Don would return to Banning for two more RMRU members and the rescue toboggan.

This time the plan worked as planned. Don let us out, he started back as we hiked downhill towards the tents. In less than ten minutes we located the tents. We talked with the injured young man about how the injury occurred. After an examination we decided that a full leg airsplint was needed. We put on the airsplint, slid the young man out of the tent with the help of nearby campers, and helped him into his sleeping bag. While we were awaiting the return of the helicopter we took the tent down and gathered the young mans equipment together.

Hearing the helicopter approaching, Kevin took off towards Tahquitz Valley. He met the bird and guided Jim Fairchild and Darrel Hand, along with the toboggan, back to my location. Once again, with help we placed the young man into the toboggan and secured him with the straps. With the help of one of the campers, Darrel, Kevin and I pulled the loaded toboggan uphill to Tahquitz Valley. (Jim was shooting the pictures.)



Jim Fairchild

The rescue toboggan was put to use again, as (L to R) Kevin Walker, Walt Walker, Darrel Hand (behind), unidentified camper pulled uphill to Tahquitz Valley.

We checked the airsplint, Darrel put some more lung power into it, and we loaded the injured young man into the backseat of the bird. We tied the toboggan to the cargo basket and Don and I climbed in the front. Don fired up the turbine and we were shortly in the air headed for the San Geronio Pass Hospital.

Downhill is always fast, even in helicopters. As Don circled the hospital we both looked for the emergency room entrance. I spotted a waiting gurney and Don landed in the parking lot right beside the emergency room entrance. ER personnel came out and wheeled the gurney over to the bird. We unloaded the young man onto the gurney and they wheeled him towards the hospital. Don lifted up and we headed back to the airport. Upon arrival at the airport I climbed out and Don took off to pick up Jim, Darrel and Kevin. While waiting for the return of the bird I discussed the mission with other RMRU members who had arrived while the mission was in progress.

After we had all eaten dinner Kevin and I drove over to the hospital to pick up the unit airsplint. When we got into the ER the nurse showed us the injured man's X-ray. It showed a clean transverse fracture of the right tibia (shin bone).



Jim Fairchild

Don Landells and Walt Walker looked on as Darrel Hand unbuckled the straps of the rescue toboggan. Kevin Walker can be seen through left rear door of the helicopter and the woman hiker who helped by carrying an RMRU pack back to the bird was not identified.

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.