

Scout Troop 2 days overdue

June 27, 1978
North Fork, Whitewater River
1978-032

By Kevin Walker

At 3:30 Tuesday afternoon, the phone rang with news of a rescue mission in the Whitewater area.

Enroute to the Whitewater Fish Hatchery my dad informed me that a scout troop from the Pacific Palisades area was overdue in coming out to the Fish Hatchery. Overdue is right considering they should have been out on Sunday.

We arrived at the Fish Hatchery at about 6:15 p.m. We were soon joined by the rest of the team members rolling on the mission, and soon after a Hughes 500C helicopter from the San Bernardino Sheriff's Department set down in the meadow where base camp was being set up. While Walt asked the necessary questions of two of the older scouts, the chopper went up the canyon to check out wind conditions.



Jim Fairchild

While most of the hungry Scouts consumed the food, given to them by RMRU members, the fellow Scout gave his approval with the 'thumbs-up' signal. Scoutmaster Ed Dillingham is on the right side of the photograph.

Upon his return we were told by the pilot that he had spotted a small fire in the middle of the north fork. With that Walt loaded his pack equipped with RMRU's new field antenna into the chopper, and left for a ridge above where the scouts were camped. After about 15 minutes Walt radioed out instructions of what gear would be needed (which mainly consisted of food), and to have the bird bring in all available team members. I was flown in next, followed by Jim Fairchild, Bernie McIlvoy, Tom Aldrich and Steve Zappe. With all that completed, base camp operator Steve Jensen radioed back that the helicopter would return at 6:00 the following morning for air evacuation.

Descending the steep slope into the scouts camp we were greeted by 12 hungry boys and one very relieved Scoutmaster. As the scouts waited impatiently for the food we had brought in to finish cooking, the Scoutmaster, Ed Dillingham told us that they had started at Poopout Hill and just didn't realize that it would be such a hard hike as it was, and it being a high water year didn't help matters any.

After the scouts had their fill of food and were finally bedded down for the night, Walt and Jim, knowing the canyon well from trips of their own, decided it would be best to hike out to the middle fork, and be airlifted out from there. So at 5:00 a.m. we woke up the scouts and helped them load their gear into the packs. At 5:30 we were finally ready to move.

Moving down the canyon was slow going due to the steep canyon sides, and high water in the bottom. All went well even though we had to wade through knee deep snow water a few times. And once we could finally climb out of the canyon to the ridge, it became an easy walk out to the extremely large middle fork.

At 7:45 the chopper (Bell 204) arrived at our location for the first load of five scouts. Two more flights in for kids and one after that for RMRU members, and we secured the mission at 8:20 Wednesday morning.

With many "Thank yous" and "Boy was that a fun ride out" RMRU bid Troop 85 of the Pacific Palisades a farewell.



Jim Fairchild

The Scouts who needed first aid on their feet, lined up, and RMRU member Steve Zappe gave the required first aid.



Jim Fairchild

With half the Scouts loaded aboard the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department helicopter, RMRU members started loading packs. (L to R) Bernie McIlroy with two packs, Walt Walker stood by with another, Steve Zappe and Tom Aldrich gathered up more packs, while Kevin Walker (who was giving Helitac signals) held up one finger, for one more pack.

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.