

Man left behind

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Mt. San Jacinto
1980-015

By Jim Garvey

The feeling that I had been through this before began while Kevin Walker was describing the situation over the phone. Two climbers on the North Face of San Jacinto, one hiking out to the tram, the other spending two nights out with little equipment.

I mentioned to Kevin that this seemed just like last week's mission, which was also on the North Face with very similar circumstances. Jokingly I asked if Hooman Aprin was involved; he was the climbing partner of the subject on the last North Face mission. Questions were raised as to Hooman's responsibility and mountaineering judgment in leaving his partner on the North Face because he couldn't keep up the pace of the climb.

Imagine my surprise when Kevin informed me that yes, it appeared that Hooman had again become separated from his partner, Thomas Plyer, on the North Face.

5:30 a.m. came all too soon. RMRU members began arriving in Base Camp at the Snow Creek road before first light. Mary Bowman, RMRU's Base Camp Operator, arranged for hot breakfasts, which were greatly appreciated. A team had been sent hiking to the Isthmus the night before to seal off the lower section of the route.

At 6:30 a.m. a Hughes 500-D from Western Helicopters arrived. After briefing the pilot, Pete Gillies, Kevin, Bernie McIlvoy and I took off. Pete is an old friend and experienced mountain pilot. We flew back and forth across the precipitous North Face close enough to the rocks to keep everyone's attention focused on the terrain.

Our plan called for Kevin and I to be dropped out near the summit of Mt. San Jacinto to begin the ground search. Bernie would stay in the helicopter and air search the back of the peak down to Little Round Valley before returning to base for more field teams.

Immediately after the helicopter lifted off, Kevin and I heard someone yelling. Looking east toward Frank Miller Peak about one-half mile down the ridge we spotted a person frantically waving. In our excitement we tried yelling at the helicopter, then used the radio, which worked much better. The helicopter circled back, got visual contact with the subject and landed a little below him. Mr. Plyer was indeed, overjoyed at being rescued. Bernie helped the subject into the helicopter and flew to base.

In a few minutes the helicopter returned for Kevin and I. By 9:00 a.m. we were back in base with the mission secure. The subject was lucky; the weather was relatively mild and he came through his ordeal in good shape.

Footnote: A more bizarre aspect of this mission was how RMRU and the Sheriff's Office were alerted in the first place.

Hooman was visiting Winfred Blevins, the subject from the first North Face mission in the Palm Springs Hospital. Apparently Hooman mentioned "they" had climbed the North Face in one day and had looked for Winfred's lost sleeping bag. Winfred asked Hooman about "they" and where his climbing partner was. Hooman said that "they" had gotten separated below the summit the day before and he hadn't seen him since. At this point Winfred called the Sheriff to let him know that RMRU had another search on its hands.

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.