

## **Climbers overtaken by darkness**

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**Tahquitz Rock**  
**1980-050**

By Ed Hill

Three brothers, Dave, Jim and Bob Black attempted a route called Super-pooper on the west side of Tahquitz Rock in back of Idyllwild. They got a late start and darkness overtook them with Dave forty feet from the top. The other two were on a ledge below him. The night was absolutely pitch black. It was so dark that one could not make out the holds in the rock.

Two climbers on the White Maiden reported their problem to the Sheriff. The call came at 7:45 PM. I had Veteran's Day off so was able to go. I called my people, assembled my technical gear and was on my way half an hour later.

I reached Humber Park to find that the first crews had already started up to the rock. Only Mary and Jack Bowman were in base. I checked in and decided to hike up to Lunch Rock where I would pick up a load of gear, from a member who was carrying a double load.

The trail was in worse shape than I remembered it. I was confused once as to where it went but continued up hill and found it again. At Lunch Rock I found the rest of the group. Mary had told them I was coming and they had waited.

I was given a 300 foot rope, and we started around toward the south side of the rock. We decided to climb up the third class descent route rather than hike to the notches and go across the top of the rock. The route starts with a long friction traverse to an easy gully that leads up to a series of ledges. Then another gully leads to the top of the rock. In several places we had to pass packs and equipment and then mantle up to the ledge above us. It is much easier to descend this route than it is to climb it. We put in a fixed rope that we were able to use as a handline. At about 1:00 AM we had everyone on top. We quickly found anchor points for the self equalizing anchors that would support the rigging. Bernie McIlvoy was elected to rappel down to the climbers. He carried sweaters and jackets for them.

Jim Fairchild took photos of the operations while Pete Carlson, Walt Walker, Chris Smith, Larry Roland and I set up pulleys for a mechanical advantage. Later on we decided to simply haul the climbers up especially since they could climb under tension from above.

The first climber up was Dave. He was just cold, hungry and thirsty. I fed him some peanuts, gave him some water and wrapped a sleeping bag around him. By the time Bernie was ready to have the second man come up, Dave was able to help us haul.

With the extra muscle on the haul line, raising Bob was straight forward. As soon as he was on top, he received the same treatment as his brother. Jim was brought up last, and we immediately started tearing apart the rigging, coiling ropes and packing gear for the trip back. Dave, Jim and Bob volunteered to help carry gear down which made it easier on everyone.

We went down the same way, dropping down onto the ledges that we had had to mantle up going up. At Lunch Rock, we met Craig Beasley, Joe Erickson, and Kevin Walker who had hiked up to help carry gear down.

We reached the vans at four in the morning, held a brief critique, and most of the team went off to breakfast. The climbers were in very good shape when we reached them. I think that this was due to the mildness of the night. There was almost no wind. I was comfortable in a down vest and parka. In years past at this time of year, I have been cold on top of the rock with most of my winter clothing on.



**REACHING THE TOP** - Jim Black reaches the top of "Super-pooper" (a climbing route on Tahquitz) followed by RMRU member Bernie Melivoy. Jim and his two brothers spent six cold hours on the face of the rock, before being assisted to the top by RMRU.

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.