

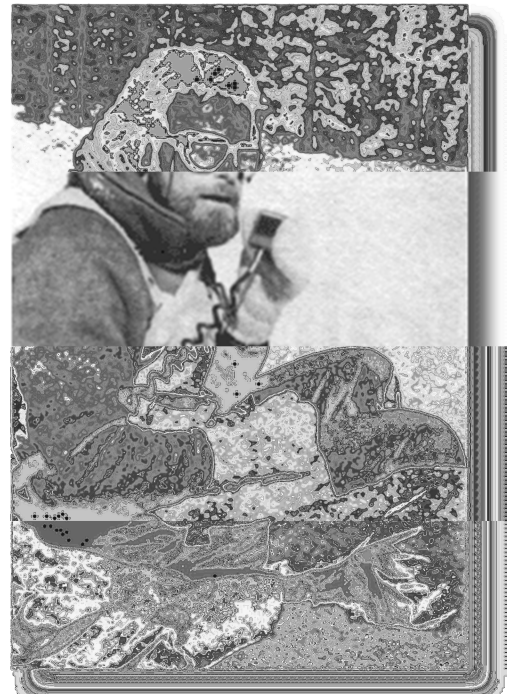
## Three men overdue on ski trip

**March 02, 1981**  
**High Country, San Jacinto Mtns**  
**1981-009**

By Kevin Walker

Monday at 1400 hrs. we received a call from Sgt. Dave Duncan of the Banning office of the Riverside County Sheriff's Department. Sgt. Duncan told RMRU member Walt Walker that three men all in their mid twenties were overdue in returning to the tram from a ski touring trip of the San Jacinto high country that had started on Thursday. The parents had told the sheriff that the three men were experienced backpackers, but this was their first major trip on Nordic skis. Another factor was that on Friday afternoon a rather large snow storm had hit the mountain and continued through the night. All through the rest of the weekend it snowed on and off, sometimes quite strongly. With the information given to the sheriff, Sgt. Duncan decided not to have us start searching until the following morning.

We met at the lower tramway station at 0600 hrs. Tuesday morning. Walt made team assignments while we waited for Don Landells' 0630 arrival time. At 0629 we heard the familiar chop-chop of Don's Bell Jet Ranger. Walt and Bernie McIlvoy would make a recon run with Don to see if they could quickly locate the group or find some clue. After a very extensive air search they returned having found nothing. Joe Erickson, Rick Pohlers and myself were assigned to search the Tahquitz and Skunk Cabbage areas. The weather was beginning to deteriorate in the valley area, so we were flown in while it was still accessible by air. Good decision, because shortly after being let off in knee deep powder snow, at Little Tahquitz Valley, the clouds rolling over from the West descended on us and we were soon in a white out condition where we could only see about 25 feet. With that we put our snowshoes on and started calling and looking (as best as one can in a cloud). Meanwhile the rest of the team was being deployed at various locations on the mountain. Bernie, Walt and Pete Carlson were let



Walt Walker

**CHECKING IN - RMRU member Bernie McIlvoy checks in with base camp, to report on the area between Mt. San Jacinto and Round Valley that had been covered by his skiing team.**

off on Mt. San Jacinto. They had skis so they would be able to cover a large amount of territory. Jim Fairchild, Hal Fulkman and Bob Attride were let off in Round Valley to search that area and over to and above Tamarack Valley. And lastly, Ron Barry, Randy Iwasiuk and Craig Britton were let off below Wellman's Cienega to search their way down Willow Creek. With all the ground teams out, Larry Roland joined Don in the bird for continued air search.

Since two days had went by since the main storm had went through, a fair amount of people had toured around the high country. Searching was slow because of finding tracks, and then having to determine whether or not they were the ones to follow. The soft powder snow also made travel slow. At approximately 1300 hrs. Ron Barry's team, in Willow Creek, picked up three sets of cross country ski tracks descending towards Willow Creek crossing. This did indeed sound promising, so they pursued them as quickly as possible.

At 1415 hrs. Carl Siechart, William Berg and Norman Switzer walked into the tram. These were the three gentlemen that we were looking for. With that, teams started walking back to the tram, and to places where the helicopter could pick teams up.

while teams were being flown out, the three men told of how they had sat out the storm after one of them had broken his ski binding. This had delayed them an extra day. Once on their way they became lost somewhere out of Little Round Valley. Instead of going over the summit saddle, they apparently crossed back onto the eastern slope between Jean Peak and Marion Mountain. From there they descended down into the Willow Creek drainage where they spent Monday night. Their pride was apparently damaged because they had seen the helicopter in the morning flying nearby, but had made no effort to signal it. Their comment to us was, "we hoped you were looking for someone else." So the tracks that Ron's team was following was the right ones, so much for helping the searchers. The important thing was that they were in good shape and if they ever got into that kind of a situation again, they would accept help, rather than dodge it.



Walt Walker

**BACK AT BASE CAMP** - The trio of young men describe their epic journey through the San Jacinto Mountains. But by keeping their wits about them, they turned what could have been tragedy, into an 'extremely long' and somewhat uncomfortable weekend.

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

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