

Hiker stopped by difficult terrain

December 29, 1981
Upper Skyline Trail
1981-045

By Jim Garvey

Ironically, the pager call for this mission came while a lady friend, Terri McCawley and I were driving from the show to a restaurant for conversation and coffee. I had just finished joking with her that a team member could activate his pager to terminate a date that was not working out; when, much to my chagrin, the crazy thing went off!

After taking my friend home and providing heartfelt assurances that the pager call was indeed authentic, Larry Koland and I sped off into the night towards the Palm Springs Tram.

Two young men had attempted to hike up Tahquitz Canyon to the upper tram station. Due to last years fire and flooding much of the canyon was filled with material eroded from the canyon walls, making the canyon easier to negotiate. However, they ran into a large waterfall that forced them to climb out of the canyon and continue the ascent up the ridge to the East of Tahquitz Canyon. Late in the afternoon, Anson Brooks left Robert Tyler at about the 6,000 foot level and continued on towards the upper tram station. Anson arrived after dark and told the Rangers at the Long Valley station about his abandoned companion. After searching the upper end of the Skyline Ridge, the rangers called RMRU.

It was an exciting night to be out hiking The wind had blown out two windows in one of the tram cars, and one at the ranger station. Limbs and entire trees littered the ground. Joe Erickson, Bernie McIlvoy, Mark Rhoads and I started down the Skyline trail. Larry Roland, Rick Pohlers, Mary Bowman and John Dew stayed at the upper Tram station as back-up support.

After descending for about 45 minutes we saw a flickering campfire to the East on a ridge across a one-half mile expanse of foreboding darkness. Crossing that black expanse proved to be a very difficult and unpleasant undertaking. The area was burned over, leaving sharp stumps that resembled punji sticks. The steep slope was very loose and broken with rock fall a constant hazard. Many small drainages crisscrossed the area interspersed with drop-offs that blocked our route.

I had the distinction of taking the most interesting fall of the evening, landing up side down wedged between some very hard rocks. After several hours of picking our way

through this mess, we approached our subject, who was sitting beside a dying fire trying to keep warm. By contrast, everyone in our search party had been cut, scraped or bruised by the time we reached Robert. An outside observer would have had difficulty distinguishing the rescuers from the rescuee.

Robert was in good condition, but cold. As we prepared to bivouac for the rest of the night, the gentle mist that had been falling developed into intermittent snow and rain. If we had not arrived the rain would have greatly increased Roberts chances of succumbing to hypothermia.

Waking up with a small river flowing through my bivy bag and into my boots is not how I usually like to start the day. My comrades, having spent an equally exciting night, ate a breakfast of jelly beans and cashew nuts.

It was still raining off and on making a helicopter evacuation impossible. As our subject appeared to be in good condition we started to hike up the ridge. After three hours of strenuous up hill hiking and third class bouldering, we reached the upper Tram station. From there it was down to Bobs Big Boy in Palm Springs for a very large breakfast.



Kevin Walker

MODESTY - One of RMRU's more modest members, Joe "Cool" Erickson, attempts to dodge the photographer, as he and the rescued subject, Robert Tyler, walk the concrete trail up to the tram station.

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.