

## Man slid 600 feet down ice chute

**December 28, 1982  
Palm Springs Tram  
1982-042**

By Craig Beasley

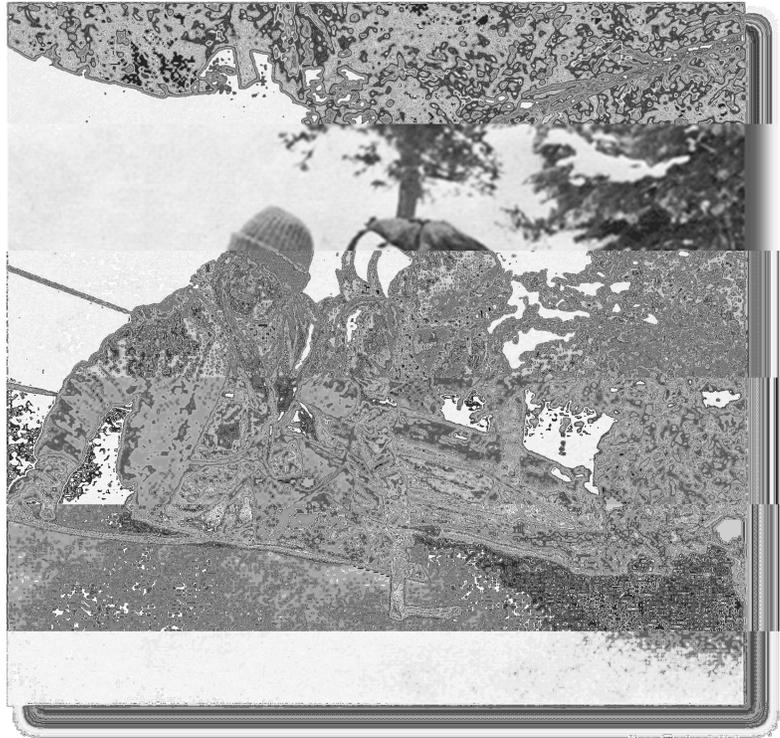
There I was sitting in my apartment in Salt Lake City, Utah, having just completed a ski-climb of the Phiefferhorn in the Wasatch Mountains. All of a sudden a premonition struck me - RMRU was going to have a mission. What else could I do but grab my gear and begin the 14 hour roll to Southern California. My premonition must have slightly premature since I arrived in Riverside a whole two days before the mission. Anyhow, I was prepared to spend part of my Christmas break with RMRU.

As I had hoped would happen, my parents phone rang with news of a rescue. just as in the old days, I grabbed my gear, left word with my parents that I didn't know when I'd be back, and away I went. The rescue was for John Rivera, a 22 year old cross-country skier who had fallen down the desert facing slopes out of Long Valley. Evidently John had taken off his skis and walked to the edge to take a look. The slopes were very icy and the skier slipped, and down the slopes he went without even his ski poles to help invoke a self-arrest. Johns brother Todd watched the incident occur. When Todd could not make visual or voice contact with John, he went to the ranger station in Long Valley and reported the accident. RMRU was notified and the mission was underway. Prior to RMRU's arrival, a ranger and a ski hut employee began rappelling down the icy slopes to look for John. The pair went down nearly 1500 feet stopping their search when they reached a technical ice face.

It was dark when RMRU members reached the sight of the fall. Walt Walker and Mark Hebert were the first RMRU members to begin what was to become a very long search down the slopes. Walt and Mark continued their search down-ward past the ranger and ski employee, supported with more rope by RMRU members Kevin Walker, Glenn Henderson, Bernie McIlvoy and Joe Erickson. At 1500 feet down from the top Wait and Mark made voice contact with someone. The voice came from out of the fall line, but it still seemed reasonable that this was the subject. After all, who else would be down these chutes in need of help at this time of night. Strangely enough, the voice was not from John, rather, it came from another person in dire need (see Mission No. [1982-043](#)). Hence the original subject was still missing.

With this new development, more RMRU members began descending the fixed ropes in search of John Rivera. Searching was difficult because of the night and dark shadows from the surrounding trees gave everything a grayish appearance. Kevin, Glenn, Joe,

and Bernie searched down 1600 feet before running out of rope. Mike Deden and myself then proceeded down the fixed lines with more rope for a continued decent. At 1900 feet the six RMRU members decided to bivouac till morning (I for one was glad to have carried my sleeping bag with me). With news that Walt, Mark and subject were resting comfortably (see Mission No. 8243M), we bedded down for a couple of hours of sleep. Come morning Joe and Bernie headed down while the rest of us began ascending, thinking we had possibly missed the subject since we were searching in the dark. This turned out to indeed be the case. Not too far into our ascent, we were notified that RMRU members Bruce Gahagan and Mark Rhoads had found the body of John Rivera approximately 600 feet down from the point of the fall. The subject had broken his neck in the fall. We proceeded up, gathering the fixed lines with us. As we did this Bernie and Joe found a helispot, and were airlifted out. The body was raised by the Sierra Madre Search and Rescue Team, while RMRU members continued bringing gear, and assisted in guiding the litter. The mission was complete once the body and all rescuers and equipment were in Long Valley. Unfortunately, this mission had a very sad ending. Ironically, this mission resulted in the saving of another life (see Mission No. [1982-043](#)).



Jim Fairchild

A note from the author: I wish to say that it was great to once again work with my friends on RMRU. RMRU is a great organization and I miss being an active part of it. My years with RMRU were invaluable. If only the skiing in the San Jacinto's could compare to the Wasatch in Utah.

**PREPERATION FOR EVAC - RMRU members Jack Schnurr, Bruce Gahagan, and Kevin Walker (obscured), prepare to piece the snow covered body of John Rivera into the litter. John was the second person in a matter of weeks to slide to his death in an ice chute.**

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.