



## Two men slid 500 feet down ice

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**Palm Springs Tram**  
**1983-004**

By Walt Walker

Saturdays were not invented for work, it says somewhere, I'm sure. However, I was bending the rule trying to lower the pile that had accumulated on my desk. There is a window right in front, of my desk, that looks out onto the San Jacinto Mountains. I could see from Tahquitz Peak all the way to Mt. San Jacinto, the entire range was covered with a mantle of snow. My business is not open on Saturdays and when the telephone rang, I thought it was probably my wife calling. It was her, but not with news of what time dinner was going to be, she told me that the Banning station of the Riverside County Sheriff's Department had called for RMRU's help. There were two men down one of the ice chutes near the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway upper terminal.

It only took a minute to turn out the lights, lock the door, and speed away towards the garage where the No. 1 rescue van is parked. I opened the garage door, started the van, drove it out, backed my Wagoneer in and headed towards my house. Once in the house, I stripped off my clothes, put on my long poly underwear, my wool pants and shirt were next. The pack room was my next stop. I took all my winter gear, ice axe, crampons and snowshoes, big soft pack, my down pants and jacket were stuffed into a stuff bag and I took the entire pile out to the van and loaded it in. Elapsed time, from phone members call to driving off for the mountain, 27 minutes.

Upon arrival at the tram I was advised that the state park rangers had descended to the two men and they were both injured, one had minor injuries and the other had sustained a head injury. They both were better than 500 feet down from the area that had previously been nicknamed the 'launching pad' by RMRU because of the recent rescues that had occurred there.

When the No. 2 rescue van arrived we began unloading, quite literally, thousands of feet of PMI rescue rope. The ABS plastic litter, portable oxygen system, rescue sleeping bag, bags of carabiners, technical hardware, nylon slings, portable spotlights and many other small items were all carried up to the lower terminal of the tram and loaded into the waiting tram car. (The Palm Springs Aerial Tramway personnel were once again very helpful in getting us to the top as quickly as possible.)

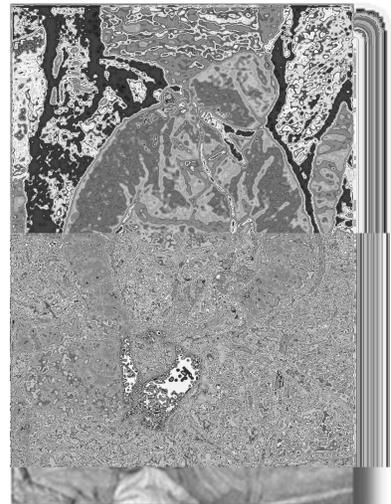
After arriving at the upper terminal we quickly carried all the equipment down to Long Valley where most of it was loaded onto a sled that was pulled by a snow-mobile. RMRU members, tram personnel, sheriff's deputies and state park rangers carried the balance of the equipment over to the staging area. Within minutes we had set up an anchor, around a very large pine tree, and quickly sent two RMRU members down on the new rescue rope. Upon reaching the subjects, they discussed the situation with the state park rangers who had given first aid. The one man was only slightly injured, a probable ankle sprain, the other man had sustained a serious head injury and was not completely coherent. We started oxygen going for the man with the head injury. He had been loaded into a stokes litter that was attached to a toboggan. The RMRU members above had set up a mechanical advantage system and were ready to lift when we radioed up that we were ready to go. The lift was started and it was a very difficult job due to the snow conditions. Part of the time the snow was very hard and supported the weight of the rescuers, the balance of the time the snow crust would break and down you went. It was a constant battle and was further complicated because we would have to radio up and tell the haulers to stop each time we sank into the snow up to our knees or better.

When we finally reached the top, we immediately moved



Jim Fairchild

**BACK ON TOP** - After being pulled over 500 feet up an ice chute, RMRU members Jim Garvey and Walt Walker help pull the snow litter containing one (seriously injured) of two men up to the staging area. The second subject was brought up shortly after.



Jim Fairchild

**VITALS MONITORED** - RMRU member Jim Garvey keeps watch over one of the injured men, as they wait to be moved into the tram station.

the litter to the sled and transported the subject slowly over to Long Valley. While we were carrying the litter up to the tram, the rest of the team was bringing up the second injured man. We had radioed out to have an ambulance meet us at the lower tram. Our portable oxygen system ran out just as we arrived at the lower terminal. The man with the head injury was loaded into the ambulance and was sent off to the Palm Springs hospital.

The whole process was repeated for the second man with the ankle injury. It was almost midnight when we headed towards the restaurant and the dinner we had missed during this successful double rescue.

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.