

College student overdue from hike

March 11, 1986
Mt San Jacinto
1986-010

By Walt Walker

When the telephone rings at 5 a.m. (that's night time to me) it usually means that RMRU's services are needed. The Banning Station of the Riverside County Sheriff's Department had requested the unit's help in searching for a solo overdue hiker. He had been reported missing by his parents. David Ayer, age 26, of Anaheim left his residence Saturday evening. He told his parents that he planned on hiking to the top of Mt. San Jacinto and staying overnight in the summit shelter. He planned to be home Monday evening for college classes.

When I talked to David's parents, by telephone, they told me he had planned on hiking up the Devil's Slide Trail (above Idyllwild on the west side of the mountain) and taking the high trail to the top of Mt. San Jacinto (elevation 10,804') and returning the same way. The Sheriff's Department reported that David's car was still in the parking lot at Humber Park.

The weather on the mountain had not been the greatest for hiking Sunday evening and all of Monday. It had snowed most of the time and there was anywhere from 12 to 24 inches of new snow. We were fairly sure that the missing hiker had lost the trail and could be almost anywhere on the mountain. Early Tuesday morning the storm was breaking up as we met RSO Capt. Larry Smith and Sgt. Dave Nordstrom at the bottom of the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway. We had requested the use of a helicopter and pilot Brian Novak of Landells Aviation arrived shortly after 7 a.m. in a Bell Jet Ranger.

The first place we wanted to check was the Mt. San Jacinto summit shelter hut. Ray Hussey and Kevin Walker climbed aboard the helicopter, Brian powered up the turbine and they were on their way to the top. When they neared the summit they radioed back that the winds were too strong to try a landing with all aboard and a heavy load of fuel. The bird returned to base and Ray climbed out and off went Kevin and Brian for another try on the summit. Being able to get lower to the ground this time, Kevin radioed back that he could see tracks in the snow on the summit and around the shelter hut. Brian finally found a spot to put Kevin off and he started for the hut while Brian returned to pick up Ray. Kevin radioed back that the hut was empty but there was fairly recently tracked in snow on the floor of the hut. Ray was flown to the summit and he and Kevin started following the tracks down toward

Frank Miller Peak.

Due to the continuing powerful wind gusts, 30 to 40 mph, only one man at a time could be flown to the summit. Rob Gardner and Cameron Robbins were airlifted to the summit in this manner. Their assignment was to head over to the San Jacinto - Jean Peak saddle and sweep below Jean Peak and head over to the Wellman Divide. Another crew consisting of Henry Negrete, Jay Pion and Jim Fairchild were flown to Round Valley. This three man crew was assigned to cover Round Valley, Tamarack Valley, the Sid Davis drainage and end up at Long Valley near the upper station of the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway. While all the above was going on Rick Pohlars rode up on the tram and became the new base using one of the portable radios.



Kevin Walker

MT. SAN JACINTO - Mountain pilot Brian Novak holds helicopter 16-Uniform on the summit of Mt. San Jacinto as RMRU member Ray Hussey exits the bird. Extremely high winds made things difficult for Brian, but he was able to let two teams of two off one at a time on the top of the San Jacinto range.

Each trip up Brian flew a brief air search and did the same as he returned to base. A new storm was starting to build on the western slope and blow over onto the eastern side of the mountain. After refueling the helicopter Brian and I took off to try and get as much aerial searching completed as we could before the storm prevented any more flying. We flew over towards Tahquitz Canyon up to Caramba Camp and started searching the area between Willow Creek and the Hidden Lake Divide. After only about five minutes of flying I spotted a single set of man tracks wandering through the trees about a half mile south of the Hidden Lake Saddle. Brian and I started tracking from the air and in a few minutes Brian spotted a man waving to us. We flew around the general area trying to find a spot to let me off. After trying to descend once down into a small clearing in the trees and the tops of several large boulders on the ridge we flew over to Hidden Lake and Brian landed on the bank of the small frozen lake. He then flew over and picked up first Kevin and then Ray and the three of us joined up as a three man team.



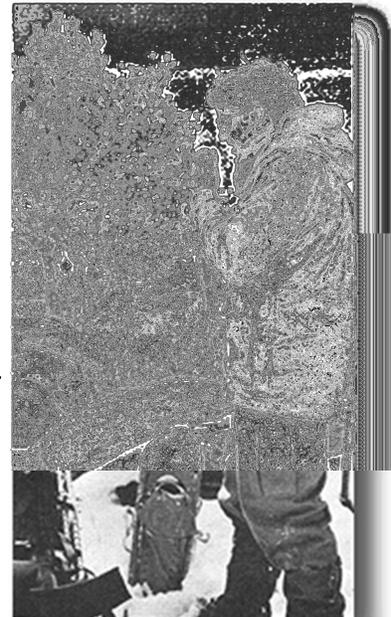
Kevin Walker

SUBJECT LOCATED - RMRU members Ray Hussey and Walt Walker talk with David Ayer after he had been located from the helicopter, and then caught up with by this field team. David was tired, wet and dehydrated, but had weathered the storm O.K.

We put on our snowshoes and started around the lake and up towards the Hidden Lake Saddle. Topping the saddle we followed the trail down towards Willow Creek Crossing. When we reached the first major drainage we turned south and headed down. We had to work our way around boulders, brush and trees as we descended. In a short time we found the single set of tracks and started following them eastward. As we snowshoed along we called out numerous times and finally we heard a reply. We shouted for him to stay where he was. The three of us met up with David and he eagerly accepted our offer of food and water. His stove had malfunctioned and he had not been able to melt snow for water or cook any food. He indeed was lost, tired, thirsty and slightly hypothermic. We radioed to base that we would continue eastward looking for a helispot. Base radioed to all field teams to be ready to be quickly picked up and flown out as the storm pushed further eastward.

In about thirty minutes we found a fairly good helispot on the ridge that descends from the Hidden Lake Divide to Caramba Camp. We had to trim some brush that would be too close to the tail rotor and rolled a rock over to support the downhill runner of the helicopter. As we completed the helispot snow flakes began to blow down on us and Kevin radioed to base that we were ready. While we had been working Brian had flown all the other members off the mountain.

As the dark clouds pushed further and further over Saddle Junction Brian arrived. Kevin gave Helitac hand signals to Brian, I watched the tail rotor and Ray stayed with David. As soon as the bird was down Kevin and I helped David into the front seat and Ray climbed into the back seat and we handed him his and David's packs. Kevin gave the thumbs up and the powerful machine took off and headed for the bottom of the tram. The storm pushed further towards Kevin and I and we started to discuss where we bivouac for the night if the bird could not return for us. However, we didn't have to go for the plan "B" as Brian returned to pick us up. As we flew back to the lower base I thought of the mission we had worked on last November and of the man who had not been as fortunate as David.



Walk Walker

COMEANDGETUS - With another storm front moving in, RMRU member Kevin Walker radioes out to base that the helispot is ready, and to send in the helicopter to pick up lost hiker David Ayer and RMRU personnel.

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.

