



Hypothermic cross-country skier

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Upper San Jacinto Mtns
1986-011

By Henry Negrete

The last hurrah of the winter season came on the weekend of the 15th and 16th of March. Like all winter storms this one was no respecter of persons. Such was the case of Edward Ferlise, 47 years old from San Diego. He chose this weekend to go cross country skiing, with nine other local Sierra Club members, from Long Valley to Mt. San Jacinto Peak and back to Long Valley.

The group was skiing down from the peak and Mr. Ferlise became separated from the others. Not anticipating this storm (which could overwhelm even the most experienced mountaineer if not prepared) the group went on ahead through Round Valley and eventually ended up back at the upper tramway station. At 6:00 p.m. the group reported to the State Park Ranger that Mr. Ferlise was missing. They reported that they had last seen him at 4:30 p.m. at the saddle between San Jacinto Peak and Jean Peak. By the time the Rangers were able to roll, the storm had settled in and it was snowing better than two inches an hour. The Park Rangers sent out two hasty search parties of two and the RMRU was contacted and put on standby status by 10:30 p.m. The Park Rangers searched without success in near whiteout conditions.

It was requested that RMRU join the search at first light and the weather didn't care that we would be out there either. The temperature was in the teens and the wind was beginning to blow hard, making the wind chill factor below OOF. RMRU members on site were: Joe Erickson, Jim Fairchild, Rob Gardner, Mark Rhoads, Bud White, Walt Walker, and Henry Negrete.

None of us were looking forward to pitching ourselves into the wiles of winter, but the thought of someone caught out there unprepared for the worst, gives those of us who are trained and equipped the willingness to go and do our best.

We deployed in three groups of two into the field with our operations leader manning radio at base. Our objective was to search the areas north and east of the point last seen (PLS) and converge with the Park units searching south and west.

The weather was not letting up and we were soon plagued with other problems. Two of our team members were succumbing to illnesses they were battling prior to the mission, so they were re-assigned to limited duties along the eastern perimeter. (I tip my hat to those guys who go out and give a hand when no one expects them to). This left us with only two teams to penetrate deeper toward the PLS. Shortly after this incident one of the Park teams was sending broken transmissions (a sign of radio failure for the close proximity we were in) but his radio lasted just long enough to announce he had found Mr. Ferlise and that his general location was Tamarack Valley.

We were instructed by our Operations Leader, Walt Walker, to proceed toward Round Valley to meet Senior Park Ranger Bob Foster and assist with a



Jim Fatchild and Walt Walker

IT'S NOT ALL GLAMOUR ... IT'S SERIOUS BUSINESS - In the photos on this page, State Park personnel, RMRU members and Sgt. Dave Duncan from the Sheriff's Department work very hard to get hypothermic patient Edward Ferlise evacuated from the Tamarack Valley area out to Long Valley during a snow storm that went from light snowfall to blizzard-like conditions

litter.

We met up with the Ranger enroute and he advised us that he had another detail bringing in the litter, so we could head in to assist with Mr. Ferlise. As we hastened our pace toward Tamarack it seemed like it would take forever, the snow was now over two feet deep, wet and heavy. (No fun even in snowshoes, if you know what I mean).

The Ranger was still unable to make radio contact to zero in on them, so we had to resort to shouting, and soon we heard the shrill of an emergency whistle. As we moved in we could see that Mr. Ferlise was clown, though still conscious. He was dangerously deep into first stage hypothermia.

Dressed only in a light ski jacket, light Gore-Tex pants, and cross country ski boots, he had virtually no protection from this kind of storm.

We administered warm soup to start warming him from the inside and all the dry clothing we had on board to his outside to try and stabilize him.

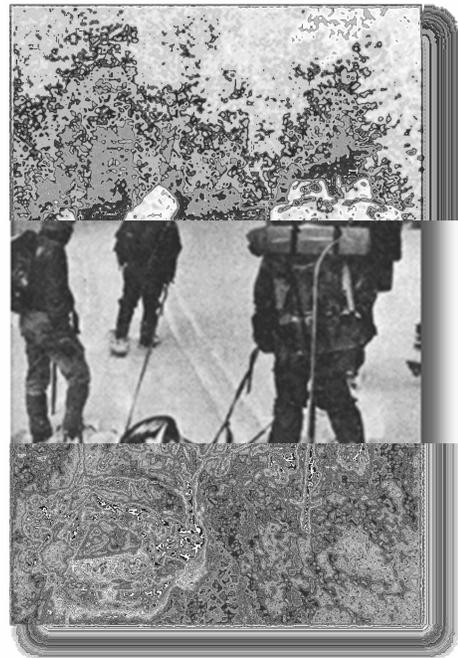
We considered setting up camp to administer further hypothermic aid, but opted to package him up in the litter and move to the Round Valley Rangers hut which was about a half mile away. And a long half mile it was. One would think that pulling a fiberglass litter in the snow would go easy. Under these snow conditions nothing was further from the truth.

The hut was a welcome sight and it felt darn good to have a break from the foul weather. As we rested, refueled our bodies, and reassessed Mr. Ferlise's condition, we also hoped and prayed for a break in the weather so that we could evacuate Mr. Ferlise by helicopter.

We kept in constant radio contact with base operations as to the weather conditions for a clearing, and meanwhile arrangements were being made to bring in the team's Cascade toboggan which is specially made for snow evacuation.

Well, like I said in the beginning: "The weather is no respecter of persons." After waiting it out for one and a half hours we had no choice but to resume on foot.

After about another two hours of slogging through the deep snow we met up with the toboggan team. Mr. Ferlise was transferred into the toboggan, litter and all,



reassessed, and we were off with renewed vitality.

The going got a little more intense as we maneuvered along the tight trails which ran along the steep drainages, but once again the training in subject care and methodical planning paid off.

Everyone got a good workout and never suffered a dull moment. All were relieved at the sight of the tram station, none more than Mr. Ferlise.

Back at the tram as we wound down this mission we all learned that Mr. Ferlise was a novelist. The first thought that came to me was, how lucky for him to be able to write about being literally snatched from the grips of death.

I hope all others we eventually will go in after will be so fortunate.

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.