



Backpacker suffered heart attack

**June 22, 1986
Reeds Meadow
1986-023**

By Henry Negrete

Our first summer call into the San Jacinto wilderness came at 2:00 pm Sunday, June 22.

The call was a bit ambiguous, concerning an older hiker, a Mr. James Deemer, 64 years old, of Long Beach. According to the informant, Mr. Deemer had hiked into the wilderness on Saturday with a couple of young companions he had recently met at his local chapter of the Sierra Club. As they reached Saddle Junction, which is the first real pit stop after enduring the Devil's Slide Trail, Mr. Deemer was experiencing some discomfort, with shortness of breath and dizziness. After a short rest Mr. Deemer was feeling up to continuing and the three hikers set out for their campsite destination which was Reeds Meadow, approximately one mile further at an elevation of around 8,000 feet.

After having their supper the younger couple noticed Mr. Deemer wheezing, and coughing a bit but not enough to raise anyone's concern. They all settled down for the night at about 9:00 pm.

In the morning at about 9:00 am the younger man was gathering some gear for another hike and noticed that Mr. Deemer was not up and about yet, but figured Mr. Deemer had burned himself out the day before and was just sleeping in. After returning from a morning hike, at 11:00 am, the young companions noticed that Mr. Deemer was still not up, and they became alarmed. They checked for some signs of life and after finding none they got spooked, grabbed their gear and headed down the trail to get assistance. They reached some forestry personnel who contacted the Riverside Sheriff's Office.

The investigating deputy was concerned about the certainty of Mr. Deemer's death, because at the young campers own admittance they had no practical training in emergency medical care.

The deputy wasted no time in calling out the RMRU and even went to the extent of personally calling Dr. Bill Blaschko, M.D., an RMRU team member living in Idyllwild, in the hopes of supplying the best medical care possible in the field, or

officially confirming Mr. Deemer's death.

Dr. Blaschko was available to respond and was joined by other RMRU team members. Mary Bowman and I made a quick response to Humber Park, being residents of Idyllwild.

In the short time it took us to make our way up to Humber Park the deputy had made arrangements to utilize the helicopter contracted to the forestry and was ready to roll us, Code 3, to the heliport at Keenwild Ranger Station.

On our way to the heliport I thought about how timely it was that the RMRU Board of Directors had just recently decided to place a team radio at Idyllwild to enable the team members on the hill to be an effective first response team.

After a mildly hairy ride through town we arrived at the heliport and within minutes were in the air and quickly flew to Reeds Meadow.

We scrambled towards the campsite led by the informant and found Mr. Deemer still in his sleeping bag, just as last seen by the informant.

Dr. Blaschko was quick to begin his assessment for any signs of life, but unfortunately there were none to be found.

Dr. Blaschko and the informant flew back to report his findings. I stayed behind to preserve the scene for the coroner.

Fortunately, for me it was not a long wait until they flew back in with the deputy coroner, and Dr. Ray Hussey, M.D., another outstanding team member. After escorting Mr. Deemer's body back to the helicopter, we hiked out of the wilderness. We later learned that Mr. Deemer had died in his sleep from a heart attack.

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.