

RMRU NEWSLETTER

PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY THE RIVERSIDE MOUNTAIN RESCUE UNIT, INC.
A VOLUNTEER NON-PROFIT CORPORATION
P.O. BOX 5444, RIVERSIDE, CALIFORNIA 92507
MEMBER OF THE MOUNTAIN RESCUE ASSOCIATION

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Walt Walker, Editor

RASH OF MISSIONS IN MARCH



Ed Hill, Rich Quackenbush and Walt Walker wait on the helispot boulder, as the large turbine powered helicopter comes in.

All of the photographs in this edition were taken by RMRU member Hank Schmel.

Search and Rescue

13 MAR., WED. — RESCUE — NO. 7406C White Mountains, Inyo County

We received a call from the Sierra Madre Search and Rescue Team asking RMRU to stand-by to assist on a small airliner that had crashed earlier that afternoon. We were notified the next morning that the Inyo team was able to handle it with no assistance.

23 MAR., THUR. — SEARCH — NO. 7407M Jensen Canyon, Cabazon Area *by Jim Fairchild*

Shortly after noon a family group left the south end of Elm Street, a few miles SE of Cabazon, for a hike. Included in the group were Allan Coggetti, his mother, his younger brother Ross, and two other boys. About three-quarters of a mile up a dirt road is a spring where the family split, Allan and Ross going cross-country uphill, the others returning home.



The missing boys brothers watch as the Riverside Police Department helicopter searches the canyon walls.

About five o'clock Ross returned home reporting that Allan had fallen off a cliff somewhere up the mountain (probably in a side canyon near Jensen Canyon). Following some checking by Sheriff's Deputies, RMRU was called. By ten or so sixteen of our twenty active members were searching. The nature of the call ("... a boy hurt in a fall up a canyon south of Cabazon ...") gave us all the impression that we'd just zoom in with technical gear and light call-out packs to evacuate the boy. Little did we know! Before long Walker and Morris were going up "Poison Oak Canyon," a western tributary to Jensen Canyon. Bridge, Schnurr, and Brown went up some steep gullies and bluffs just to the north. Claybrook shuttled late comers up to the spring. Soon we had Carlson, Schmel, McIlvoy, MacIntosh, Quackenbush, Gillespie, Castilonia, Hill, Stephens, Pohlers, Frickland, and yours truly, assigned to various areas. The hours went by. No luck. Exceptionally difficult to adequately cover steep, loose-rock terrain surrounded by thick scrub oak, buckthorn, chamise, mountain mahogany, and many other shrubs. Three of us bivouacked below Poison Oak Canyon due to our sensitivity to the poison.

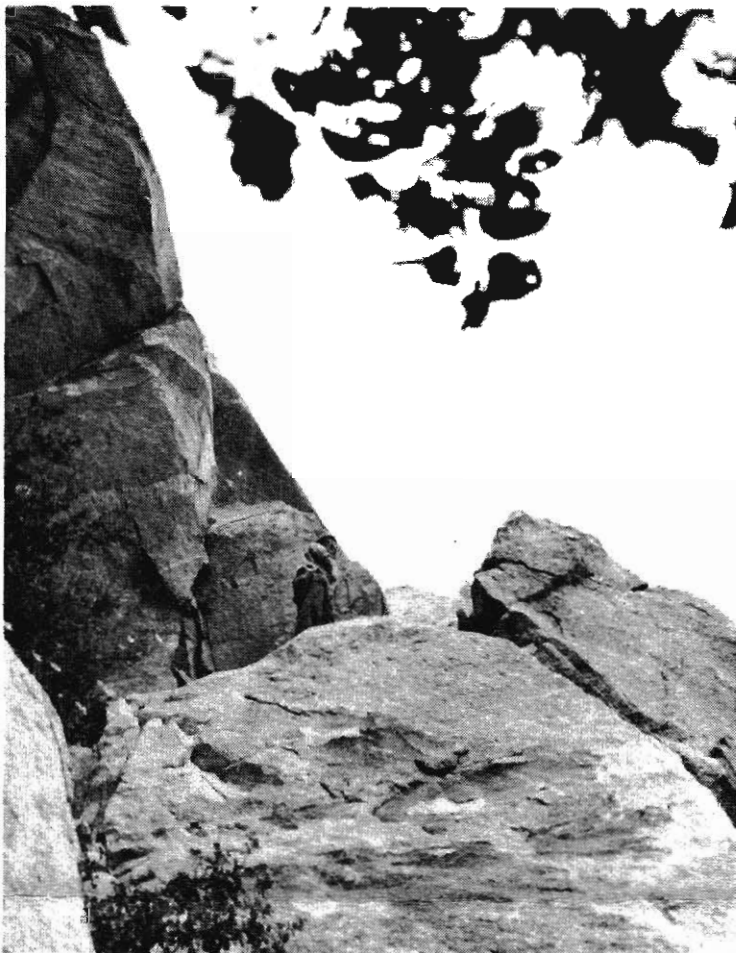


Rich Morris and Ed Hill peer down onto one of the many, many ledges covered with dense brush.

Friday morning several teams ascended Poison Oak Canyon, then turned their attention to the areas above. Our party tried to ascend the 300' high south wall of P.O. Canyon, finally making it in a direct line to where Don Landells had landed his bird in the "tilt" position. Ray, Hank, and I tried to lift the skids and place small boulders under for more levelling, but the engine, which Don had shut down, refused to re-start. So, with Gary, he hiked out to base and got a ride to his base, returning with Reed Jarroch in another bird and a fresh battery. The engine started, and Don "popped" the machine up from its predicament in spectacular fashion.

Meanwhile, the search turned up a few of Ross' tracks about two-hundred yards north of the helispot, but hard gravel and deep grass deterred our attempts to follow them. The search area was criss-crossed and enlarged. With heavy hearts we came out at dark, sure the boy had fallen to his death, "somewhere."

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Steve Stephens, RMRU member, searches one of the ledges in the prime search area.



Montrose and Sierra Madre team members study the ledges below, looking for a descent route.

Saturday, with many more men from Altadena, Montrose, China Lake, and Sierra Madre, we expanded and intensified the search with the same results. We found rattlesnakes, Mountain lion, babcats, coyotes, many cliffs and brush patches, but no trace of Allen.

Sunday, I took a three-hour hike with Ross to see if he could re-trace his hiking route and give more information. He stuck well to the original statements:

"On the way back from our hike we came to a place where Allen said he would slide down the rock to a tree and then climb the rest of the way down. I was chicken to do that. Allen slid past the tree and missed it. I heard him hit trees below and saw an orange tennis shoe fly up." Our search had been directed to cover every possibility, especially cliffs that even remotely fitted Ross' description.

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Rescue team members from Altadena, Montrose, Sierra Madre and Riverside climb into the Los Angeles County Fire Department helicopter just as the sun rises.



As the helicopter hovers on one runner, Walt Walker heads towards the big bird to assist in off loading equipment.

Sunday afternoon featured more skillful and spectacular helicopter flying, by the Los Angeles County Fire Department, to search canyons and cliffs. Hopes to find Allen alive faded, because we were aware of the nighttime temperatures and that we had covered the area so that if he could have answered even in a whisper, we would have heard him. If he had been injured and knocked unconscious, shock and exposure would have probably killed by the first night, the second night for sure. It was the consensus of MRA teams and the Sheriff's Office to discontinue the search until the following Saturday.

24 & 25 MAR., SUN.-MON. — SEARCH — No. 7408M
Palm Springs Tram, Long Valley Area
by Ray Castilonia, M.D.

After an exhausting, three-day search in Jensen Canyon, the members of RMRU were about to partake in a well deserved, warm night at home. Pete Carlson was busily deciding what to do with a newly acquired friend who had become quite attached to him during the long search, and Jim Fairchild was about to devour his favorite entree when the phone rang.

Packing began. Switching from low desert to cold summit gear, each member kept in mind the differing requirements between these two altitudes. With the disappointment of a recent failure and the knowledge of night-time conditions at the top of Chino Canyon, each man prepared for himself clothing, food and heat for the worst of conditions in the area.

Pete Carlson, being less than enamoured with his new companion, sought the aid of two RMRU members in persuading a dissolution of the relationship. Having an unsuccessful attempt at separation, Pete and his companion were obliged to pick up Bernie McElvoy before proceeding to seek the aid of a physician. After a local anesthetic, Pete's friend — a mildly engorged *Dermacentor* tick, was successfully removed and RMRU proceeded to the Palm Springs Tram.

At the time of arrival at the tramway, Bob Claybrook and Jack Schnurr had collected appropriate information and had deployed to the upper station. The victim was a 75 year old Caucasian male, dressed in grey-blue jacket and plaid trousers, who had been missing since he put his wife on the tram car at the upper station, and missed the car himself. He was senile, unfamiliar with the area, and had no experience in mountains. There was no evidence that the victim was still in the area. Questions appeared in every rescue member's mind as to the potentiality of a searching attempt. Despite this apprehension, teams were deployed, looking for tracks in the snow-filled canyons at the top of the tram.

One team was sitting on the rounded boulders southeast of the tram, identifying the surrounding terrain. Miller, San Jacinto and Jean Peaks, Tamarack, Round and Long Valleys were easily visible from the view point. The question arose: if a victim followed the drainage of Long Canyon, would he enter Taquitz Canyon above or below the dangerous area? Then suddenly, a gray-haired man appeared in the entrance to Long Canyon. He was clearly visible and appeared to be talking with someone. The two-man team investigated. As they approached the gray-haired man, he looked up quickly and spouted, "Hello there, young man. How are you today?" Confused, but content, Tunas VanKirk was lead to his family.

28 MAR., THU. — RESCUE — No. 7409A
Jensen Canyon, Cabazon area
by Walt Walker

Just about 5:30 p.m. Al Andrews activated RMRU's pager system. We were needed to rescue six people stranded, who had been searching for the boy missing from the previous weekend. When we arrived at the roadhead we were advised that they had been able to solve their own problem.

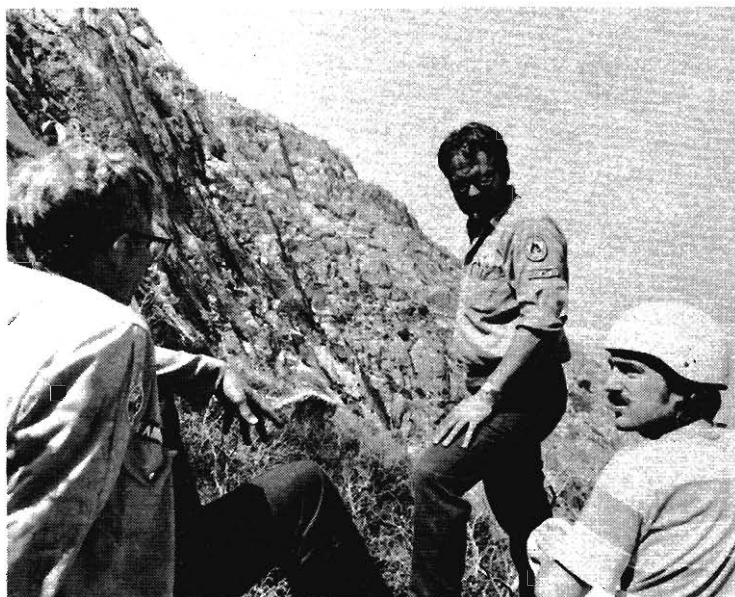
29 & 30 MAR., FRI.-SAT. — SEARCH — No. 7410M
Jensen Canyon, Cabazon area
by Walt Walker

RMRU had originally planned to continue the search for Allen Coggetti on Saturday, but with the mission call above and a request from Lt. Ray Campbell, we resumed the search at daybreak Friday morning.

Ten RMRU members left their jobs to don packs, hike into the poison oak and dodge rattlesnakes. Even though our hearts were not into it, we proceeded with the job at hand with the usual professional skill that RMRU has been noted for. (Note: Both the Riverside County Sheriff's Department and the Riverside Mountain Rescue Unit were criticized for discontinuing the search on the previous Sunday evening.) One by one, assignments were taken care of. By Friday evening we had eliminated one entire rock face. This had required both climbing and rappeling all day long.

Saturday morning once again found us hiking up Jensen Canyon. While some of us climbed rock faces and checked out ledge after ledge, Hank Schmel, Rick Polhers and John Dew proceeded into the small side canyon we lovingly named, 'Poison Oak Canyon'. About 10:30 that morning the radio came to life with the code that

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During a quick break, RMRU members, Jim Fairchild, Walt Walker, and Rich Morris discuss the problems of covering the many ledges and all the brush.

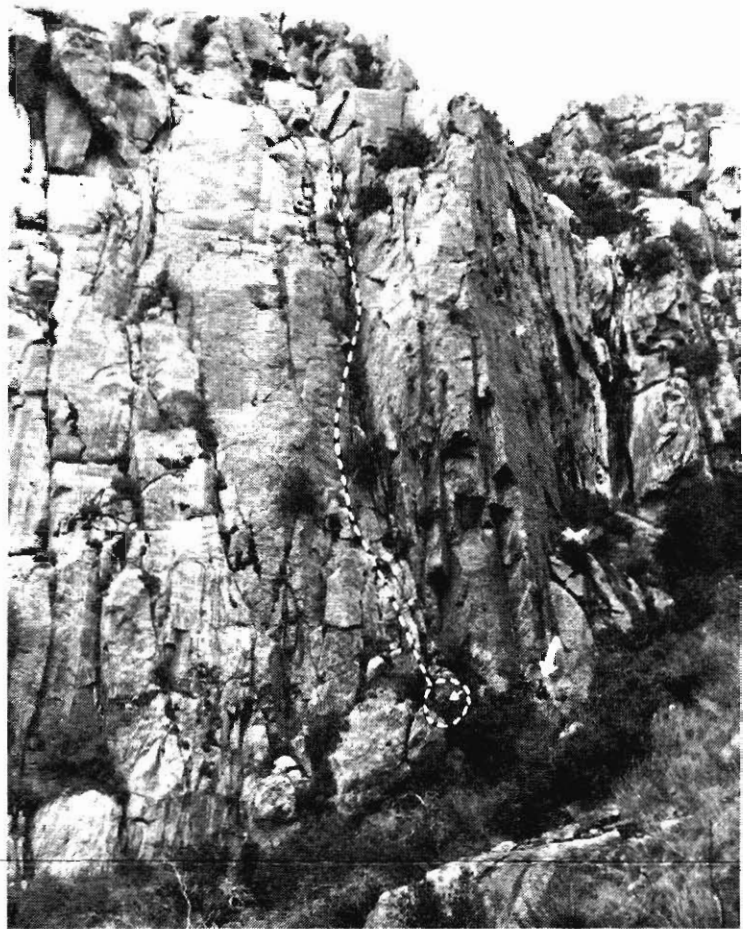
a body had been found. Hank's team had found the missing boy on a ledge covered with Scrub Oak, in fact his body was almost completely concealed by the bushes.

While some members hiked out to pickup needed equipment, others hiked into the small canyon to assist. During this time the sheriff's department contacted Don Landells and requested his helicopter.

When Landells arrived, the necessary equipment was loaded onto his bird, and then flown into the canyon. The body was loaded onto a litter, carried over to a helispot, loaded onto the helicopter, flown out to base and turned over to the coroner. We learned later from the coroner that the boy had most likely died before he had landed on the ledge when he had fallen nine days before.



Pictured is the dense Scrub Oak that the missing boy fell into.



The dotted line shows the approximate route of young Allen Coggetti's 350 foot plunge to death. The large arrow points to waiting RMRU members and the small one in the circle to where the body lay.



Strange, if not predictable, how quickly circumstances change. Last month I bemoaned the energy crisis but now we can at least go on trips. Also, I spoke of the joy of finding victims alive. Then, at long last Poison Oak Canyon revealed the body of a boy who, in total ignorance of mountainous terrain, fell 300' to his instantaneous death thinking he could climb down to the bottom in a small tree.

Participation reached another high point for RMRU members when 21 of us were actively engaged in the search for Allen. The one man who missed was far out of town.

Our Sustaining Membership is increasing both in numbers of

people giving and the amounts they give. This is wonderful when we survey the nation's financial condition!

We have four new candidates for membership who proved their sincerity and prowess by participating in the last day of the search this Saturday.

Our members with positions of leadership and responsibility are working hard to make the unit go — another source of joy to the Pres.

We are getting our write-ups in to Walt the Editor, so he's happy.

You wonder why I'm painting the rosy picture? (Rest assured I'm aware of problems which we are working on to the best of our ability) I've decided (as of last October) not to run for the Board of Directors this year. Why? Mainly because of incomplete recovery from a bout with Herpes Zoster (The Shingles) last year. More running, other physical fitness endeavor, and more rest should help before long. I am confident that the new Board (three of us older types aren't running) will effect an increase in our effectiveness and performance in all departments. My heartfelt thanks to all members and friends of RMRU who have given so much of themselves. My future with RMRU? — to be on every mission with the team with the longest, toughest assignment.

Guest

Ding Bat

of the month

by HANK SCHMEL



For the first time in RMRU history we have a guest 'ding bat' of the month. Our old friend and pilot Don Landells (Shown in the circle) landed his helicopter on a ridge and turned off the motor as he often does while waiting for us. When he tried to start his machine, it would not start. As his bird set 'dead' he hiked out for a new battery.

from Old'en Days

5 YEARS AGO IN THE "RMRU NEWSLETTER"
April 1969

SEARCH & RESCUE ACTIVITY

One of RMRU's "epics" was reported. After dinner on a Thursday evening we received a call that a young man had descended from the upper terminal of the tramway and had not met his wife at the bottom as planned.

After carefully loading winter gear into our packs we departed the tramway into the darkness. The first thing we did, was rappel 300 feet into a canyon we had never descended. Shortly, we picked up tracks descending. All night long we climbed, descended and froze. At first light two of our members flew with Don Landells in his new Jet Ranger helicopter. They spotted the missing man and picked him up.

SUSTAINING MEMBERS

The following were welcomed for contributing: Mr. & Mrs. Harry Monson, Mr. & Mrs. John B. Morgan, The Riverside Exchange Club and Boy Scout Troop 1 of Riverside. A special thanks was passed on to the following for continuing to support our rescue efforts: Mr. William F. Zauche, Mr. & Mrs. Carl F. Tennant, and Mr. & Mrs. Milton M. Levy.

THE PRESIDENT'S BOX

Walt commented that the San Diego Mountain Rescue Team had passed their snow and ice test with a very large turnout of members and a very good job.

Sustaining Members

by Mike Daugherty

I never cease to be astonished by the wild fluctuations in RMRU's rescue "workload." Weeks will drag by with nothing but an occasional abort and then there will be one search and three rescues in the space of 48 hours. It's almost as if one rescue call were somehow able to precipitate two more. As of this writing the team has just been through another such epidemic, leaving — as I recall from my days as a rescue member — the team's members physically exhausted and on thin ice with their employers. I mention this in connection with the sustaining membership for two reasons. First, I do it to point out that there are those whose names seldom appear here who support RMRU with something other than a check (not to denigrate that venerable institution). For example, those employers who tolerate the absence from the job of a team member who is out

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searching for a lost child. Surely these people are contributing something very real to the team.

Second, I am reminded that search and rescue operations must sometimes be conducted by men who have neither slept nor eaten properly in some time and who are wearied by the physical and emotional drain of the rescue or rescues they have just completed. Under these conditions the margin of safety is narrowed considerably and it is here that thorough training and first-rate equipment make the vital difference. I am often appalled by the cost of our radio gear, but when I consider that the radio may well accompany a man who is obliged to rappel into 1000 vertical feet of 2 AM darkness from the top of Tahquitz Rock, I realize how small its cost really is.

This month, we have been joined in our endeavor by the following new members:

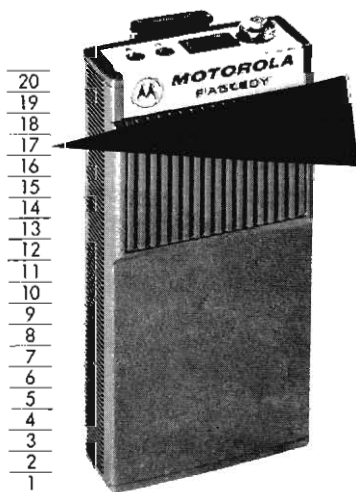
Gail Reichel
Alcan Management Club of Riverside
Sierra Club 100 Peaks Section
Mrs. B. K. Gibson
Mr. and Mrs. William Van Kirk
Nona White

and by the following renewing members:

Mr. and Mrs. George Phillips
Mr. and Mrs. Loyd Rathbun
Mr. and Mrs. Roland Wilhelmy
Mr. and Mrs. John Murdock
Mr. and Mrs. David Morris
Mrs. Ruth Echols
*Mr. and Mrs. Milton Levy

**Century Club Member, donation of \$100 or more.*

Pager Fund



Coming Events ---

8 May, Board of Directors Meeting.
11 May, Rescue 74', Century City.
15 May, Regular Meeting.
17-19 May, Training.
12 June, Board of Directors Meeting.
26 June, Regular Meeting.
29-30 June, Training.



ENCLOSURE

The pamphlet enclosed with this mailing of the "RMRU Newsletter" was published by the California Region of the Mountain Rescue Association.

RMRU is proud to be a member of MRA and thought you would like to see what is being done in mountain rescue circles.

Reprinted from the April 11, 1974 'Riverside Enterprise'.

Readers' Open Forum

Riverside

MOUNTAIN RESCUERS

Editor, the Press and Enterprise:

I was quite concerned about the rather critical comments reported in the Press-Enterprise concerning the Riverside Mountain Rescue Unit. This was the result of their recently calling off a search in the Cabazon area. This could understandably be laid to comments by a distraught mother, and she is to be forgiven. Her son was found, too late, dead from a fall.

For those who are not aware, RMRU is one of the top two or three rescue teams in the United States. They do not enter into a search lightly, nor do they ever give one up without being thoroughly convinced that it is time to fall back, regroup and make new plans. I have known many of these men personally for years. There is no finer, more dedicated, unselfish, unstinting volunteer group anywhere; men who would give their lives, if necessary, in a search and rescue operation.

These men are not paid, give up countless lost days of work, nor are they reimbursed for worn-out expensive equipment, and must pay for their own doctor bills when injured on a search or rescue. Their one payment is the smile on a mother's face when a child is found alive. Maybe this is worth the agony of frozen toes and broken bones. Nothing is harder for these men to take than getting to a victim too late.

I have taken Boy Scouts into the wilderness for years, secure in the knowledge that these rescue men would be there in case I ever got "hung out to dry." They are never farther away than a phone call if I'm ever overdue. We should count our blessings in this county knowing that men of this caliber are willing to sacrifice their all to search for the lost and strayed.

JACK NELSON

Riverside