

TRAINING



**18-19 Nov., Sat.-Sun.
Familiarization,
Palm Canyon West,
San Jacinto Mountains**

By Kevin Walker

How does one begin to tell a story such as the long to be remembered training of the two famous hiking groups of RMRU, the Ridge Runners and the Canyon People. Well, I suppose the best place is to start at the beginning.

Saturday, we met at the Pine Springs Ranch above Garner Valley. Our goal was to descend Palm Canyon West and onto Palm Springs by Sunday afternoon. After Ed Hill received permission to cross a small piece of private property, we started up the trail towards the Desert Divide. Once reaching the ridge, we stopped for a break. We were deciding which route to take when our illustrious President decided he wanted to go down the ridge and then drop into the canyon bottom several thousand feet below. Ah, but there seemed to be a difference of opinion. There were some who felt it was better to stay in the canyon bottom. Being the great leader that he is, Ed said "I'll take a group down the ridge. Walt, you take the rest down the canyon." Well that seemed fair enough. The Ridge Runner team consisted of Ed Hill, Avery Powers, Don Chambers, Joel Erickson, and guest Richard Lutz from Switzerland. The Canyon People team consisted of Walt Walker, Jim



RMRU PHOTO BY JIM FAIRCHILD

ROUTES WERE BEING DECIDED when this photo was taken early Saturday morning, at the beginning, of the West Fork of Palm Canyon. (L to R, foreground) Richard Lutz (guest), Brian Hixon, Avery Powers and Kevin Walker. (standing) Walt Walker, Ed Hill, Joe Erickson (hidden), Steve Zappe and Don Chambers.

Fairchild, Steve Zappe, Brian Hixson, and myself.

Off we went on our merry ways. Our team was doing fairly well, our biggest problem that we had was more snow in the canyon bottom than we had expected. The radio had been quiet for about two hours when to our surprise the Ridge team called us and stated that they were going to turn back. We were navigating a small waterfall at the time, so we asked them to stand by. Once we were past our little problem, Walt got back on the radio to Ed. After asking what the problem was, Ed replied, "Brush, manzanita and more brush." Well it seemed that the Ridge Runners had encountered more brush than what their little eyes had told them. So with that we went on our way, and Ed's team started back to Garner Valley. Even though we did not have to worry about the brush, we were still in the snow. To our luck though, we finally got out of the snow at about 4:00 in the afternoon. Soon after that we found a perfect place to camp. It then did not take much time before a

warm fire was going, and we were drying out our now quite wet socks. While doing that we put all of our food together. Since the rest of Steve's cooking group was now back at the cars, and Richard had been in our group, and was also back at the road head, Steve ate with us. All joking aside, we did miss not having the rest of the group with us.

After breakfast Sunday morning, we started down to complete the rest of our journey. It was once again slow going, but not snow this time, it was now very thick grape vines intermixed with assorted brush and rocks. At about 2:00 p.m. we climbed out of the canyon, had lunch, and then started working our way down - up - over - back - and across all of the little sucker ridges. But persistence paid off, we finally reached the small foot trail leading to the road head. And at some time after 4:00 p.m. we reached the road head, and our rides back home.

Final score:

Ridge Runners 0
Canyon People 1

• RMRU

Search and Rescue

RESCUE

Mission No. 7845A

**1 Nov., Wed.
Mt. Whitney**

The China Lake Mountain Rescue Group had requested our help for a rescue mission. We had just started on our way when word was received that the mission had been cancelled.

• RMRU

SEARCH

Mission No. 7846M

**6 Nov., Mon.
North Face of
Mt. San Jacinto**

By Brian Hixson

Just as I was coming out of a Biology lecture, the pager sounded, and I went to the nearest telephone. Upon phoning in I received the information that two climbers were overdue from a climb of the North Face of Mt. San Jacinto. I rushed home, gathered up my gear, and headed towards the road head.

We made our Base Camp at the community of Snow Creek, which is at the foot of the North Face. When I arrived, Don Landells had just landed in his Bell Jet Ranger. Kevin Walker and Jim Fairchild had been selected by Operations Leader Walt Walker to be the first team to be flown part way up the mountain. The plan was to have them check for tracks, fly two more members to the top for a check, then put two more in the bird to fly as observers.

Just as Kevin and Jim were about to climb into the bird we received a message, via the sheriff's radio, that the two overdue climbers had hiked out to the Long Valley Ranger Station. So, we loaded up our cars and headed home. • RMRU

SEARCH

Mission No. 7847M

**12 Nov., Sun.
Dark Canyon area,
San Jacinto Mountains**

By Ed Hill

At 2 a.m., the phone rang. The team was asked to search for a Boy Scout troop, lost in the Dark Canyon area. We were to meet at the Idyllwild Sheriff's Substation at 5:30 a.m. I called my people and went back to bed for an hour.

Arriving in Idyllwild, we were sent to the Pine Cove Fire Station to look after the boys who had been evacuated via a snow cat. We started cooking cans of soup and cocoa and carefully wrapped up bunches of boys in blankets. While we were doing this, we were told that T. J. Smith, the deputy left at the scene, had found another boy, deceased, wrapped up in one of the collapsed tents. Jim Fairchild and I

volunteered to go with Captain Ray Canova to evacuate the body.

We rode in on the snow cat, relieved the deputy, took the pictures that the coroner requires, wrapped the body in one of the sleeping bags and sent it out on the snow cat.

Both Jim and I were numb from what we had just seen. A whole group of scouts and their leaders had succumbed to hypothermia. There had been no one in good enough condition to take the necessary steps to keep the whole group alive. We found sleeping bags which could have helped keep the group warm still on packframes and found food which should have been eaten still in bags. The group's clothing was totally inadequate for the mountains at this time of year. We found soaked levis and tennis shoes.

Our mountains which are so hospitable for three seasons of the year can be arctic in the winter. As long as people go into them unprepared for these conditions, lives will be lost.

• RMRU



RMRU PHOTO BY JIM FAIRCHILD

SAD TASK, HALF COMPLETED. Two unidentified men, Ed Hill (looking at camera) and Jim Fairchild (taking photo) had just loaded, the body of the deceased Boy Scout, along with some camping equipment. The other half of the equipment, pictured at right, was removed by a second trip up the snow covered Dark Canyon road.

SEARCH

Mission No. 7848M

**12 Nov., Sun.
Santa Rosa Mountains**

By Kevin Walker

Being that this was the first major snow storm of the season, we were not surprised when we were notified of a second search mission as we were just finishing one in the San Jacinto Mountains. The call was for two hunters overdue from a deer hunting trip in the Santa Rosa Indian Reservation.

It was decided that it would be advantageous to use a helicopter, and make an initial search of the area by air. So after catching a quick breakfast, RMRU members cleared from the previous mission went to Camp Maranatha to await the arrival of the helicopter. Just as someone commented that it was 9:00, off in the distance we could hear the familiar high pitched, "chop-chop" of Don Landells helicopter. It was decided that fellow team member Jim Garvey and I would ride with Don to make the initial search. So, without any waste of time Jim and I climbed into Don's turbine powered Bell Jet Ranger, and were off for the Santa Rosa Mountains.

Upon reaching the search area we were surprised to find about a foot of snow on the ground, with drifts up to three feet. We were hopeful when we spotted the hunters car parked in front of a locked gate. But after hovering directly over the car and no response from inside we moved on up the road. Only after about five more minutes of flying, we were pleased when we saw two men carrying rifles walking down the road. So with a quick landing by Don, Jim climbed out and went down to the two very puzzled men. Upon questioning them, Jim looked back at Don and I, and nodded in an affirmative manner. Don then told me that he could move the two men down to their car, and then come back and get Jim and I. I then got out of the chopper and went down to Jim and the two men and gave the hunters all the warnings about helicopters, mainly, **keep your head low**. We then loaded the hunters into the chopper, and Don was off. The bird was only gone for five

minutes, but it would have taken the two men most of the day to reach their car. While the bird was gone, Jim related to me what he had been told by the two men. They had started Friday before the storm arrived, and had left their car at the locked gate, and continued up the dirt road. When the storm hit, they found an abandoned cabin and stayed there till Sunday morning when the storm subsided. They then started down the road, and that is when we came in.

Upon Don's return, we headed back to the two mens car to see if they had it started. With steam coming out of the tail pipe, we headed back to complete one more task. And that was to see if there was any hikers in need of aid due to the heavy snow. After making a quick check of the San Jacinto high country, all of the hikers we saw, had good equipment, and were going about their way in a normal manner.

Once back at base we were informed that the two hunters had made it out to the highway. With that, Don headed back to his home, and the rest of us soon did the same. • RMRU

SEARCH

Mission No. 7849M

**12-13 Nov., Sun.-Mon.
Black Mountain Road,
Camp Lackey,
San Jacinto Mountains**

By Jim Fairchild

A few hours into resting up from the physical and mental exhaustion of the preceding day's missions the phone rang again; another search call.

The Banning Station of the Sheriff's Office requested assistance in locating three overdue hunters, reportedly in the Black Mountain area.

When I was near Banning driving the van toward the Black Mountain Road turnoff, the Sheriff's dispatcher called to say a convoy would form at the bottom of the grade, then Capt. Canova confirmed this and soon a motley parade began to wend its way up the mountain; a dump truck ahead to drop sand on icy stretches of the road, a semi-trailer with caterpillar

tracks with snow pushing blade, other State pick-ups, Capt. Canova's 4WD vehicle, RMRU van, and assorted others. This was the most leisurely (slow) drive I ever made up the grade. At the roadhead there was a flurry of packing and getting into other 4WD vehicles (add the Pine Cove Rescue panel truck driven by Bob Muir), then it was off up the road, following the snorting and bucking tractor that cleared the way enough for the wheeled vehicles to follow. Brian Hixson remained with the van as Base Camp Operator, while Hal Fulkman, Bernie McIlvoy, Steve Zappe, Kevin Walker and I jolted along for ten miles to Camp Lackey.

Before reaching the camp we encountered a number of vehicles left abandoned on the road. They were unceremoniously moved by the tractor. On a hunch we checked the Fuller Ridge Trail roadhead. Kevin and I had exited Canova's vehicle to get some welcome exercise loping along behind the tractor. As we neared a van at the roadhead a frantic honking began. Visions of near-dead hypothermia victims were conjured. Upon stumping up to the door through deep snow we saw four warm but anxious men safely ensconced. We tried to calm their anxiousness to be evacuated, saying they would be returned for later. It was on to the camp where dawn found us being greeted by two Doberman Pinchers, five chickens, two cockatoos, and a cat. Not to men-



tion a woman (owner of the zoo) and three young men. They too were eager to be evacuated, especially the woman who told of a strong wish to drive east to be married in three days. Of course, she thought her "Murphy, a VW bus, could drive out on the "cleared" ten miles of steep, narrow, snow-covered road.

Are you wondering what happened to the three overdue hunters whose worried wives initiated this whole drill? Well, the woman at Camp Lackey had heard shots the previous evening and radioed out on CB to that effect. That's how we all got into the act. She told us further that she heard shots about the time we would have been a mile or so away from reaching the camp. The noise of the tractor had prevented the sound from reaching our ears. All this early morning we had been awaiting the large helicopter on contract to the Calif. Division of Forestry. Capt. Canova had requested it to come to transport RMRU searchers and evacuate whoever we found. As time passed without results, Canova requested Don Landells, who soon arrived. With Steve Zappe aboard and searching where I figured the shots came from, a whole three minutes elapsed before the two vehicles and three hunters were spotted. Don ferried them back to Camp Lackey, and departed for a trip to Bishop. Meanwhile, Bill Barrett of Western Helicopters flew the 205 overhead and said he wasn't planning to land on the tiny field in the middle of Camp Lackey. We suggested a huge helispot on a ridge a mile or so NW and that was fine. Also meanwhile, because we anticipated this eventuality, the tractor had cleared the road over to the ridge and thence up to the van with four men at the Fuller Ridge Trail. Canova made trips, Bob Muir made trips, and when all were on the ridge Bill made his final flight from there to the Banning Airport. It was planned to drop the chickens over the airport on a fly-by just for effect, but their wings had been clipped. Anyway, Bill lifted the big bird off the ridge about a minute before the dense, white cloud brought almost zero visibility and later another snowstorm.

We landlubbers spent another two hours jolting back to the rescue van, putting in a total of seven. I'm still puzzled as I ask, "This is mountain rescue?" • RMRU

SEARCH

Mission No. 7850C

21 Nov., Tue.

San Jacinto Mountains

The Riverside County Sheriff's Banning station had notified us two boys were lost and that the Palm Springs Aerial Tram was to be the roadhead. About 20 minutes after we were on the way, the pagers advised that the boys had been found.

• RMRU

SEARCH

Mission No. 7851A

24 Nov., Fri.

Hurkey Creek area, San Jacinto Mountains

It was early evening when we received a call that four children were lost out of the Hurkey Creek Campground. There was snow on the ground, the temperature was **dropping**, and the children were not dressed for the cold. All RMRU members contacted, **hurried** from their homes, and were quickly on the way when the pagers relayed the good news. The four children had been safely located. • RMRU

SEARCH

Mission No. 7852M

26 Nov., Sun.

Rabbit Peak, Santa Rosa Mountains

By Ron Barry

The callout came at around 2:00 Sunday morning — two guys, ages 16 and 21, were overdue from a hike down by the Salton Sea. I piled the gear into my truck, and picked up Bernie McIlvoy on the way out, with our destination being the Indio Sheriff's substation.

The Indio Sheriff directed us south to a series of dirt roads outside Coachella that led out to some cultivated fields. The eastern horizon was changing from ink black to indigo as dawn approached. The rescue van was parked next to a field, and members of the lost boys' family were there. The victims were lightly dress-

ed, so they definitely spent a chilly night up there, and they had a dozen or so tacos with them. They were supposed to have gone hiking up towards Rabbit Peak Saturday morning, to get up into the snow. As dawn approached, maps were pulled out and we went over the most probable routes they would have taken. Two routes were top priority — one was up a large winding canyon, the other up a ridge that led eventually to the top.

Soon after sunrise, Don Landells arrived in his Jet Ranger. Bernie and I boarded his ship, with John Dew going as observer. After a quick recon of the lower ridges and valleys, Bernie had Don drop us off on a dominant ridge at around the 1500 foot level. After the chopper was out of range, we gave some yells for our victims, but got no reply. Next we checked the ridge out for tracks, and - BINGO! Right where the chopper landed, was a set of Vibram tracks, going uphill along the ridge. More searching produced a second set of tracks - these from tennis shoes. A brief conversation with Base, and we knew the bootprints matched what the boys were wearing.

Don returned and airlifted us up the ridge, tracking from the air until we lost them. We were dropped off, and soon picked up their tracks again. Don returned for more teams as Bernie and I continued up the ridge. Jim Hansen and Darryl Hand were flown up to a point on the ridge a mile ahead of us, where they would try to cut tracks. Unfortunately, they never found any, so we had to assume the guys dropped off the ridge between us and the Hansen/Hand team. Another team was dropped on the ridge at a point between us and Hansen/Hand, which consisted of Jim Garvey and Hal Fulkman.

Don then flew up to the snowline to try and find tracks by air, leaving the six of us to figure out where they bombed off the ridge. Don Landells has the keenest eyesight, and eventually he spotted obscure tracks going off the ridge into a canyon, then later on, way up high on another ridge. Our victims had dropped off our ridge, crossed the canyon, and ascended another ridgeline that undulated up to the snowline. Getting low on fuel, Landells picked Bernie and me up, and we had a quick flight up to just below snowline. There was no-



where to land up here, so we stepped out on the runner and dropped down to the ground, trying to avoid the abundant cholla cacti.

Don returned to Base to refuel, while we tracked our "elusive duo" up a narrow ridge, where the tracks disappeared again! We were searching the area when Base radioed that our "duo" had arrived at the rescue van. They had retreated from the mountain precisely at the point we were at then. • RMRU

from Old'en Days

by Walt Walker

NOVEMBER

Ten years ago—

The **President's Box** by Walt Walker related how 1500 copies of the October newsletter had been distributed in an effort to help raise money for the unit. Also that there had been 21 SAR missions through October. The big news was that the unit had received the two FM handietalkie radios that what were the beginning of the unit's communications system.

The **Sustaining Members** column by Al Andrews, thanked his parents for becoming the unit's first renewing sustaining members.

Under **Search and Rescue** was the unsuccessful search in the Kearsarge-Gardiner Basin area. RMRU members along with the other California Region teams, had searched for David Oldfield. The search started on the 9th and lasted until the 20th when it was called off by the Sequoia Park Rangers. With many unit members on the previous search, we received a call on the 20th that two young boys were stranded on a ledge in Massacre Canyon near the City of San Jacinto. The unit members who were still at home responded and with aid of aluminum snow pickets, driven into the dirt, we lowered Larry Percy down to the boys. he secured a rope to them and they were hauled to safety one at a time. Four days later we started searching for a 76 year old man who had wandered away from

his car in the Red Mountain area south of Hemet. The unit's Bloodhound, Sugar, was started and she began to track into dense brush. When footprints were found the rest of the team members were called into the area. Shortly our calls were answered. We soon zeroed in on the faint response and shortly located the missing man. He was somewhat dehydrated from going without water for 18 hours. He was given water and helped out.

Five years ago—

On the front page the **Sustaining Members** column by Mike Daugherty reported that the unit had escaped from the financial doldrums, in which the unit had found itself for many months. There was a long list of new and renewing sustaining members.

Search and Rescue listed two missions for the month. The first was the successful rescue of a 14 year old boy, with an injured ankle, from part way up Cabazon Canyon. It had required our technical skills. We had had to rig the litter and lower the injured boy down two dry waterfalls. The second operation was an all night search in the Tahquitz drainage of the San Jacinto Mountains. A young man had become separated from his hiking partner. Early in the morning RMRU members, Ed Hill and Rich Morris, were searching along Tahquitz Creek when they heard a response to their calling. Shortly they located the missing man. He was in good condition, other than being hungry and cold. They took care of that and hiked him back to Reed's Meadow where he was flown out by Don Landells in his super charged Bell helicopter. • RMRU

