

SAN JAC FLOOD of '80



RMRU PHOTO BY JIM FAIRCHILD

MOUNTAINEERS AWASH — Fast running water is not one of the usual elements for mountaineers. However on that infamous Thursday RMRU members braved the waters that inundated the City of San Jacinto. RMRU members Jim Garvey, Brian Hixson and John Dew provided one of the many rescues that day.

Search and Rescue

SEARCH

Mission No. 8003M

**12 Feb., Tues.
Below USC Campus
San Jacinto Mountains**

By Kevin Walker

Rule No. 6 of the 10 ways to please a loved one: Pager goes off while having dinner at Lord Charlies with your girl friend. So much for a quiet evening.

After calling Al I was informed that there was a mentally retarded man lost somewhere below the USC Campus in Idyllwild, since the early afternoon. Rendezvous point would be the Idyllwild Sheriff's office.

With that we quickly finished dinner and left Riverside for San Jacinto. After dropping Patrice off at home, I went to my place and tossed the gear into the car and headed for Idyllwild. Just as I passed the Elementary school in Idyllwild, I met the van followed by a herd of cars heading for the USC campus. After slipping into the caravan, we headed past the campus and on down the old control road that heads towards the base of the mountain. We had only been on the road for about 10 minutes when the convoy of assorted RMRU and Hemet team members came to a halt. Heads were popping out of windows trying to see why we had stopped so suddenly. Well low and behold the man in question was walking up the road, and almost ran into us. With that it was time to find a place to turn around and head for home. • RMRU

ASSIST

Mission No. 8004M

**20 Feb., Wed.
North of the City
of San Jacinto**

By Brian Hixson

It was a strange feeling to be told over the school intercom to leave your school room and go home because of the chance that the levee holding the San Jacinto River back might break. Upon reaching my home I was met by my mother who told

me to get my rescue gear together and go back to the Cottonwood Trailer park and assist in evacuating the trailers and homes below the levee. When I reached the base camp at the trailer park I found that the evacuation operation was well under way with the trailer park almost completely empty. At base the Sheriff was directing operation, with the Hemet and San Jacinto Police Departments, the Hemet team, and RMRU assisting in notifying the residents of the danger. Fellow team member Kevin Walker and I were assigned to check all the homes along the old Gilman Road and tell the residents that they might have to leave their homes if the erosion of the levee shifted to the north side of the river. After completing that assignment we returned to base and reported on what residents we made contact with. It was about 3:00 in the afternoon when Kevin and I were told to rendezvous with Hemet Valley Ambulance on the North side of the river. The reason being that if the levee breached the north side would be isolated and by having the paramedic ambulance there, medical aid could be given to residents. At 6:00 we were told that we could return to base. Once back, Walt Walker told Kevin and I that work crews were beginning to gain on the erosion and residents would be allowed to return to their homes. It was a secure feeling to know that the danger was over, little did we know what was in store for us the next day. • RMRU

RESCUE

Mission No. 8005A

**21 Feb.; Thurs.
Sage area,
South of Hemet**

At 2:30 Sunday morning, RMRU received a call from the Hemet office of the Riverside County Sheriff's Department, requesting our services in rescuing an injured man who was trapped with several other people by rising flood waters in the Sage area. Since the main road into Sage was washed out, team members headed for the mountain road that heads toward Mountain Center. Once again rising flood waters proved to be a problem. The San Jacinto River had washed out a portion of the highway next to the Cranston Bridge, which required that the highway be closed. With the closing of the highway it was decided that it would be safer to use a helicopter to air lift the injured man and the other residents out at first light. • RMRU

EVACUATION

Mission No. 8006M

**21 Feb., Thurs.
City of San Jacinto**

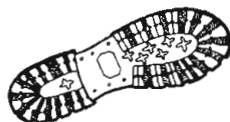
By Kevin Walker

Well, to tell you the truth I thought it would be like the previous day when we were asked to help with all the rain oriented problems around the City of San Jacinto where I live. Nothing extremely serious, just isolated homes and ranches that were on low ground.

Five of us (all valley residents) were helping to fill sand bags at one of the local dairies, when Walt Walker said that there was a more serious problem at another location. Walt, Brian Hixson and Hal Fulkman rode with Capt. Bill Park and Chris Noon joined me in the rescue van. As we were driving Chris and I talked about what could be wrong now. Maybe some resident who had an excessive amount of water flowing toward his house or something like that. But instead of going to the area that had been having all the problems, we headed through the city and out to where our business is, and where I live.

Just as we reached Arrow Printing, it was a very bad feeling that I got as I watched a 50 foot section of the levee break open. No more fooling around, we had a real problem now. To all the residents who had had problems previously with water, I now knew what they were feeling, because the mobile home where I live and the business where I work was just about to become a flood statistic. By the time we had moved two picnic style tables around to the front of our business and some large chunks of concrete to weight them down, we were in water up to our knees. By that time there was nothing more to do but leave and try and help in the city. Brian carried one of my dogs, while I led the other, a large Blood hound. He was nearly having to dog paddle to keep his head above the water. It really was a helpless feeling to have to leave your home surrounded by water.

Once back in the city, we set up base camp on high ground across the street from where my parents live. We quickly started filling large plastic bags with dirt from my parents' drive way. We were about halfway complete with the shoveling when the first trickle of water could be seen in the street. In less than 15 minutes the water had reached the top of the bags, and was starting to lap over the top. The bags soon gave way and the water came flowing into the property. We saved what bags we could and put them in front of doors, low windows, and the garage. While we worked outside, my mom, sister, grandparents, and friend



of the family, Dona Towell, sopped up water as it leaked through the exposed walls. The water finally peaked out at about 18 inches on Walt's house. By this time more team members had made it into the valley and were ready to help. With things finally straightened out at my parents' house, we were able to start helping the less fortunate.

Our first assignment was to check some homes that were isolated north of the city. To do so we would need a helicopter. That was not a problem at this time as there were numerous choppers helping to evacuate residents from their homes. As luck would have it, a familiar white and gold bird with blue trim was flying by at that time, so with no delay Walt radioed to pilot Don Landells and requested his help. Don soon returned, and Walt and I were on our way to check out the assigned area. It was strange to see all the streets that I grew up on, to be totally submerged under swift moving water. As we flew over the isolated homes, one of which was my grandparents', we saw that all were fairing quite well under the circumstances. Since there were no life threatening situations in that area we were flown back to our base camp. Once back we were assigned to check homes that were worst hit, east of the city, and evacuate anyone in that area. Pete Carlson remained at base while the remaining 10 of us were driven by a large lumber truck to the homes in question. Once there we started checking the homes that now had a good four feet of water running into them. Those that we found were all older people that did not get out in time. All were in good spirits though, as we helped them (carried piggy-back style) to an area where the choppers could land.

There was one set of homes though that would be a problem getting to. We would have to cross one street that had a good five to six feet of water running in it. Since the current was much too swift to try and swim, a helicopter would have to be used. After getting one to land on a small sand bar, Walt and Rick lifted off to help those on the other side of the street, while the rest of us continued on the south side. Walt and Rick had their work cut out for them. They were let out on a shed roof top, and then had to climb down and bring one elderly couple out of their home and then help them up onto the roof where the chopper could set down.

As you can see, we had a very long and very busy day. I want to emphasize though that we were not the only ones helping in the evacuation. The Hemet team, Red Cross, Air Force, National

Guard, Hemet and San Jacinto Police, CDF, sheriff's department, and many residents took part in helping those hit by the flood. The water has since reced-

ed, but the scars still remain. It was a day that I will never forget. Years from now I will look back and remember the Flood of 1980. • RMRU



RMRU PHOTO BY JIM FAIRCHILD

EVACUATION — RMRU members carry an elderly woman by stretcher to a waiting rescue helicopter. Most residents were evacuated to the Hemet Fairgrounds where the Red Cross had set up a refuge center.



RMRU PHOTO BY JIM FAIRCHILD

WET FEET — RMRU members Brian Hixson, Rick Pohlers and John Dew stand by, while Jim Garvey, Hal Fulkman, Kevin and Walt Walker head towards one of the many homes containing stranded residents.



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**20 FEB., 1980
North of the City
of San Jacinto**

By Brian Hixson

SEARCH

Mission No. 8007C

29 Feb., Fri.
Palm Canyon,
San Jacinto Mountains

RMRU member Walt Walker received a call from the Indio office of the Riverside County Sheriff's Department that there was an overdue hiker in Palm Canyon. Walt was asked how long it would take for someone to hike down the canyon. After giving an approximate time for the average hiker to make it, RMRU was placed on stand by. • RMRU

Jean. From there it was a ridge walk up to Mt. San Jacinto for lunch.

After enjoying a good meal, they set up anchors on the top and everyone took his turn at descending about 50 feet down the North Face, and then ice climbed their way back up. Even though RMRU does not have many actual ice oriented missions, it is still very important to be ready in the event that one does occur. After a good afternoon session, the group descended to the Frank Miller Saddle where

camp was then set up. No one mentioned to this writer, but one can well imagine that there was no food leftover after dinner. Some retired early while others stayed up a little bit later to take in the night scenery.

Sunday was somewhat low key, with a leisurely breakfast, and then the breaking down of camp. After that, all enjoyed the snow hiking conditions on the way back to the tram. All in all a very successful training. • RMRU

TRAINING



Familiarization & Personal Skills

8-10 Feb., Fri.-Sun.
Mt. San Jacinto,
San Jacinto Mountains

(the following article was written from conversations with participants)

At 7:00 P.M. RMRU members met at the lower station of the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway, so that they could catch the 7:30 car to the mountain station. Once at the upper station the group headed down the switchbacking sidewalk to Long Valley. After dropping a radio off at the ranger station, RMRU headed for Round Valley. It would be much easier to hike in, in the daylight, but by hiking at night the terrain is much harder to make out, so yet another form of familiarization is achieved. Upon reaching Round Valley the group set up camp and bedded down for the night.

Saturday morning it was the summit or bust. It was a clear but cold day due to the fact that there was approximately eight feet of snow on the ground. Normally one would just hike up the trail to the summit. But in RMRU's case, that would not be. The group went cross country from Round Valley and headed for the Marion saddle between Marion Mountain and Jean Peak. After lipping over the saddle onto the western slope, the group traversed across the front of the mountain. As they were traversing, they also were gaining altitude, and in doing so the group again lipped up on the 10,000 foot ridge and made the summit of

Thank you!



Comments, from the Publisher—

As I waded across the flooded intersection, towards my home on the corner, thank you's were the farthest thing from my mind.

Thursday, February 21st began for me at about 2 a.m. when I received a call that RMRU was needed in the Sage area. After struggling, till daybreak, trying to get my 4-WD Wagoneer running (with grateful help from mechanic John Freitas) I found out the highway near the Cranston bridge had washed out. Plans were changed and RMRU was assigned another task. We had just started that job when word was re- that the levee had broke east of the city.

In a matter of minutes I was in front of my business trying to do what I could as the water rose around me. Knee deep, I waded back to the road as the water rose.

The next thing I knew, friends, relatives and RMRU members were trying to help my wife Sondra and I protect our home from the rising waters. It was a very unusual feeling being the recipient of help. That help was only the *beginning*. In the next few days, even weeks, scores of great friends and relatives pitched in and helped us to dig out.

On behalf of my family, I would like to thank everyone for **all the help** given to my family and I.