

Volume XVI, Issue 5, May 1980 — Kevin Walker, Editor — Walt Walker, Publisher — Dona Towell, Artist

Search and Rescue

SEARCH

Mission No. 8021M

19 May, Mon.
San Jacinto Mountains

By Jack Schnurr

What a relief! It was a gorgeous Monday morning, about 10:30 AM, and I had just forced myself to sit down in front of a desk of mid-term essay exams that needed to be read and graded. The phone rang; Al Andrews asked if it was possible to roll on a man missing in the San Jacinto high country. I'm sure that my "YES" was the most emphatic and enthusiastic answer he received all morning!

It was a beautiful day to be driving. Passing through Banning, I didn't even bother to stop at the Sheriff's station and ask if the mission was still on; if it was cancelled, I didn't want to know about it! Winding up the mountain road towards Idyllwild, I admired San Jac, still iced with a generous coating of snow; yet, at the altitude where I was driving, the countryside was spring green and speckled with wild flowers; I gloated at my good fortune in having an excuse to go hiking on a "work day."

Soon I arrived at the base camp which was set up at Camp Maranatha in the ball park; Don Landells' helicopter was on order and the team was getting briefed to go into the field. The search centered on a 22 year old male, Joe Coupe, missing from his group since Sunday afternoon. The group had climbed a hill above their camp in Skunk Cabbage Meadows; Joe decided to return to camp alone. When the group returned to the campsite, they found that Joe had not made it back to camp. The group searched the area and found tracks descending towards Law's Camp and Carumba Camp. They decided they needed help, returned to camp, packed up ALL of the gear, including Joe's and hiked out

to Idyllwild. Joe, in shorts and a tee-shirt, was now definitely a victim on the mountain! Joe was described as a beginning backpacker, who was a smoker and not in the best of condition.

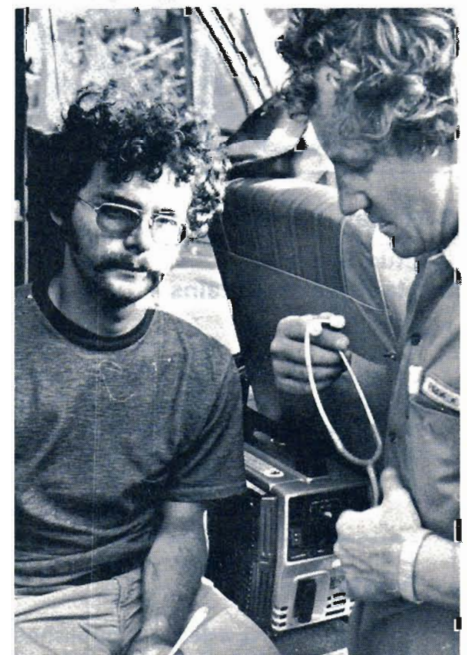
Walt Walker decided the first field team should check the bottleneck at Carumba for tracks and that the second team should go to the Tower helispot in Tahquitz Canyon, below Carumba Camp, in case Joe had made it past Carumba. Craig Beasley was dropped off on the Palisades to be the radio relay between the field teams and base. Additional field teams were dispersed in the area around Skunk Cabbage to check and see if Joe might still be in that area.

Pete Carlson and I drew the assignment to the Tower helispot in Tahquitz Canyon. We sorted gear for a possible overnight stay as the helicopter lifted Walt and Kevin Walker up the mountain to Carumba Camp. Soon, Pete and I were loaded and the bird headed towards Tahquitz Canyon. If the drive up the mountain was grand, then the "chopper ride" to the canyon was magnificent! Riding just above the trees, searching for Joe on the way in, the mountain top lay in spring-time renewal. The shaded areas under the trees were still burdened with snow, but the sunny meadows and the trees along the stream banks were pregnant with budding greenery. The sunlight danced and glittered on the streambed that ran full with icy cold snow melt. The air, though cool and crisp, smelled fresh and felt invigorating.

The chopper dropped into the canyon from the high country and soon we were standing on the Tower helispot. This helispot is literally a tower of rock and dirt that rises several hundred feet out of the canyon bottom; the tower is situated on the end of a long ridge and at the confluence of Tahquitz Canyon and several other drainages from the east side of San Jacinto Wilderness area. From here, a collecting basin, we could check the floor of the canyon and see if Joe had hiked this far. We called the Carumba team for a radio check and was informed that they had tracks heading downward, through thick brush, towards our location. We acknowledged and began our climb downwards through the brush and over the loose dirt and rock. Reaching the canyon floor, we quickly decided that Joe had to be traveling high on the ridge due to water conditions. The high, raging water,

coupled with the cliff like walls of the canyon, would force Joe to travel out of the canyon bottom. We radioed out that we thought Joe was still above us, probably making very slow time through all of the thick brush on the ridge lines. Unfortunately, the helicopter was not able to stay with the search due to other commitments during the day, so the search would have to stay on the ground until Don could return about 1630 hours that afternoon. Pete and I climbed back up on top of the Tower and sat watching the various skylines above us; what thick brush!

Just about 1630 hours, we heard a shout and straight across the canyon, atop a water fall, stood our missing hiker. While I climbed back into the canyon and over to the victim, Pete radioed for a bird evacuation. Soon Don was back, picked Pete up, located a tight helispot close to the water fall, picked up Joe and me, and soon we were back in the ball park. Several more shuttles and the rest of the team was off of the mountain also.



RMRU PHOTO BY JIM FAIRCHILD

Joe was tired, dehydrated and his poor, exposed arms and legs told the tale of his 4500' descent through the thick brush. He got some nourishment from Mary's camper before his hiking companion took him home.

I thought about the memories that I would have of an almost perfect day (how many times do rescues occur from 10:30 AM to 5:00 PM on a beautiful, sunny Monday when you should be working?) compared to Joe's grueling, 24 hour bush-wack on a freezing mountain. I wonder if he will ever go backpacking again? If he does, will he get the training to SAFELY enjoy the country he travels in? I hope so; this time he was lucky! • RMRU

SEARCH

Mission No. 8022A

**25 May, Sun.
Snow Creek,
San Jacinto Mountains**

We received a call through the Banning office of the Riverside County Sheriff's Department that a marine from the 29 Palms Marine Base was overdue in returning from a hike in the Snow Creek area of the San Jacinto Mountains. The mission was cancelled as the team was beginning to head for the roadhead. It seems that the marine had just been a little slow in hiking back out. • RMRU

TRAINING



9-11 May, Fri.-Sun.

**Cactus Springs,
Santa Rosa Mountains**

By Craig Beasley

It was a cold, windy and cloudy Friday night as we departed from our cars toward the old corral just above Horsethief Creek. As we hiked, we could hardly help

but wonder what the weather would be like for the weekend. We decided upon a place to camp and bedded down for the night. Besides, those big dark clouds above our heads never decided to give us any showers.

On Saturday morning, Dave Ezell and Tom Aldrich met the rest of us and we headed off to practice our compass skills. Two compass courses had been laid out the weekend before by Hal Fulkman (the Training Officer) and Ed Hill. We broke into two groups and began finding our way to that night's camp by following a bearing which led to a small flyer and another bearing, and to another . . . The last bearing had to be extrapolated from three other bearings off of prominent points. Not too much of a surprise, our destination was Cactus Springs. One of the groups made it to Cactus Springs ahead of the other and spent a pleasant lunch sunbathing and enjoying intermittent showers. So far that day, it had only rained and been cloudy enough to make it a very nice day for hiking. After both groups were done with lunch, we broke into groups of three and Hal came up with some rescue problems that a three man team had to solve with just their call-out gear. Dinner time came around awfully fast and the steaks were cooking in no time.

Sunday morning, Hal was our "rabbit." He set out from camp with a pair of little girl's sandals taped to the bottom of his boots. For the entire morning, we tracked the sandal prints, largely using the leap-frog method (one team following the tracks directly while another team swung out ahead and to the side to try to cut the tracks. After tracking practice, we headed for Horsethief Creek to eat lunch. While we ate, we had a group critique of the training to give the Training Officer some input to help him in planning future trainings. With lunch over and gear packed up, we headed for our cars and respective homes. Due to the strong possibility of Sunday night missions, the trainings are now designed so that we can be home in good time Sunday evening so that we can repack and be ready for a mission that night. • RMRU

Election Results — 1980-81 Board of Directors

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Notice!

The **RMRU Newsletter** is published 12 times per year by the Riverside Mountain Rescue Unit, Inc. It is intended primarily to inform the Regular and Sustaining Members.

If you would like to receive the newsletter on a regular basis, and at the same time become a Sustaining Member, send your tax deductible donation of \$25 or more to:

Riverside Mountain Rescue Unit
Post Office Box 5444
Riverside, California 92517

\$USTAINING MEMBERS

BY WALT WALKER

Due to the changeover of the financial records from myself to the new Treasurer, Jim Garvey, the Sustaining Members write-up will be delayed until next month.