

Volume XVII, Issue VII, July 1981 — Kevin Walker, Editor — Walt Walker, Publisher — Lisa Walker, Artist

## Search and Rescue

### SEARCH

Mission No. 8122M

7-8 July, Tues.-Wed.  
Upper Drainage,  
Palm Canyon

By Bob Attridge

At a little after 9:00 pm I received a call from my call captain Jim Fairchild. It brought news of a search. Details were sketchy, more information would be available at the rendezvous point, which was at the Anza turnoff on the Palms to Pines highway.

Once at the meeting point Operations Leader, Walt Walker informed us that Sylvia Birrage, age 35, was overdue in arriving at her residence in Pinyon Pines. Her planned route of travel on horseback started at the Tom Parr Ranch in Garner Valley. From there she would ride up a fire road that led to a trail which would take her over the ridge and down into Palm Canyon. Then she would ride up the rocky wash to Pinyon Pines and her home. Sixteen hours had elapsed since she was last seen, so this meant that she could be most any where between starting and stopping points.

Team 1 consisted of Bernie McIlvoy and Kevin Walker. Their assignment was to get to the Desert Divide ridge as soon as possible to see if Sylvia had got that far. Hal Fulkman and Mark Rhoads would start searching near where she was last seen. In the event that team 1 did not find anything, Hal's team would be responsible for pointing the rest of the group in the right direction. Team 3 consisted of Rick Pohlers, John Dew and myself. This team would start at Pinyon Pines and hike down canyon and possibly find Sylvia in the canyon. Two 4WD vehicles would be needed to get teams 1 and 2 to their respective starting places,

so the Hemet team was contacted. After a short wait Bob Elliot and Pete Boss arrived. Soon after everyone was walking,

Knowing that the following day would bring high temperatures all the teams hiked straight through the night to take advantage of the cool air. As planned, team 1 found the unusually square hoof-print on the trail that Sylvia said she would travel. With that, Hal's team was pulled off their assignment. Base was moved around to Pinyon Pines. As the sun rose over the desert ridges it found Bernie and Kevin still following tracks, and my team still walking down the rocky wash in Palm Canyon. The silence of the morning was broken with a transmission from Bernie, "We've found something." Come to find out, Bernie and Kevin had walked across Twila Wellman also on horseback. She was a friend of Sylvia, and knew the country like the back of her hand. She had also been searching for Sylvia. Twila had also been following hoofprints, and she felt that Sylvia would double back. So Twila went on her way, and team 1 stayed with the tracks. Our team was finding that Palm

Canyon was not a sandy wash, just the opposite. It was quite rocky, which slowed our travel. Even with this inconvenience, we had something very important, water. At about 9:00 am Bernie radioed to base that they had used the last of their water. And to make matters worse, they could find no more tracks. Base informed them to find shade and wait.

At 9:30 the sheriff's fixed wing was overhead and joining the search. At 10:30 the plane had to return to the desert. Because Sylvia had not been located yet, and team 1 needing water before being able to continue, Don Landells was requested and okayed.

At 11:15 Don arrived at base camp. From base, Don flew Jim Fairchild and Hal Fulkman into where Bernie and Kevin were. Jim and Hal would try and find tracks and Bernie and Kevin would fly air search with Don for awhile and then return to base for a brief rest. The initial air search brought no results. Don flew back to base, Bernie and Kevin climbed out and Walt Walker joined Don. Then flying down to our location in the canyon, I was picked up to help



RMRU PHOTO BY JIM FAIRCHILD

HOOFING IT — Just to the right of the pair of binoculars is a print left by Sylvia Birrage's horse. Tracking is quite slow on this type of terrain.

search by air. We had searched for some time and were about to fly back to base and get the rested troops back into the field, when we thought we saw something. Don turned the powerful machine in the direction of the object. Sure enough at 1:46 we found Sylvia. Only thing is we could not take the credit for the initial find. Twila's theory of Sylvia doubling back was correct, and Twila had located her resting under an oak tree. Don found a helispot nearby and landed. After giving Sylvia liquid refreshment, she was flown out. A friend of the family volunteered to ride Sylvia's horse back out. So, after he was airlifted in, and the rest of our members were brought out, the mission was secured.

• RMRU

## SEARCH

**Mission No. 8124M**

**25-27 July, Sat.-Mon.  
Sunrise Camp,  
Yosemite National Park**

*By Pete Carlson*

On Thursday RMRU received a call from the Sierra Madre Search and Rescue Team, again asking if RMRU could send any members, in a last ditch effort to locate a 14 year old girl missing for a week. Four members were able to respond. Mary Bowman, J.R. Muratet, Joe Erickson and myself drove into the Van Nuys Airport and met 25 other MRA (Mountain Rescue Association) members. We were flown on a Air National Guard C-130 to Bishop, and then on a three hour bus ride to Lake Tenaya.

Mary stayed with the Sierra Madre base truck and the rest of us hiked 5 miles into advanced base at Sunrise Camp. The National Park Service had been searching for the first 5 days along with some MRA personnel. They had done an excellent job and turned up not one clue. The MRA had volunteered to come up on the weekend and do sweep searches in the prime areas. We did our searching on Saturday afternoon and evening and again on Sunday. We also had no luck and did not find any clues.

We hiked back to our bus at about 3:00 pm Sunday afternoon and then took the bus down to Bishop. We were 3 hours later than we had said, and our airplane had left. So we went to dinner and then to sleep at the airport where another plane was coming in at 6:00 am. It was right on time and we arrived back in LA about 8:30.

We do not like to end a search without finding a subject but some times it happens. The weather had been excellent for a week, there was lots of water in the area, and if someone was up and moving around they should have been found. I would like to thank the Air National Guard for flying us up to Bishop and back. Also the National Park Service for doing an excellent job in running the search. • RMRU



RMRU PHOTO BY JIM FAIRCHILD

**TIRED BUT RELIEVED** — Sylvia Birrage rests in the No. 1 van after being located and flown out. Sylvia had been lost for nearly two days.



## CALL

**Mission No. 8123C**

**19 July, Sun.  
Yosemite National Park**

We received a call from the Sierra Madre Search and Rescue Team, asking for members to respond with members of their team for a search in Yosemite for a 14 year old girl. Because of a large number of members being on vacation, and not wanting to leave our county uncovered, no one was sent. • RMRU

# \$USTAINING MEMBERS

BY KEVIN WALKER

Normally we are asking for donations. Instead, this month I want to tell you what we have been doing with your contributions. We have just completed going through the technical gear. We now have two sets of climbing hardware (chalks, runners, carabiners). By having two sets, we stand less chance of running out on a large mission, and in the event of two missions running at the same time, we will not be hard pressed to do the missions. We have also just purchased more rope (which must be done periodically) because it is our life line.

A new oxygen system has just been purchased. It is slightly smaller than the existing system, and much lighter. This will enable us to carry it in a member's pack. For the old oxygen system we have purchased a soft pack. This would allow a member to place some of his own equipment into the pack and not be totally dependent on other members. Along with the new equipment are the month to month expenditures, gasoling, newsletter, telephone, vehicle upkeep, etc.

It is a phrase that is used quite frequently but still fitting. For making this possible from month to month, and year to year, thank you.

### New—

Louise McGrath

### Renewing—

Circle City Hospital

Karen Allen

Greg Bronson

Cabazon Chamber of Commerce

Lloyd Allen & Ann Ahern

Marydoris Powers

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

## Coming Events-

### AUGUST

**5 - Regular Meeting**

**8-9 — Training**

**19 - Board Meeting**

### SEPTEMBER

**2 - Regular Meeting**

**10-11 - Training**

**23 - Board Meeting**

## 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

# Training



## Technical and Potluck Dinner

**11 July, Sat.  
Suicide Rock & Sky Yacht,  
San Jacinto Mountains**

It was a perfect day for training. Clear and warm would be the order for the day. RMRU members met at Norm and Maggie Mellor's cabin at 7:00 am. Gear was divided and the group started up for Suicide Rock. It was about a half hour walk to where the team trains at. Once there, the gear was spread out.

Before starting training on the rocks, everyone went through knot practice. This gave members a chance to practice and show different techniques for tying the various knots needed for technical situations. After that, the group took to the rocks. Bernie McIlvoy and Kevin Walker checked members off on jumaring and rappelling past a knot in the rope and also going over a small overhang. Walt Walker and Pete Carlson also did the same, but on a shorter and less steep area for newer members. The morning was spent on the various personal climbing skills associated with rescue. After lunch the group did several lowers and raises using the stokes litter. Some members rode in the litter. This gave them a different perspective on matters.

At about 3:00 pm ropes were coiled and gear loaded into packs. The group quickly made their way down, because the associate members had been busy themselves making a feast of food. And a feast it was, complete with steaks, corn on the cob, salads and fresh fruit for dessert. And of course, plenty of liquid refreshment. All in all a good day and an excellent evening. To the associate members, thank you for a great meal. And to Norm and Maggie, thank you for just being you.

• RMRU



RMRU PHOTO BY JIM FAIRCHILD

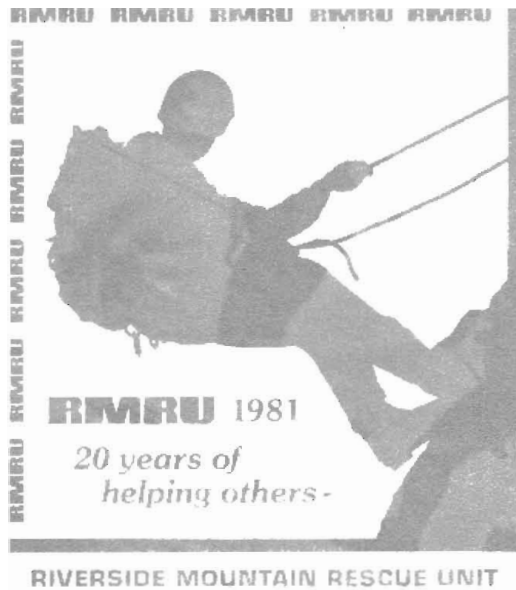
ON RAPPEL — RMRU member Bernie McIlvoy stops to see what Kevin Walker is up to, while a calm Joe Erickson continues down the face



RMRU PHOTO BY JIM FAIRCHILD

SEEING IT FROM OUR SIDE — Reporter-Photographer Susan Wood (doing a photo story) gets a ride in the stokes litter. RMRU member Pete Carlson is at Susan's side. Susan's main comment was, "are these ropes really strong enough?"





**IT'S  
STILL  
NOT  
TO  
LATE!**

### ***Just a reminder that...***

You are cordially invited to attend an evening dedicated to celebrating **RMRU's 20th Anniversary**. The entire evening is planned as an informal time for the regular members to rub elbows with you.

We, the regular members, have been hard at work for the past six months in planning for this celebration. There will be displays of equipment, from the very beginning, to the most recently obtained. You will be surprised and amused by this historical collection. Both of our rescue vans will be there for you to see. In addition we will have a very interesting exhibit of photographs, taken over the years, of RMRU in action.

It is our hope that, as many as possible, friends, former members, sustaining members, members of other rescue teams, people we have rescued, and your families, will honor us with your presence. If you cannot attend, please write and let us know how you are and what you are doing.

The doors will open at 6 p.m. and the regular members will be there in uniform to greet you. Each person attending will be presented with a 20th Anniversary Souvenir Booklet. There will be Hor d'Ouvres and a no host bar set up. At 7:30 p.m. a Buffet dinner will begin. After dinner there will be an informal program including a color slide history of RMRU. Again, we urge you to join us for an evening of enjoyable fellowship.

Where: Raincross Square, Riverside, California

When: 6 p.m. till ? — Saturday, October 3, 1981

Price: \$15.00 per person, including Hor d'Ouvres, Dinner and Booklet

Reservation deadline: September 16, 1981

Your dinner tickets will be mailed to you along with a map.

**Send your reservation and check today!**

Riverside Mountain Rescue Unit, P. O. Box 5444, Riverside, CA 92517