

Familiarization

**8-10 May, Fri.-Sun.
Deep Canyon,
Santa Rosa Mountains**

By Walt Walker

One of the main tenets of RMRU's training is familiarization of the areas that we are called upon to perform our search and rescue missions in. With that in mind the training chairman, Hal Fulkman, recommended to the Board of Directors that we should descend Deep Canyon. They agreed and the route was to be from the Dolomite mine, below Pinyon Flats, to the desert floor, above Palm Desert. It was also decided that the training chairman would set up a man tracking problem Friday evening.

With his usual enthusiasm Hal started in early Friday evening. He left a set of footprints that were to be tracked, later in the evening, by the following eager crew: Craig Britton, Joe Erickson, Jim Fairchild and daughter Carol, Randy Iwasiuk, Bernie McIlvoy and son Eugene, Jerry Niswonger, Larry Roland, and Karen Rutledge.

Due to a number of problems, there was another group who could not start until Saturday morning. They were: Bob Attridge, Jim Garvey, Kevin Walker, and Walt Walker.

In years past, RMRU has had more problems with canyon (Tahquitz, Palm West, etc.) descents than any of its other trainings. I should have noted it as an 'omen' when Hal telephoned me late Friday evening that one of his hiking boots had ripped open and he had hiked out. He said he had another pair and would go in with the Saturday a.m. crew.

The Friday p.m. crew had tracked down canyon and camped above the stream in one of the few flat spots in the area. Saturday morning they hiked down to the confluence of Deep Canyon and Horsethief Creek and ate breakfast there. The Saturday a.m. crew

radioed to the Friday p.m. crew that they were leaving the highway and starting down canyon. The Friday p.m. crew was going to wait until the Saturday a.m. crew caught up.

Being in the Saturday a.m. crew I was enjoying observing the zig-zagging tracks of the Friday p.m. crew as they had tracked down the canyon the evening before. Another 'omen' as Hal jumped back after coming upon a Rattlesnake sunning himself upon a sandbar in the stream bed. We climbed out on the northwest slope, to avoid a tangle of brush in the canyon bottom, and were able to make radio contact with the crew below. We told them we estimated our arrival time as 20-30 minutes.

Our E.T.A. was just about right on as we met the other crew. They were already taking advantage of the convenient swimming hole created by the natural rock formations. While we iodine treated water and combined fruit flavored drink mixes in our canteens, the other crew put on their boots and packed up.

We started down, the combined crews, and immediately had to climb up and around a waterfall. 'Omen' you say, well not really. Because we had missions in the canyon in the past and had run into waterfalls. However, we had never descended the canyon in its entirety.

For the rest of the day we followed the winding sandy floor of the canyon bottom. The water in the canyon, most of the time, was only three to six feet wide and only a few inches deep. Occasionally a rocky band across the canyon bottom would cause it to widen and deepen. Back and forth, across the stream around boulders was the order of the day. One exception, we startled another 'buzztail'. We stopped to observe him and some of the newer members found out Rattlesnakes are swift swimmers.

In late afternoon we stopped and camped on a sandy bench a few feet above the slowly running stream. We explored the area, gathered wood and got ready for dinner. The fire was started and when the coals were ready, steaks, potatoes and vegetables were cooked. After dinner we sat around the fire, retold exploits of the past and discussed the coming waterfalls: how many; how tall would they be; how long would it take?

Shortly after first morning light we started stirring and in a short time

breakfast meals were being prepared. The group moved fairly quickly and soon we were packed and on our way. We were all looking forward to the unknowns ahead.

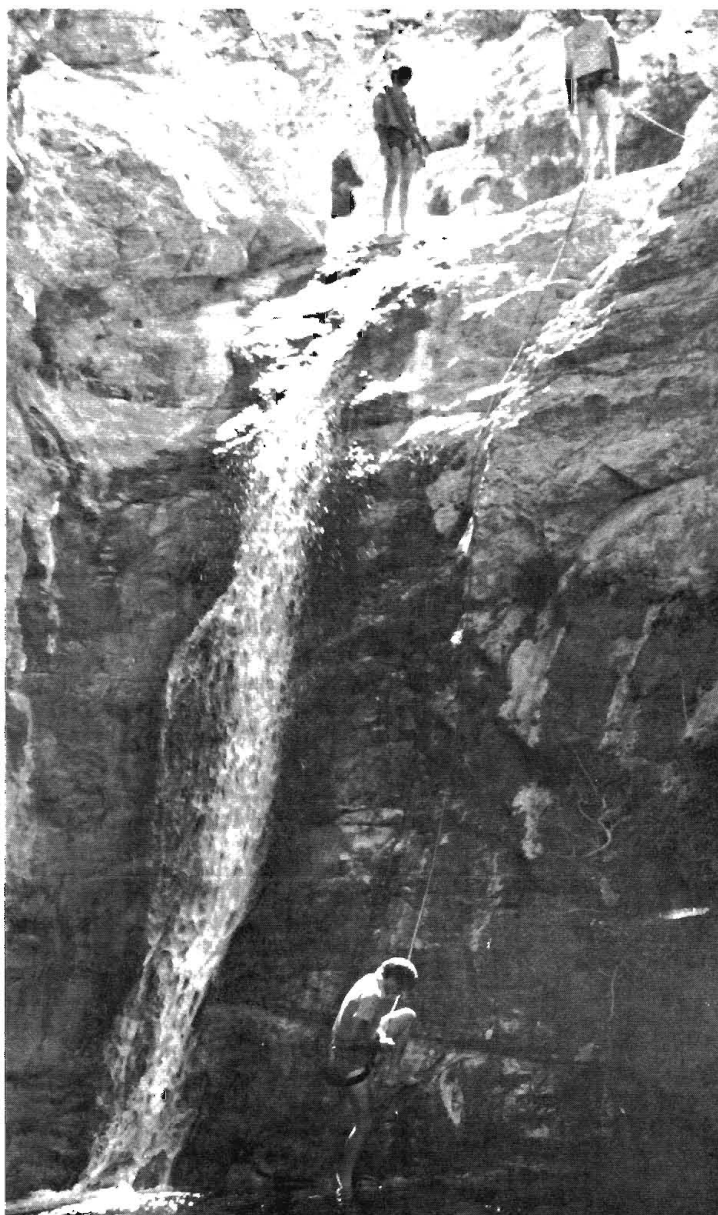
Around mid-morning we ran into our first obstacle of the day, a waterfall. The group in the lead found a way up and around about 400 feet up. There were a couple of areas that required third class rock climbing skills and we belayed a couple of the newer members down them. In all it took us almost an hour by the time we reached the canyon bottom again. The day was beginning to warm up and a number of our group went swimming in the pool below the falls.

On our way down canyon again we encountered a number of spots that required us to climb up, around or along-side problem areas. We had no sooner negotiated another problem when we were faced with a bigger problem, a waterfall about 50 feet tall, with a large deep pool of water at the bottom. It was mutually decided that we could descend it faster than we could climb around it on the steep rotten granite walls.

This waterfall presented a rather unique problem — get the whole crew and their packs down — however, the packs should not get wet, but the crew could. We set up two anchors, one for a rappel rope and the other for a trolley line to keep the packs out of the water. The more experienced members began rappelling into the very cool water and then swimming across the pool, about 30 feet long. As other members began rappelling, the packs were hooked up to a pulley and they were lowered one at a time. Bernie made the last rappel and the ropes were pulled down. It was mutually agreed it was time for lunch.

When the group finished lunch we started down canyon once again. Refreshed by the cool water we moved along the canyon bottom with spirits high. More minor obstacles and around a bend... another tall waterfall! This one was slightly taller than the last one. We basically set up the same type of system as before. Members rappelled, swam, packs were lowered and another hour was gone.

The canyon walls began to close in on us until we came to an area where the two walls were only 20 feet apart and hundreds of feet high. Also, a truck



RMRU PHOTO BY JIM FAIRCHILD

TESTING THE WATER — RMRU members Larry Roland and Walt Walker (top of photo) have a good laugh as Jim Garvey tests the 58 degree water, before finishing his rappel into the pool.

sized boulder blocked our way. We decided to jump the ten feet to the water below and trolley the packs across the 40 foot long pool. With everyone and their packs across the water we started downward, **again**, in the late afternoon shadows.

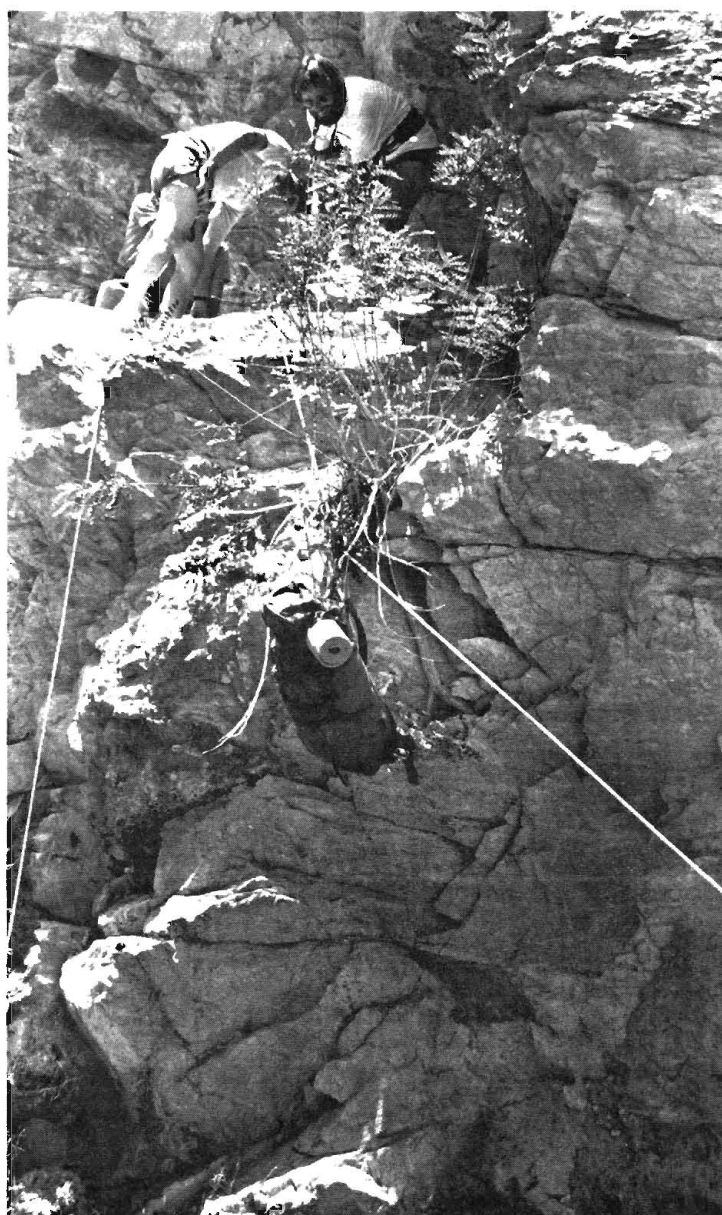
Many years before we had run a search in the lower part of the canyon and we knew there was a tall waterfall in the lower end of the canyon. You guessed it, we were there. While one crew studied the waterfall, another crew climbed up the east side of the canyon.

It was generally agreed upon that the pool at the bottom of the waterfall was more that 150 feet below. Since we were carrying 150 foot long ropes, this would mean a person rappelling would

have to pass a knot, while in the stream of plummeting water.

The veteran members quickly decided this was too difficult of a problem for the newer members. The entire group started up the steep slope of loose rocks. We had only ascended a short distance when it became obvious that one of our newer members was having a problem. The member was neither, physically or mentally, up to the rest of the canyon. Continuing the descent would have greatly increased the chance of an injury accident. We estimated it would have been well after midnight when we would have reached the Desert Preserve station above Palm Desert.

Team member Mary Bowman had been waiting for us at the Desert Preserve



RMRU PHOTO BY JIM FAIRCHILD

PACK TROLLEY — RMRU member Walt Walker prepares yet another pack, while Bernie McIlvoy starts one across on a tyrolean traverse across the pool to waiting members.

station since 2 p.m. Shortly after 6 p.m. we radioed out to her and asked her to call Don Landells and request him to fly us out of the canyon. In about 15 minutes Mary radiod that Don would shortly be on the way in one of his Bell Jet Ranger helicopters.

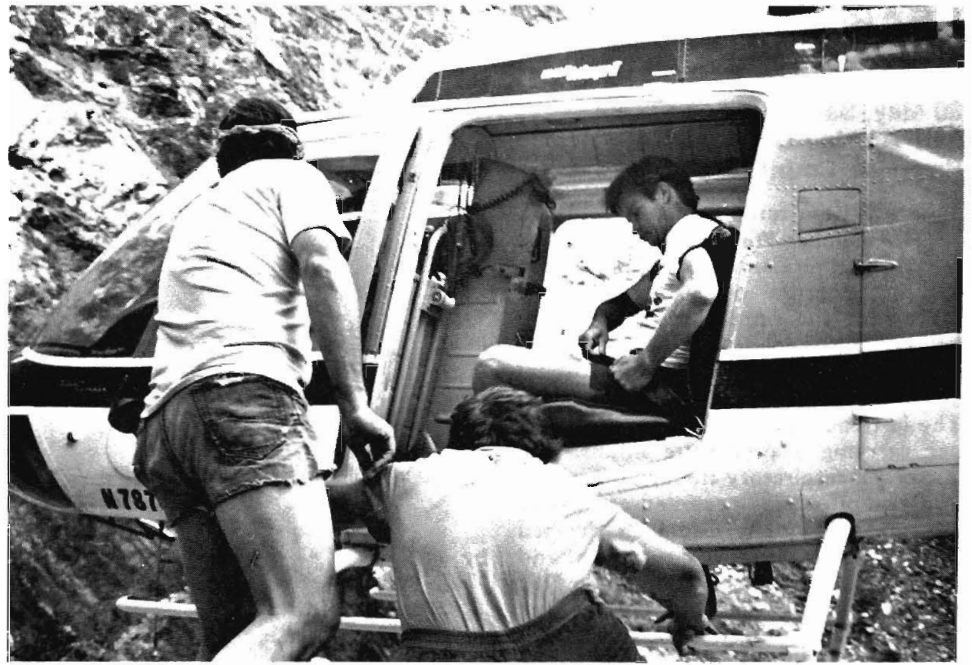
We scouted around and found a car sized boulder for a helispot. There were a few smaller rocks uphill, that would have been dangerously close to the main rotor blades, that we pushed and rolled away. A list of body and pack weights was quickly compiled. We planned on five trips of three members each and one trip of packs in the cargo sling.

There had been almost no wind blowing for the past couple of hours. Now gusts of 10 to 15 m.p.h. began to blow



RMRU PHOTO BY JIM FAIRCHILD

ALL WET — A slightly soaked Kevin Walker prepares to climb out of one of the pools encountered on Sunday. In the foreground, Bernie McIlvoy coils a rope used to bring packs across the pool.



RMRU PHOTO BY JIM FAIRCHILD

SECOND LOAD — RMRU member Walt Walker closes the door to Don Landells' 206 Jet Ranger. While Joe Erickson buckles his seat belt, Kevin Walker steadies the left skid on the one runner boulder.

down the canyon. Since we were on the east slope, this would mean Don would need to have the nose of the ship pointed up canyon. This just added another small problem, Don would be touching down the landing skid on the opposite side from him.

We had barely completed all of our plans when we heard the familiar turbine whine of a Jet Ranger. The helicopter came into view and in seconds Don circled over us as we set off a smoke bomb. With Kevin giving Helitac hand signals, Don hovered and slowly put one skid down on the boulder. Three members climbed aboard, buckled up, and handed out the rope and cargo sling. Don lifted off, turned down canyon, and the first load was on its way.

The cargo sling was spread out and we started placing packs on it. We had planned on the weight, but not the bulk. Eight packs had filled it up. So one extra trip was needed for packs.

After a total of seven trips, five for members and two for packs, all of us and our packs were at the bottom. We thanked Don for the airlift as the twilight was fading to darkness. Jack and Mary Bowman, along with Ron Barry had thoughtfully purchased some 'Colorado upstream water'. As the cans popped open we unwound and critiqued one of RMRU's best training weekends. We, new and old, had learned a great deal!

• RMRU

Search and Rescue

SEARCH

Mission No. 8116M

**2-3 May, Sat.-Sun.
San Jacinto Mountains**

At 2245 Saturday night, we received a call from the Banning office of the Riverside County Sheriffs' Department that a 15 year old boy had been reported missing out of the Willow Creek area, and that further details would be available at Humber Park.

Idyllwild resident and RMRU member Mary Bowman was first to arrive at Humber. There she met the deputy who told her that a group of hikers camping at Skunk Cabbage had taken a short hike over to Willow Creek in the morning, and while at the creek the 15 year old in question became separated from the group. After spending the better part of the day trying to locate the youth, they finally went back to their camp at Skunk

Cabbage. There they had a portable CB handitalkie, they radioed out asking for help from somebody. Luckily, a REACT member in Hemet heard the calls for help. The REACT member then called the Sheriff who in turn called RMRU.

Shortly thereafter, RMRU members Walt and Kevin Walker arrived in the No. 1 van followed by John Dew and Hal Fulkman. It was decided to send Hal and Kevin in first to gather more information and start searching. John Dew would hike in to the saddle and act as a relay. It was just after midnight when Hal and Kevin were just starting out when Mary heard part of a transmission to Hemet. The REACT member radioed back up to RMRU's CB that the 15 year old had walked back into camp unharmed. With that the searchers loaded their gear back into the vehicles and the rest of the team enroute was turned around by the pager system. Thanks to the REACT member RMRU was promptly notified of the mission and promptly told of the youth's return to camp.

• RMRU



SEARCH

Mission No. 8117M

**30 May, Sat.
San Timeteo Canyon,
Riverside County**

At a little after 0700 hrs. Saturday, RMRU member Walt Walker received a call from Ray Canova, Captain of the Banning Sheriffs' office. He informed Walt that the Loma Linda Medi-vac helicopter was missing in heavy ground fog between the Banning Pass Hospital and San Bernardino General Hospital. The last communication from the chopper carrying a premature infant, two doctors, a respiratory therapist, a nurse, and the pilot was received at a little after midnight. The Captain requested our Direction-Finding equipment and four of our members, two for each D.F. receiver. Walt called Rick Pohlers and asked him to contact Joe Erickson and the two of them responded with the No. 2 van to the Colony Kitchen in Beaumont. Walt then called son Kevin Walker and they rolled in the No. 1 van. Walt and Kevin reached Beaumont first. Upon turning on the D.R. unit, they got a signal from an Emergency Location Transmitter (ELT). From there they drove up to nearby Mt. Davis, a high point looking over the Beaumont area. Again they got a signal, but now were able to get a bearing. Walt radioed the direction to the command post. The Civil Air Patrol also turned in a compass heading. With the two bearings the command post was able to triangulate the location on a map, which put the signal near the end of San Timeteo Canyon. With the ground fog starting to clear the San Bernardino Sheriff helicopter was able to fly one of the compass headings to where the other bearing came across. It was not long after that, that a grim message came into base. The crash site had been located and that there were six fatalities.

All vehicles and equipment were moved to San Timeteo Canyon. The crash was only several hundred yards off the highway. Our four members were asked to stay and help in the extrication of the bodies from the wreckage. Before doing so, the coroner, FAA, and the National Safety Transportation Board had to be contacted. Once all were present the sad task began. Once all the bodies were moved back to the road, our job was done.

Air crashes are never easy, and something a rescuer never gets use to, but sadly enough, are sometimes part of our job. We of RMRU would like to express our sympathy to the families and friends for the loss of a very valuable team of emergency personnel. • RMRU



RMRU PHOTO BY WALT WALKER

CRASH SCENE — The large green and white helicopter had broken into three major pieces of wreckage. The turbine engine (not shown), the transmission and main rotor assembly (foreground) and the fuselage were strewn across an old grain field. Riverside County Sheriff's Captain Ray Canova points out to Deputy Assistant Coroner Carl Smith one of the bodies that was trapped in the main wreckage of the helicopter.

