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Search and Rescue

RESCUE

Mission No. 8201M

3 Jan., Sun.
San Jacinto Mountains

By Rick Pohlers

Real early Sunday morning, I was awakened with an invitation to go hiking. 'You gotta be kidding', I said, 'It's pouring out. What nerd got himself hung out in this weather?'

A whole group of boy scouts stuck in the snow near Cornell Peak was the story. It's tough to leave a nice warm bed so early in the morning to expose oneself to such a cold, nasty, 'hike'. 'Who's in charge of this outfit anyway?' I grumbled as I drove off to the tram to meet the other grumpy, bleary eyed fellow rescuers.

The little troopies had started out in the marginal weather Thursday, which got worse. By Saturday morning they were up to their little eyeballs in nice, soft, fluffy, white snow for which they were woefully unprepared. In addition, on Saturday afternoon they had strayed from the beaten path and were somewhat lost in white, fuzzy world of swirling snowflakes, (the flakes were not alone).

Realizing they would soon be over their heads, two leaders stumbled off into the flurry and eventually got to the ranger station in Long Valley. With news of their dire plight, ranger Rick Brown and a fellow ranger set off with stoves and tents to lead this little forelorned group out to warmth and safety. However upon somehow finding the group they found that it would take more than two guys to get a cold, hungry, whimpering bunch of troopies going. Since it was getting dark they decided to keep them all from

turning into popsicles in the night, and call for reinforcements in the morning. And that's where we come in.

We got most of this story at the Long Valley ranger station, which was in radio contact with ranger Rick. He needed snowshoes and help to get these guys on the road again. The ranger people rounded up the shoes for us, and off we went. Pete Carlson and Bernie McIlvoy lead since this was in the area that they frequently ski. Others included Walt Walker, Randy Iwasiuk, Joe Erickson, Kevin Walker, Larry Roland and yours truly. This was our first Winter rescue and it was snowing nicely. We were all pleased to be out in the snow, and not in the rain as we had feared. It did not take long to reach the group as they were fairly close, but there was some searching and navigating in the weather. Some folks get confused with map and compass stuff, but we eventually found them despite their confusion.

The camp was a disaster area with packs, tents, boots, pants and pathetic shivering scouts scattered everywhere. They were supposed to be packed and ready to go by the time we got there, but such was not the case. Some *you know whats*

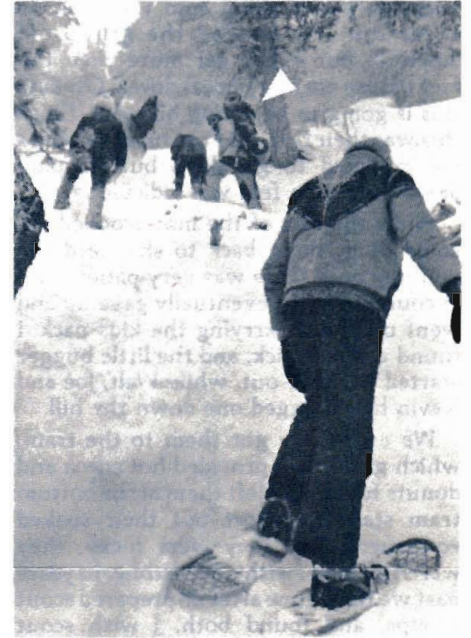


PHOTO BY KEVIN WALKER

MUSH YOU TROOPIES —
RMRU member Bernie McIlvoy (arrow points to), helps to motivate the cold Boy Scouts up the hill away from where they had spent a cold night.



PHOTO BY KEVIN WALKER

PREPARED FOR WHAT? — It seems that this bunch of troopies just weren't prepared for what Mother Nature had to offer. A few RMRU members can be seen trying to get the group organized for their trip out to the tram.

needed to be kicked to motivate these little munchkins out of their cold stupor, and that's what we did. Walt, 'Mr. Bad' (now that he has a beard again), assigned us to pack gear, strap on snowshoes and start herding scouts up a small hill above their dismall camp. Bernie was surprisingly affective in motivating scouts, and we were soon ready to go, sort of. In my long experience with scouts, I found that there is bound to be some whiners and criers in every troop, and this was no exception. We herded the group off downhill but didn't get more than ten feet before we had a breakdown. Oh boy, this is going to be a long hike out. Since this was their first time out on snowshoes we expected to go slow, but flopping down every ten feet was ridiculous.

While the rest of the mob trooped on, some of us hung back to shepherd the whimpy ones. Pete was very patient and encouraging, but eventually gave up and went on ahead carrying the kids pack. I found a sharp stick, and the little bugger started to move out, while Walt, Joe and Kevin half dragged one down the hill.

We eventually got them to the tram, which graciously provided hot cocoa and donuts for all. We left them at the bottom tram station to sort out their soaked equipment. But they were lucky, they were still alive, with no frostbite. In years past we have gone after ill-prepared scout groups, and found both. I wish scout leaders would take the scout motto seriously, **we do.** • RMRU

SEARCH

Mission No. 8202M

**16-17 Jan., Sat.-Sun.
Near Saddle Junction,
San Jacinto Mountains**

By Walt Walker

Saturday evening at seven o'clock is one of the all time **miserable moments** to receive a rescue call. Wives and girlfriends of RMRU members, become unhappy, in a matter of **micro** seconds. You guessed it, that's exactly what happened for the second mission of the new year.

Kevin Walker and I arrived at Humber Park in the No. 1 Van, with John Dew and his son Roy right behind us in their car. We were met by Mary Bowman and Deputy Fogel of the Riverside County Sheriff's Department. They explained the details of the situation. Four older boys had gone for a hike towards Tahquitz Rock. One of the boys, due to poor footwear, turned back at about 1:30 p.m. The other three continued upward and had not returned. None of them were carrying any equipment and it was believed

that they did not have any matches with them. There was patchy snow at Humber Park and it was estimated that there was about two to three feet of snow in the high country.

Shortly Joe Erickson arrived and it was decided that Mary would be the radio and base operator and Kevin the Operations Leader. John, Joe and I would start out as quickly as possible. Just as we were putting on our packs we heard a faint call from way above us. It sounded like it was coming from northeast of Tahquitz Rock. We immediately started up the ridge just south of the Devil's Slide Trail. About 20 minutes after the three of us had started searching, Bernie McIlvoy and Mark Rhoads showed up at base. They became the second field team.

Near Humber Park there were literally thousands of tracks in the snow and it was impossible to start tracking from there. About 30 minutes into the search, the team I was leading, came upon three sets of tracks that seemed to fit the description given us. We started following them up the ridge. The tracks, in the beginning, more or less went upwards with very little variance left to right. As we went along, about every 10 minutes we would shout and occasionally we would get a reply. However, we were having a very hard time trying to determine in which direction the reply was coming from.

After consultation with the 'Ops. Ldr.' it was decided that we would continue up the ridge and that Bernie and Mark would head into the drainage east and north of Tahquitz Rock. Now and then we would lose the tracks and we would have to stop and circle about until we found them again. About 1000 feet above Humber Park we left the intermittent snow coverage and were hiking entirely on the snow.

The tracks now began to wander from one side of the ridge to the other and we were no longer receiving any replies to our shouting. Bernie and I communicated back and forth via the radio and agreed that the last we had heard of the voices was east and considerably higher than our present elevation. Bernie and Mark began a traverse towards Saddle Junction as we continued following the tracks up the ridge. I radioed to Bernie and asked him what their progress was and received a classic reply, "**We are in 5.9 brush!**"

Earlier it had been decided to call the associate members for some extra help. Don Ricker, Mike Daughtery and Tom Aldrich responded to the call. They were joined by regular member Craig Britton to form a team to hike up the Devil's Slide Trail, to try and establish a perimeter to the north.

Before I knew it my team was on a very steep slope of very hard snow which required a good deal of effort to kick steps into it. About 50 or 60 feet up, the slope

turned right into a chute, that had a large area of ice that required me to start chopping steps with my ice axe. When we finally reached the top of the chute and looked around, we could now only find two sets of tracks. Some scrambling over and around boulders brought us to a very large hunk of granite that we had to circle around. As I came around the corner I could see the glow of a campfire shining into the trees. I shouted and received a reply from above.

As I started to continue a cramp struck my right thigh and Joe 'sped' by me to grab the bacon. Before I knew it John had passed me by and I could hear them both chuckling as I struggled to release the cramp. When I finally covered the hundred or so feet to the fire, Joe was doing a great job of passing out clothing to the three boys. With that completed, Joe fired up a mountaineering stove to prepare some hot liquids and food for the weary trio of boys.

When we arrived at the campfire we were surprised to find a tent and two extra people. As the stove was heating the water we learned that the couple had snowshoed up the ridge and had not made the top before dark. They had heard the boys shouting and called back to them. We also found out that most of the shouting had been back and forth between the boys and not in response to our shouting. One of the boys had slipped on a steep slope and slid better than 200 feet downward. Luckily his trip down was stopped by a large snowbank. He lost one boot in the process and was also separated from the other two. All the shouting had been done to try and get back together again. Fortunately for them the man had been able to start a fire for them to huddle around.

It was decided that the best thing to do was wait the two and a half hours to first light and then head up to Saddle Junction and then down the Devil's Slide Trail. The four man crew who had hiked up the trail bivouaced at the Saddle. John, Joe and I collected more firewood and took turns keeping the fire going during the rest of the night.

The next morning we fabricated a boot, out of John's ensolite pad and some tape, for the young fellow who was missing a boot. We were met by the four man crew and then hiked up the short distance to the Saddle. It was then down the trail towards Humber Park. The boy with the handmade boot was having a very hard time staying on his feet so we radioed down to base to see if they could try and locate a boot. In a very short time Mary radioed back to us that a boot had been located and that Kevin would start up the trail with it.

About half way down we met up with Kevin and stopped to have the boy put on the boot. With the boot laced up we

started down once again. As we neared Humber Park we could hear voices and soon realized it was coming from people who were playing in the snow. When we made the final turn and headed to the parking lot we had to dodge kids on sleds and snow saucers. When we arrived back at base team doctor Norm Mellor was there waiting to examine the boy's foot to check for frostbite. The good news was that the boy's foot was cold but not frostbitten.

With the mission completed we drove down to Idyllwild for a hot breakfast. After consuming many hot cups of coffee, milk, juice, eggs, potatoes, bacon, ham, sausage, pancakes and french toast we headed for home and some sleep. • RMRU

SEARCH

Mission No. 8203M

21-22 Jan., Thurs.-Fri.
Foothills N.W. of Banning

By Kevin Walker

Once again we would hope. We would hope to find survivors. At a little after 8:00 PM Thursday, RMRU member Walt Walker received a call from Capt. Ray Canova of the Sheriff's Department. He told Walt that there was an ELT (Emergency Locator Transmitter) signal emitting from the mountains Northwest of Banning. A CAP (Civil Air Patrol) member was driving through the Banning Pass in the early evening and picked up the 121.5 Emergency signal. The CAP reported the signal to Scott Air Force Base who handles all CAP operations, and they also reported it to the Sheriff's Department who then called RMRU.

The team was activated and met at the North end of Highland Springs Road. While waiting for the Riverside members to arrive, John Dew his son Roy and myself in my jeep followed Sgt. Pete Kiyasu in the Sheriff's four wheel drive. With Pete were new members Glenn Henderson and Bruce Gahagan. Also in the caravan were two teams from the CAP. We drove along the base of the Banning foothills taking readings with our ELT locators. As we slowly moved West the signal became stronger. Back at base camp work was being done to see if there had been an aircraft reported overdue, with no results. Also to make matters worse we were searching in a bitter cold fog. Base contacted me and told me that there were more members present and waiting for assignments. Walt wanted me to return and try and mark on the map what we had searched and the bearings we had taken with the locators. So stopped and took one last

bearing before returning to base. But this time the signal was quite strong and it seemed that we were beginning to move around to the west of the ELT. John and I felt very strongly that we were close, so I assigned Bruce and Glenn to John, and they started in followed by a group from the CAP. Sgt. Kiyasu, Roy and myself returned to Base. After giving a general location to Walt, we decided to put two more hiking teams in at another road headed to the North. Again, we loaded up the vehicles and drove into another 4-wheeler road. As we neared the end, and reached the trail head, John radioed to base that they had found where something had struck the ridge they were now on, and that they were beginning to find small pieces of aircraft parts. John's team was close, very close. As they continued, we started in. Because of the dense fog it was difficult to navigate. We had been hiking for only a short time when John reported to base that they and the CAP had located the main wreck, covered with a thin layer of snow, of what was once a Beach Baron, a twin engine aircraft. They searched the area for some time but could find no survivors. We found there location just as John reached the ridge where we were standing. John reported that since the wreckage was so badly destroyed who ever was in the plane had to either have been thrown out or crushed under the wreckage. With that we slowly hiked out for a quick meal and a couple of hours of sleep.

At first light (5:30) Friday morning Don Landells arrived in 40MC (four-zero-mike-charlie) to assist in locating the crash victims. The first load in was Walt, Rick and myself with the brush cutting and aircraft extraction tools. Don let us off on the ridge across from the wreckage. While Don flew out for more members we cut brush and improved the helispot. As more members were flown in we moved around and then down the ridge to where the craft rested. What apparently had happened was that the twin struck a first ridge anywhere from 140 to 180 miles per hour, and then went another 400 feet dropping small pieces of debris until it struck the side of a second ridge, approximately 50 feet from the top. Being daylight now we expected to find the bodies quickly, somewhere near the main wreckage. Upon reaching the craft though, we found nothing. There were however, four seats. Two near the plane, and two actually in the wreckage. This was strange because there was no sign that anyone had been sitting in them.

The coroner was flown in and thought it was strange also that there was no sign of anyone. Normally, around a crash site things can get pretty messy, but nothing. There was some thought that maybe the bodies could be underneath the plane. But

before we could try to move the craft, we would have to wait until the NTSB (National Transportation Safety Board) personnel arrived. While waiting we started doing line searches from where the plane first struck the ridge to final resting point. Don assisted from the air searching the areas that were too steep to try and walk. All that was found was small bits of debris, extra clothing and lots of papers.

When the NTSB personnel arrived, we were hopeful that we could resolve the search. After getting all the necessary photos, we were given the OK to move the wreck. After tying a sling to what was left of a wing, we had Don come in. With the cargo rope hooked up to our sling, Don applied power and started to pull up and back. It took just about all of the powerful helicopter's force to move it, but it was enough to tip the plane back, so that we could see underneath. But again, nothing. Don had to fly to Blythe, so he was cleared. One of the other pilots, Mike Donovan was enroute to replace Don however, so that if need arose, he would be there.

We were all quite baffled as to what could have happened, when one of the NTSB men came up and said that the four seats that were at the crash site were passenger seats, and that this particular plane was a six seater and not a four. So we decided to do another sweep from the ridge. About twelve of us lined up, and started down to the wash below and then up to and past the crash site. Still nothing, so we continued on over the ridge and down the other side. As we started up the side of the third ridge, nearly 450 feet from the crash, Rick made a grim discovery. Within about 20 feet of each other were the bodies of two men, still strapped to their seats. With that, Mike flew in the body bags and the cargo net, and with the coroners O.K., the bodies were placed in the bags and then in the cargo net. Mike was called back in for a cargo pick up. Joe Erickson guided the chopper in with hand signals, and once in position, Walt hooked the line up to the cargo hook on the bottom of the bird. And with a thumbs up signal from Joe, Mike pulled up and away.

Our job was done. As we were walking out, one could not help but wonder why it happened. To imagine their terror upon first striking the ridge. And of course the loss that would be felt by family and friends. Why? • RMRU



Training

Winter Shakedown

**8-10 Jan., Fri.-Sun.
Mt. San Jacinto,
San Jacinto Mountains**

By Mark Rhoads

At 7:00 pm Friday the team met at the lower station of the Palm Springs Tram. After putting the finishing touches on equipment, we caught the 7:30 car to the top. It was a clear and cold night, so parkas were donned and packs of the 50 - 60 pound range were lugged up and onto the backs of the troops. Out the back door and down the concrete walk to Long Valley. After checking in with the rangers and leaving a radio with them in the event of a rescue, we started out behind the station moving towards Pete and Bernie's ski route. It was decided to stop early and

camp for the night, so that the newer members could get better familiarization during the day.

Saturday morning we ate our meals that varried from scant to elegant. Once packed up, snowshoes were strapped on and skis were clipped into, then onward to the saddle between Harvard and Yale Peaks. It was a rather steep route, but direct. We stopped at the saddle for a snack and to enjoy the view of the mountain. From there we traversed across the slope coming down from Cornell Peak to Tamarak Valley. There, we stopped for lunch. It was a clear and quite warm day for January. From Tamarak we started up the slope that heads towards Tamarak Junction. Pete Carlson was on skis, and just breezed up the slope. Pete picked out a campsite that overlooked Tamarak Valley, but yet was sheltered by trees on the up hill slope.

That evening was spent enjoying good food and drink, and many stories from the past. This is one of the things that makes winter camping so enjoyable.

Sunday morning we were awakened not by the sun, but by the sound of snow gently falling on the tents. After breakfast, we decided to load up and stash the packs and then hike to the summit. As we started up the steep slope the snow be-

came quite hard. Hard enough in fact, that if we continued up, crampons would probably be needed, so the veterans decided to stop and practice ice axe skills. For the next couple of hours we got in some beneficial practice. The temperature started to climb and snow that was falling became quite wet, and we decided that now would be the time to start down.

For the return trip to the tram, we hiked down through the lower end of Tamarak Valley and then down the drainage to the Long Valley trail. Soon we were back to the ranger station and all the people up for snow play in Long Valley. Up the walk to the tram and then down to Palm Springs, all in all a good winter shakedown. • RMRU



PHOTO BY KEVIN WALKER

FUN??? — Local RMRU 'animal' Mark Rhoads tries his hand at ice axe arresting for the first time. Even though it was snowing, the conditions were good for this particular exercise.