

Volume XIX, Issue I, January 1983

Kevin Walker, Editor — Walt Walker, Publisher — Carolyn Parsons, Artist

Search and Rescue

ABORT

Mission No. 8301A

1 Jan., Sat.
Palm Springs Tram,
San Jacinto Mountains

RMRU members' watching of bowl games was interrupted with a call from the Banning Station of the Riverside County Sheriff's Department with the information that three hikers were overdue in completing a hike from Idyllwild to the tram. While members were enroute to Palm Springs the trio walked out, all in good condition. With that news, the pagers were activated and members were turned around. • RMRU

SEARCH

Mission No. 8302M

5 Jan., Wed.
Lower Tahquitz Canyon,
San Jacinto Mountains

By Jim Fairchild



"Aced again!"
"Snicker, snicker."
More about the above later.

Chris and Holly were hikers. They climbed a long way up the south ridge of Tahquitz Canyon, to an elevation of over 2800 feet which is considerable considering the elevation, 450 feet, of Palm Springs, where they started. According to Chris, after they started down,

he and Holly took slightly different routes, resulting in his seeing her on a sub-ridge before he descended back to the origin of their hike. Holly did not show up, so Chris reported her missing and the Palm Springs Mounted Police, a local search group, responded.

The Mounties hiked up a ways, shouted and got Holly's calls in return, but were unable to pinpoint the location, and were recalled to base by their department. The best description they could give us regarding the area from which the calls emanated was "on a ledge on the south wall of the canyon." We too, would have some problems later pinpointing the location.

Chris said they separated about 2 p.m., he returned to town about 5 p.m., the mounties were called and hiked during the early part of the evening, and we (RMRU) were called about 11:30 p.m. The writer had just finished printing pictures of the recent search and body recovery of a young man who did not survive a 400 foot slide down an icy slope near the tramway, had only fifty minutes before crawled into bed, and Al's phone call precipitated a quick drive to the roadhead near Ann & Chester Doley's home at the west edge of Palm Springs near the mouth of Tahquitz Canyon.

We had slim manpower, meaning that we could field two teams, Bernie McIlvoy with Cameron Robbins to ascend the south ridge of Tahquitz Canyon, the writer with Craig Britton and new member Bill Blaschko, M.D., to ascend the canyon bottom itself, going around the first falls and onto the infamous 'belly-roll' trail.

The three of us lumbered across the desert toward the canyon's mouth in high spirits, confident of victory (finding Holly, taking care of her, and getting her out of the hostile, threatening, frightening, very dark environment). The reader please refer back to the opening words of this narrative.

A half-mile up we crossed the creek, with only one wet foot, and proceeded along the many branched trail toward the lower falls. Bernie & Cam were now on the ridge and would occasionally flash their super-powerful light down on us. The noise of the tumbling stream blocked any calls Holly may have made as she

watched our progress from the *other* side of the canyon, two thousand vertical feet above and a half-mile south. Of course, we did not know until after returning to base that she had a ring-side seat and view of our struggles upward. After some false trails we got above the falls and headed into the narrowing canyon along the belly-roll trail. One false step along it and we'd plunge 200 feet and more to join the ranks of certain unfortunate predecessors. Most of the way up the trail we stopped for a break and waited to hear when Bernie and Cam were the same lateral distance along, but a 1,000 feet above. Our powerful lights verified this, and we continued. At the belly-roll, a series of parallel upthrusting ledges with a cramping overhang above and open space below, we skittered across. Shortly we fumbled over a steep-slabby descent to almost meet the stream, below the second falls.

Bernie radioed he had response to his yells, very faint westward, up the mountain. We turned south and up to climb the headwall and reach that aforementioned 2800' level. It was steep and treacherous. I kept hearing weak calls, but finally believed it was the Tahquitz Maidens tormenting me with their plaintive, compelling voices. Higher and higher, then Craig, now 200 feet below me, called. 'What,' Holly answered.

Of course, by now the greatest search vehicle known was on hand, Mike Donovan flying one of Don Landells' jet rangers. Kevin Walker and Rick Pohlers were aboard with the loud-hailer, an electrically impelled voice-magnifying device. I asked them to fly the huge, high canyon wall across from us, where beautiful sunshine illuminated the rocks and shrubs. They did some zig-zags, not quite as high as where the 'what' seemed to originate. Kevin and Rick were put out on the pinnacled ridge above the steepest, narrowest part of the canyon to call. They were answered, it sounded to us, on the ridge top now that it came from below them. They called again, this time they nailed her down as being north of them (away from the canyon) at the same elevation. Search is over. Mike flew back, spotted her, picked up the victorious orange-parkaed RMRU men, and Holly was soon aboard, being flown back to

civilization, where she was looking down on most of the night and this early morning.

'Aced again.'

Bernie and Cam were 699' below us, and were picked up first, then we three were plucked from our roost.

Back at base I walked up to Kevin and said, 'Aced again!' He answered, 'Snicker, snicker.' Just kidding, but it's a terribly frequent format: some of the troopies struggle and sweat all night, locate the subject, then the fellows at base climb into the helicopter (strenuous move). fly up, and away, and grab the subject from under our runny noses.

So what? That's our job, we love it, and we are forever grateful that Holly and so many others are alive because the Lord grants us the strength and skill to accomplish such things. • RMRU

SEARCH

Mission No. 8303M

8 Jan., Sat.

Tahquitz Canyon,
San Jacinto Mountains

By Rick 'Major Disaster' Pohlers



January training is normally our annual winter shakedown, however this year it was different. The sheriff had a problem that he needed help on, so being nice guys we accepted his offer to go hiking in Tahquitz Canyon instead of playing in the snow.

The problem was a missing woman. Seems that she went hiking with some friends in the canyon but became tuckered out and was left at about the third falls to meet another party coming down. The other party never saw her and neither has anybody else since September. Boy talk about a cold trail! It was going to be tough to track her.

It was delightful in Palm Springs that Saturday, could see why all the eastern folks fill up the town. We had a tremendous turn out with 25 guys and one den mother there to participate in the arduous task of looking under every rock and bush for any tell tale sign. There was even media coverage there and a lot of attention was paid to the very cute media personnel by the troops.

The group was divided into teams, the 'A' team, commanded by 'Mr. W' Walt Walker, was made up of our veteran world class mountaineers such as Pete Carlson, Bernie McIlvoy, Larry Roland, Ed Hill and Jim Garvey. The 'B' team, commanded by 'Major Disaster' Rick



RMRU PHOTO BY GLENN HENDERSON

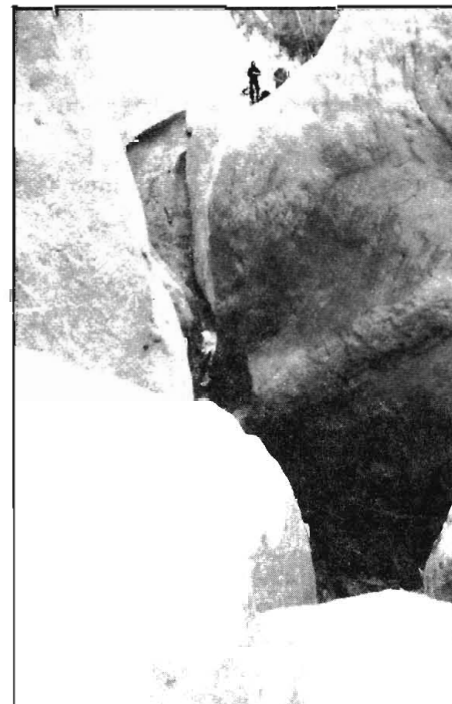
HOLY MACKEREL — RMRU member Kevin Walker seems to be in a spot as Mel Krug quietly sneaks off. Seriously, there are many such difficulties when descending Tahquitz Canyon. This section is a short distance above the third falls.

Pohlers was made up of probationary members, green weenie recipients, goof ups, mal contents and clutzes such as Joe Erickson, Kevin Walker, Mel Krug, Hal Fulkman, and others too numerous to mention.

Our trusty pilot was on hand to fly the teams into various spots in the canyon and give the HQ an over view of the operation. He also graciously flew in the lovely media persons to get some action shots of the troops in action. It's always fun to see yourself on TV.

The day went well. We have taken on a lot of new people not familiar with the canyon, so it was extremely good training for both A and B team members. Field progress was monitored from the air by 'Mr. W' and his 'aid de camp', 'Major Disaster.' The only thing to report was contact with a canyon resident living in a 'Cond' near the third falls. The guy was dressed in a lovely white bed sheet with long black greasy hair and beard, a real canyon space cookie. Obviously he was absolutely no help at all since his head was not on this planet.

On a serious note, after a very thorough search of the area with no clues at all the team commander decided to terminate the search since the possibility existed that she may have walked out and kept on going. So Don gave everyone an 'E' ticket ride out, and we all retired to the local Piazzaria for refueling. So ended another exiting day for your faithful heroes. • RMRU



RMRU PHOTO BY GLENN HENDERSON

VIEW FROM THE TOP — This is what one of Tahquitz Canyon's many waterfalls looks like from the top. RMRU members Bernie McIlvoy and John Muratet can be seen on a ledge at about the middle of the falls.



RMRU PHOTO BY GLENN HENDERSON

HOME JAMES — After a long day of searching, pilot Don Landells gives RMRU members a scenic ride out of the canyon and back to base camp at Ann Dollys.

Peak all the way to Mt. San Jacinto, the entire range was covered with a mantle of snow. My business is not open on Saturdays and when the telephone rang, I thought it was probably my wife calling. It was her, but not with news of what time dinner was going to be, she told me that the Banning station of the Riverside County Sheriff's Department had called for RMRU's help. There were two men down one of the ice chutes near the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway upper terminal.

It only took a minute to turn out the lights, lock the door, and speed away towards the garage where the No. 1 rescue van is parked. I opened the garage door, started the van, drove it out, backed my Wagoneer in and headed towards my house. Once in the house, I stripped off my clothes, put on my long poly underwear, my wool pants and shirt were next. The pack room was my next stop. I took all my winter gear, ice axe, crampons and snowshoes, big soft pack, my down pants and jacket were stuffed into a stuff bag and I took the entire pile out to the van and loaded it in. Elapsed time, from phone call to driving off for the mountain, 27 minutes.

Upon arrival at the tram I was advised that the state park rangers had descended to the two men and they were both injured, one had minor injuries and the other had sustained a head injury. They both

Editor's Note

On behalf of the 'B' team I wish to submit a formal complaint to Major Disaster. In his article he speaks of the 'A' team as veteran world class climbers. Interesting thing about this is that malcontent, yours truly aided by Glenn Henderson and Mel Krug, also fellow goof ups, got two world classers, namely Bernie McIlvoy and J. R. Muratet out of a hole (narrow section of waterfalls) that they rappelled into. So in the future the 'A' team better watch out, because the 'B' team is ready and waiting to go!

RESCUE

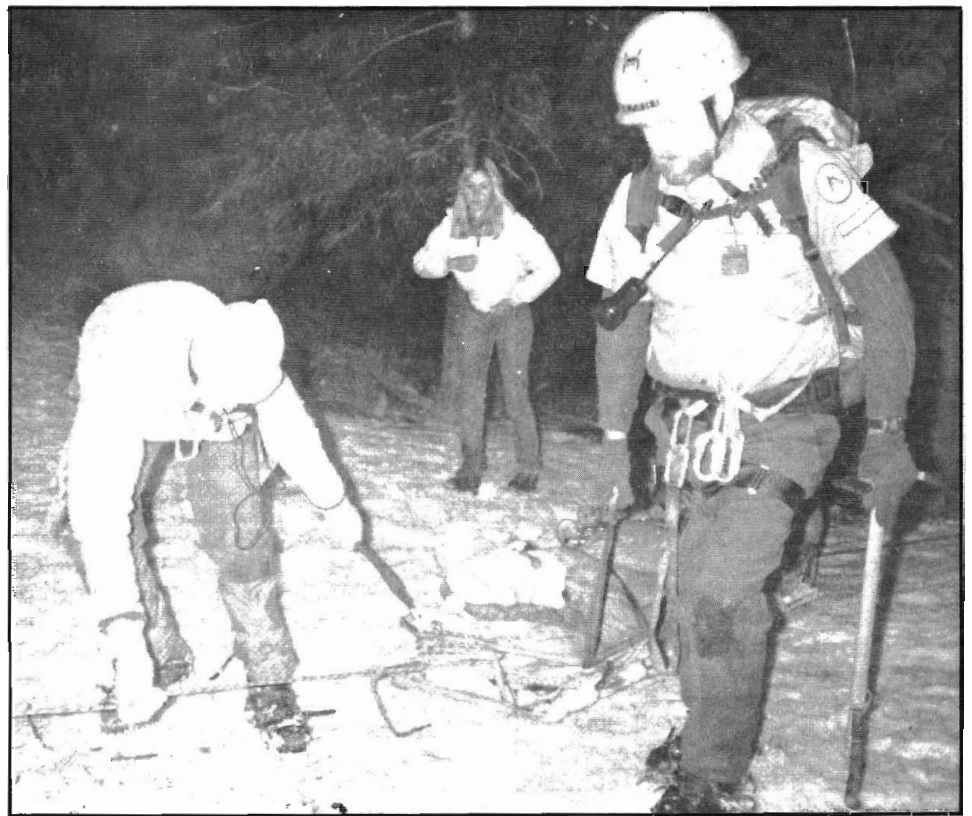
Mission No. 8304M

15 Jan., Sat.
Palm Springs Tram,
San Jacinto Mountains

By Walt Walker



Saturdays were not invented for work, it says somewhere, I'm sure. However, I was bending the rule trying to lower the pile that had accumulated on my desk. There is a window right in front of my desk, that looks out onto the San Jacinto Mountains. I could see from Tahquitz



RMRU PHOTO BY JIM FAIRCHILD

BACK ON TOP — After being pulled over 500 feet up an ice chute, RMRU members Jim Garvey and Walt Walker help pull the snow litter containing one (seriously injured) of two men up to the staging area. The second subject was brought up shortly after.

were better than 500 feet down from the area that had previously been nicknamed the 'launching pad' by RMRU because of the recent rescues that had occurred there.

When the No. 2 rescue van arrived we began unloading, quite literally, thousands of feet of PMI rescue rope. The ABS plastic litter, portable oxygen system, rescue sleeping bag, bags of carabiners, technical hardware, nylon slings, portable spotlights and many other small items were all carried up to the lower terminal of the tram and loaded into the waiting tram car. (The Palm Springs Aerial Tramway personnel were once again very helpful in getting us to the top as quickly as possible.)

After arriving at the upper terminal we quickly carried all the equipment down to Long Valley where most of it was loaded onto a sled that was pulled by a snowmobile. RMRU members, tram personnel, sheriff's deputies and state park rangers carried the balance of the equipment over to the staging area. Within minutes we had set up an anchor, around a very large pine tree, and quickly sent two RMRU members down on the new rescue rope. Upon reaching the subjects, they discussed the situation with the state park rangers who had given first aid. The one man was only slightly injured, a probable ankle sprain, the other man had sustained a serious head injury and was not completely coherent. We started oxygen going for the man with the head injury. He had been loaded into a stokes litter that was attached to a toboggan. The RMRU members above had set up a mechanical advantage system and were ready to lift

when we radioed up that we were ready to go. The lift was started and it was a very difficult job due to the snow conditions. Part of the time the snow was very hard and supported the weight of the rescuers, the balance of the time the snow crust would break and down you went. It was a constant battle and was further complicated because we would have to radio up and tell the haulers to stop each time we sank into the snow up to our knees or better.

When we finally reached the top, we immediately moved the litter to the sled and transported the subject slowly over to Long Valley. While we were carrying the litter up to the tram, the rest of the team was bringing up the second injured man. We had radioed out to have an ambulance meet us at the lower tram. Our portable oxygen system ran out just as we arrived at the lower terminal. The man with the head injury was loaded into the ambulance and was sent off to the Palm Springs hospital.

The whole process was repeated for the second man with the ankle injury. It was almost midnight when we headed towards the restaurant and the dinner we had missed during this successful double rescue. • RMRU

SEARCH

Mission No. 8305M

23, Jan., Sun.
San Jacinto Mountains

By Kevin Walker



The calmness of this particular morning was broken by the sound of the pager. Rendezvous: lower station of the Palm Springs Tram, for a search. Upon reaching the tram, we were informed by the sheriff that Charles Vanutta from San Diego had been reported overdue by his wife from a day hike on Saturday. His route of travel was to have been from the tram to Mt. San Jacinto and back again. Weather on Saturday was poor, to the extent of snow falling on and off all day. The storm was now breaking up which would allow us to use a helicopter to air search and then put field teams out.

As we finished loading our packs Don Landells arrived with one of his 206 Rangers. Walt and I loaded our packs in the cargo compartment and climbed in. As Don made his way up the mountain, dodging the fluffy clouds, we talked about where to start. First order of business would be to cut tracks along the escarpment from the tram to Mt. San Jacinto.

After doing that Don flew us down the ski route from the summit back to Round Valley. Searching was difficult as hikers and skiers had already been into the search area since the storm. We were working the 10,000 foot ridge when base radioed and said that Charles had just wandered out to the Banning-Idyllwild Highway near Pine Cove. So... back to base, thanks to Don, and back home.

• RMRU

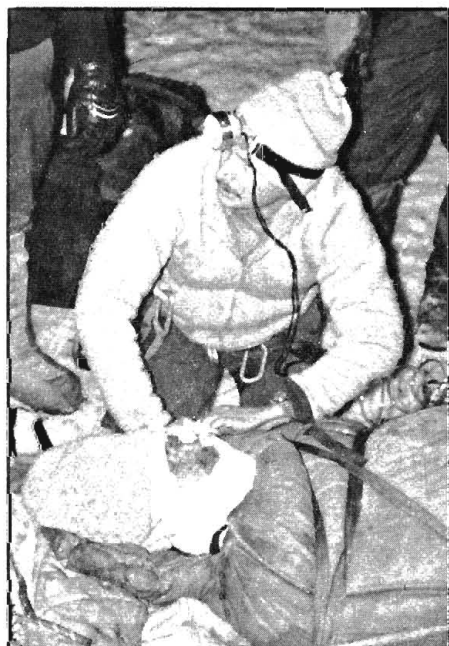


Team Winter Skills

16 Jan., Sun.
Above Tamarak Valley,
San Jacinto Mountains

After having spent Saturday searching in Tahquitz Canyon (see Mission No. 8303M), it was left up to members if they wanted to spend Sunday training in the snow on the big mountain.

Sunday morning saw a small but eager group riding the tram to the mountain station. The plan was to hike in and through Round Valley, and then to the steep slope above Tamarak Valley. Plans were followed as the group went up onto the slopes and spent the majority of the day setting up anchors, for raises and lowers, breaking the systems down, moving to different spots and doing it again. By late afternoon the members were back at Long Valley and ready for the tram ride back down the mountain. • RMRU



RMRU PHOTO BY JIM FAIRCHILD

VITALS MONITORED — RMRU member Jim Garvey keeps watch over one of the injured men, as they wait to be moved into the tram station.

