

Volume XIX, Issue VI, June 1983

John Dew, Editor — Kevin Walker, Publisher — Dona Towell, Artist

Search and Rescue

SEARCH

Mission No. 8321M

5 June, Sun.
Below Tahquitz Rock,
San Jacinto Mountains

By John Dew



During the mid morning fellow **RMRU** member Walt Walker contacted me for a search below Tahquitz Rock. This was our monthly training weekend and the majority of our members were somewhere in Deep Canyon. This only left a few of us immediately available for the search.

At Humber Park I met Mary Bowman closely followed by Walt. Walt told us that John Muratet was enroute to the Big Horn overlook to contact the rest of the team in the canyon to respond ASAP to Idyllwild. Quickly Walt, Jim Garvey, Roy (my son) and I were in the field heading to the base of the rock where Mary Villalobes was last seen the day before. It seems that she had been watching companions climb on Tahquitz Rock. When they finished their climb and hiked back down and around the rock, Mary was not there. They spent most of the night looking for her, and at first light came out and called for help. We had just reached the base of the rock and started looking when Mary was seen at a coffee shop in Idyllwild. With that news we headed back to base, and then home. • RMRU



SEARCH

Mission No. 8322M

21 June, Tues.
Tahquitz Drainage,
San Jacinto Mountains

By John Dew



A group of 7 teenagers with two adult leaders had arrived at Skunk Cabbage Meadow in the afternoon of Monday for the beginning of a 3 day trip. That evening Patrick Pacheco, a 16 year old, went exploring on his own but didn't return. He was last seen about 6:30 p.m. By 9:00 p.m. the group began searching for Patrick and ran into **RMRU** member Joe Erickson who coincidentally was camping in Skunk Cabbage Meadow with another group of teenagers. After further searching with Joe's guidance, which was unsuccessful, one of the adult leaders hiked down to Idyllwild to get help.

After the call from the sheriffs office,

RMRU team members assembled in the wee hours of Tuesday in Idyllwild to sift through the available information and plan strategy. Patrick had said he was going down to a river when he was last seen. The Skunk Cabbage Meadow area drains toward Caramba and the treacherous Tahquitz Canyon. On the basis of previous experience it was felt that Patrick might try to follow the river out of the wilderness and end up in Caramba. As soon as dawn broke Jim Fairchild and Bill Blaschko were flown by helicopter to where the subject had last been seen. Meanwhile a second team consisting of Randy Iwasiuk and Cameron Robbins were flown to Caramba, the direction the subject was believed to be heading. John Dew remained in Idyllwild to coordinate activity while Joe Erickson was stationed at Saddle Junction to relay radio messages between base camp and the search teams. John Dew called the Sierra Madre Search and Rescue team for backup since so few **RMRU** members were available.

Jim and Bill worked down from Skunk Cabbage Meadow through scattered patches of snow and finally picked up some fresh tracks that led to the established trail to Caramba. Analysis of the tracks indicated that the subject had come up the trail toward Skunk Cabbage Meadow for a while but had then turned around and gone back in the direction of Caramba. Randy and Cameron in the meantime were questioning campers in Caramba and working their way up toward Skunk Cabbage Meadow.

At the halfway point between Skunk Cabbage Meadow and Caramba, Patrick was found by Jim Fairchild and Bill Blaschko. Over some breakfast Pat described spending a cold and largely sleepless night. He had found the trail but hadn't been sure which way to go on it (just as had been surmised by the tracking information). Five members of the Sierra Madre team arrived in Idyllwild just as the subject was found. Their response was greatly appreciated even though they were not actually needed in the field. Patrick was in good condition and had an uneventful hike back to rejoin his group who were waiting anxiously at Skunk Cabbage Meadow. The search team members hiked down Devil's Slide Trail under clear blue skies, enjoying the scenery with the satisfaction of a mission completed. • RMRU



TRAINING



Familiarization

3-5 June, Fri.-Sat.

Deep Canyon, Santa Rosa Mountains

By Jim Fairchild



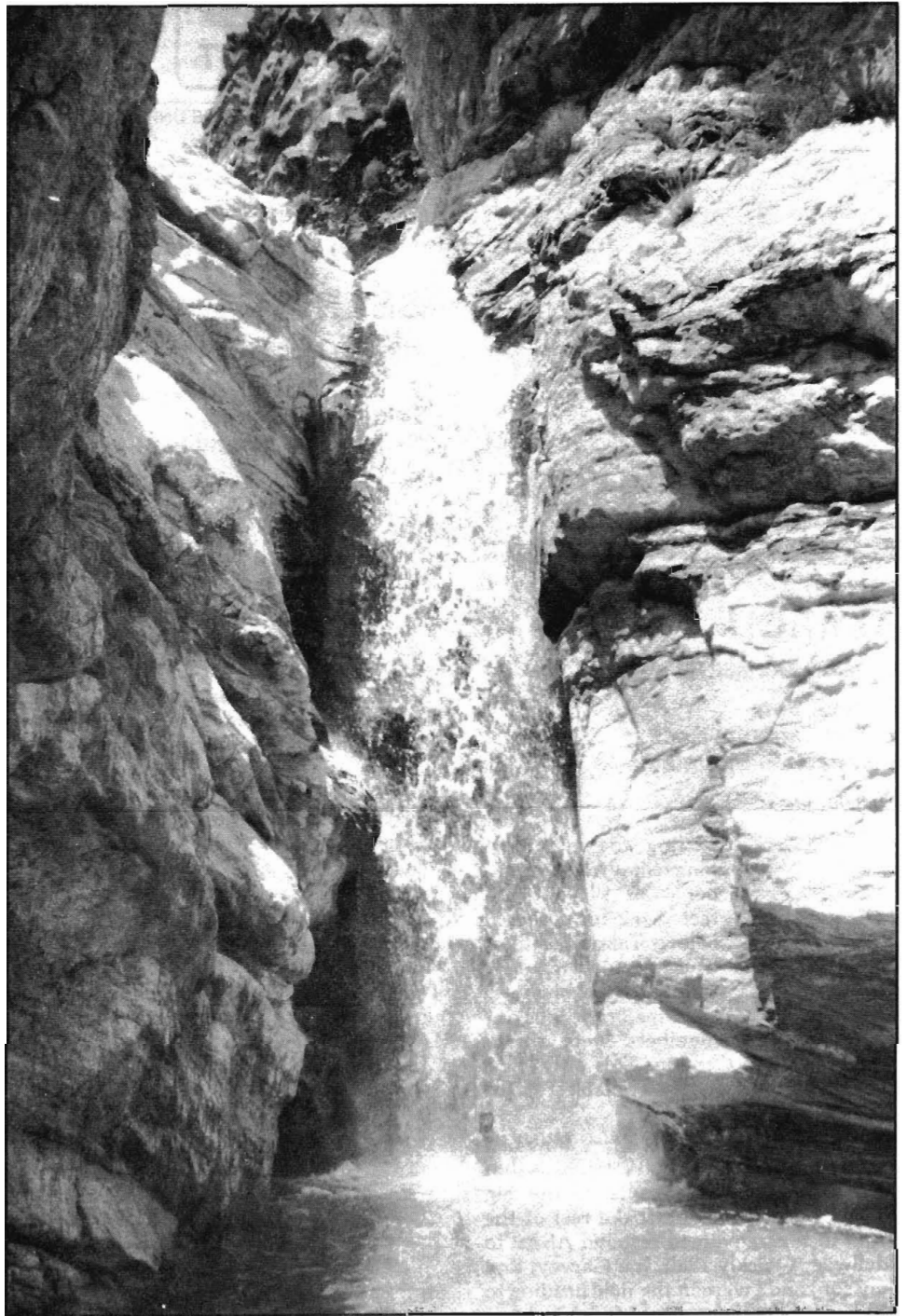
The parking lot at Pin-yon Fire Station was bare of cars. We were on time (2000) and it is the right day. Then we re-checked just to be sure! Joe Erickson, the past training chairman, and the writer, a recycled training chairman, were chagrined — all set to commence an epic descent of Deep Canyon, and no team mates in sight. We drove a half-mile up a dirt road to an upper roadhead — no one here either. We hid our packs under bushes and returned, this time to the Sugarloaf Cafe. All hands were here of course!

After a reasonable period of conviviality I felt brave and uttered a semi-authoritative, "Lets' go," everyone jumped up and went. Will wonders never cease?



The 3 mile hike to our camp in the ancient corral above Horsethief Creek Camp was cool, brisk, and most pleasant. There was some muttering about a scarcity of extensive flat places to sleep, but fatigue prevailed and soon we slept.

Surely the wonders were persisting because we started hiking Saturday morning at about 0730. From Horsethief Creek Camp we turned down stream to reach the confluence with Deep Canyon Creek. Water flow was high so we did a lot of jumping across the stream seeking the least splashy route. The presence of water supports a varied vegetation: cottonwood, ash, scalebroom, mesquite, juniper, yuccas, nolina, cat's claw, Garrya, yerba santa, coudalia agave, palms, plus many cacti and annuals. Pools supported



RMRU PHOTO BY JIM FAIRCHILD

ALL WET — At the bottom of one of the many water falls of Deep Canyon is Dave Ezell braving the still cold water from the winter.

lush banks of algae and newly vitalized moss showed its brilliant green in moist places.

We hurried along. At first the canyon walls were not particularly abrupt, but by noon they began to rise steeply, especially on the east side. Numerous tributaries of water joined Deep Canyon some by means of lovely waterfalls.

The June sun had warmed the canyon and us as we passed through a lengthy aisle of almost blinding white rock, then

ascended left up a loose gully to by-pass our first major falls. Lunch followed a cooling session at the base of the falls. Ants attempted to share everything.

Team-mates beside Joe were Ed Hill, Bernie McIlvoy, Mark Hebert, Cameron Robbins, Bud White, Pete Carlson, Dave Ezell, Mel Krug, and Bill Blaschko.

Resuming the descent, we soon came to a convenient system of game trails that took us up, around, and below a waterfall we usually rappelled.

Now, a bend in the canyon where noisy cascades made us climb a 20' cliff onto a peninsula, Bud stepped on a rock that came loose and dropped him face-first onto more rocks. A broken glasses lens frame and lacerations, resulted. But, the grizzled veteran eschewed a free ride out and continued hiking.

The super-high snow melt run-off had badly damaged our anchors for the rappel at the next waterfall, but we backed it up with a No. 8 Hexentric chock and 24' of sling. All went well, and the plunge into the pool directly off the rope was both exhilarating and refreshing.

The canyon was now narrow, the walls hundreds of feet high on both sides. A huge chockstone created an impressive 15' falls where we had to toss packs into the long narrow pools below, then jump and swim for it. Refreshing again.

Just 100 yards upstream from the last and highest falls (77') we had to rappel, is a very steep slope of broken rock. Two years ago Don Landells helitacked us out from a large, flat boulder 150' up. That boulder is now in ruins at stream level, the rest of the slope has slid down and the upper 50' is bare slabby bed rock. We had observed many other re-arrangements in this loose, highly fractured chasm.

Last year's anchors at the highest falls were now under water. We resorted to a pair of ancient, rusty, wobbly spikes I had seen as early as 1955 during a descent leading my Boy Scout Troop. Joe went first, belayed by Ed. The writer, with 200 pound body and 45 pound pack went next — the acid test. No one need worry after that. This rappel was esthetically pleasing with thunderous falls 10' right of us, fern and moss covered, overhanging wall to descend, and a cold turbulent pool to drop into, and, providentially, wade across to dry rock. Three marvellous palm trees stood nearby, as did many others up side canyons.

A half hours scramble featuring slippery, cabin sized boulders brought us to Saturday nights' bivouac. Here were a series of flat, sandy spaces just above a huge pond and cascading creek. Above rose overhanging cliffs. We hoped no big-horn sheep would try to look down on us and dislodge rocks. The writer has had that happen before.

Ah! SUPPERTIME. Unlucky fellows, drying clothing and sleeping bags from packs not completely waterproofed, others dozing to recoup energy; and yours truly watching sizzling steaks and preparing succulent mushrooms and tomatoes, to be consumed with butter, capsicum and dressing. Our expected convivial "campfire" minus a fire, never materialized, instead, an early repose. As the frogs and toads began to chorus we began to snore.



Dawn came a bit late for us in the deepest portion of the canyon, and we leisurely came back to consciousness. The handi talki radio next to me began to say things like "RMRU there's a mission . . ." Attempts to respond failed, but we finally put together that there was a call for a search in the Tahquitz Plateau country. Our breakfast and repacking were expedited. Bernie led, saying it would "go." It did. But in the gully we met short vertical sections where we had to pass packs. At the second one the writer reached up to get hold and do a pull up. This caused a need to look straight up while arms were extended above. Weakness and difficulty in breathing ensued. I asked Mark for assistance and he literally hoisted me up to his side on a ledge. Talk about strength! My doctor later assessed the problem as a compression fracture to the vertebra at the location of the nerve that controls breathing.

Our ascent to the highway was punctuated by stunning views; flaming red blossoms of ocotillo, encounters with Teddy Bear Cholla, and the flaming sun. Of course, part way up the mission was called off!

We met J.R. Muratet at the road opposite Black Hill. He supplied us with cold beverages and rides back to our vehicles.

Our training, though attenuated, was highly successful for familiarization and negotiation of rugged, sometimes technical terrain. • RMRU