

Volume XIX, Issue V, May 1983

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

Search and Rescue

CALL

Mission No. 8313C

1 May, Sun.
The North Face,
San Jacinto Mountains

We were called by the Banning station of the Riverside County Sheriff's Department that two men were overdue in completing a climb on the North Face of Mt. San Jacinto. As members were being called, the two men hiked out to the tram, and in good shape. • RMRU

SEARCH

Mission No. 8314M

6-7 May, Fri.-Sat.
Strawberry Creek,
San Jacinto Mountains

By Ed Hill



For most of the year, Strawberry Creek is benign. The water dances along, murmuring over the stones. It tumbles down through Strawberry Grotto over a series of waterfalls and cataracts. In early

spring after a winter of heavy snowfall, it assumes a different character. There is a loud roar as the water smashes its way through Strawberry Grotto on its way down the mountain. These are the times that one must respect the power of the water; it can and will kill if given the chance.

On Friday, May 7th, two young couples and their dogs went hiking down through Strawberry Grotto. They were from San

Diego and were enjoying the awesome sight of a large volume of water rushing down the canyon. One of the dogs, a black labrador retriever ended up in the water and was swept away. In an effort to save the dog, George Stammitz entered the water and was also swept over a waterfall. The remaining people hiked out to summon help.

We had planned a weekend of tracking, orienteering, and good fellowship in the Pinyon Flats and Martinez Peak area. The call for help found us driving out to the roadhead. Some of the members were diverted early, and Jack Bowman was sent out to the roadhead to catch any stragglers.

The first indication to me that a mission was on was when I arrived at the roadhead and found nobody there. After a ten minute wait, I saw what might have been a rescue van's lights and heard a radio. I walked over there and found Jack sitting in his truck. Shortly I was on my way back to Strawberry Grotto.

Teams were already in the field searching both sides of Strawberry Creek. The water was the highest that we had ever seen. Usually it is not too difficult to cross the creek. This time there were only two places to do so safely. The teams found nothing and returned to base camp for a slow careful search the next day.

Equipped with pikes loaned to us by the fire department, we returned to the creek with the intent of probing every pool and every pocket of fast water. We did our probing while being held on belay. In several cases we rappelled down to a pool and jumared back up when the job was done.

Midday we found the body of the dog. She was caught under a large tree that had been swept over a waterfall and had itself been caught at the base. The poor dog had been swept over two waterfalls. At this point we had a very good idea that we were searching for a body. Bernie McIlvoy wanted to move the tree a bit in the case the man was also caught under the tree. We attempted to move it with a mechanical advantage, but all we did was damage our rope and a Gibb's ascender.

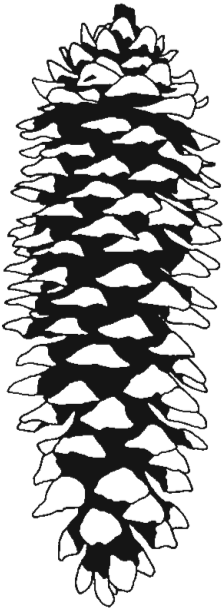
After that we moved slowly upstream probing in all the pools and places where a person could be caught. Mel Krug had brought his wetsuit, and he and Bernie took turns wearing it. The water was so



cold that you only wanted to be in it for a few minutes at a time.

In a small pool most of the way down the first waterfall, Bernie felt something different from what he had been feeling all along. He was sure that he had located the dog's master. He could hook the body with the pike but could not dislodge it. The body was being held in the pool by the force of the water. He tied a line to the pike and had three team members pull. They couldn't move it, so he called for more manpower. Mark Hebert crossed the creek on a line, and two other people on the far bank joined up to make six people on the line. That was enough to dislodge the body, and it came tumbling down the creek toward the second falls. I was in the shallow water above the second falls and was able to swing the body into the bank. From there it was a relatively straight forward task to get him into a body bag and transport him to the road at the top of the hill.

My guess is that he had never seen fast water before and had no idea of what it could do to him. RMRU



SEARCH

Mission No. 8316M

**11-12 May, Wed.-Thurs.
Snowcreek,
San Jacinto Mountains**

By Glenn Henderson



My family and I had just finished dinner when we were interrupted by the telephone with news of a mission at Snow Creek. So much for a quiet evening at home.

The team met at the caretakers cabin for the Palm Springs Water District above the community of Snow Creek. The caretaker reported hearing voices up in the canyon above the cabin and at one time it sounded like calls for help, and at that point did the right thing in calling the sheriff for our assistance. We quickly made up teams and headed into the field.

To make a long story short, after searching some time after midnight, three men hiked out of the canyon and after being questioned it was decided that they were the mysterious voices that had been heard earlier. With that all field teams were called back in, gear stowed and everyone headed home for a few hours sleep before morning. • RMRU

ABORT

Mission No. 8317A

**14 May, Sat.
Falls Creek,
San Jacinto Mountains**

During the late morning we received a call from the Banning station of the Riverside County Sheriff's Department that a man was stranded on a ledge in Falls Creek. Members were contacted and responded to the roadhead at the community of Snow Creek. As members were quickly preparing gear for a rescue operation, the man walked out stating that he had been able to free himself from his problem. With that members loaded up and headed for home. • RMRU

CALL

Mission No. 8318C

**28 May, Sat.
Norco,
near Riverside**

We were called by the Riverside station of the Riverside County Sheriff's Department to assist in the evacuation of a plane crash near Norco. As the call out procedure was being started, the sheriff

called back and said that because of the closeness to the city our help would not be needed. • RMRU

SEARCH

Mission No. 8319M

**28-29 May, Sat.-Sun.
Tin Mine Canyon,
Near Corona**

By Bill Blaschko



The one that got away! Although I have been on RMRU only a short time, rumors had already reached me about the unusual nature of missions in the Corona area. As you will see, the mission in Tin Mine

Canyon bears this out.

On May 28 the sheriffs department relayed a message to RMRU that there was an injured hiker up the canyon. An informant described coming upon a sleeping bag and some uncooked food up the canyon. The informant then heard a yell and some crashing through the shrubbery, he then went for help without ever actually seeing the subject. Forest service personnel were notified first and were looking for the subject when our team arrived on the scene. At approximately 11:00 p.m. Kevin Walker and Mark Herbert headed up the narrow canyon battling their way through thick brush, stinging nettles and veritable groves of poison oak. When radio communications became difficult John Dew moved up to a nearby ridge to serve as a radio relay. After meeting with Kevin and Mark, and outlining the areas they had searched, the Forest Service personnel hiked out leaving RMRU and the sheriffs deputy to finish the mission. As Craig Britton and Bill Blaschko were preparing to hike up the canyon Craig lacerated his finger on some brush cutting equipment. While the sheriff drove Craig to the hospital for a few quick stitches, Walt Walker and Bill Blaschko headed up the canyon to join in the search. This left Mary Bowman, the only other team member responding, to run the base camp.

While Kevin, Mark, Walt and Bill explored the area indicated by the informant, John Dew saw a flashlight from his vantage point on the ridge. After radio

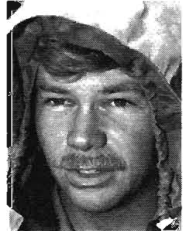


RESCUE

Mission No. 8315M

**8 May, Sun.
Upper Palm Canyon
San Jacinto Mountains**

By Joe Erickson



We were called out for an injured hiker in Upper Palm Canyon. This was my day off and a fine warm spring day for a hike.

We were to meet at the top of Palm Canyon off of highway 74 at

Ribbonwood Drive. When I arrived at the trail head, the two RMRU vans were there and members were ready to hike. I hurried, got ready and ran to catch up with the others. We were to clear an area for the helicopter that we were expecting soon.

A group of CDF workers had arrived earlier and were with the subject already. Apparently this woman became exhausted (first time backpacking) and the heat had gotten to her. As she was hiking she had complained of nausea, dizziness and eventually fell when crossing the stream.

Reportedly stable now and ready to transport, Kevin and I flew with one of Don Landells' pilots, Mike Donovan to her location. A moment or two of search by air brought us to her and her group. The CDF men had the situation under control and assisted us in gently placing her in the helicopter. We flew her and her gear out in a couple of minutes to base camp where her partners were ready to take her to the hospital.

We all drove home a few hours after the first call — a job swiftly and efficiently done. • RMRU

contact we turned off all our lights, but someone's flashlight was still visible to John. The subject was using his flashlight only intermittently and was coming down a ridge rather than the canyon. Kevin, Mark, Walt and Bill started back down while Craig Britton and the sheriff (now returned from the emergency room) waited at the bottom of the trail. John Dew was able to follow the subject to a point approximately 200 yards upstream from base camp, but saw no further evidence of the flashlight after that. In spite of our combined efforts the subject was able to slip out of the canyon without being found. Although it was not known why the subject eluded us, it was speculated that he may have been engaged in some illegal activity. According to the sheriff's deputy marijuana has been cultivated in that area in the past. We won't have the satisfaction of knowing exactly what happened because this is "the one that got away." • RMRU

SEARCH

Mission No. 8320M

31 May, Tues.

**Sage,
South of Hemet**

By Bruce Gahagan



The call came late in the afternoon. The initial report was that there was a downed aircraft in the Sage area south of Hemet.

Upon arrival on the scene by RMRU member Walt Walker it was learned from the reporting sources that a local had seen a small aircraft at low altitude with possible engine trouble, fly over and disappear from sight on a south easterly course from Sage. After reviewing maps of the local area, teams were sent out in four wheeled vehicles to get a fix on the planes emergency locator beacon (ELT). Earlier in the day the Riverside County Sheriffs Department aircraft was unable to make a thorough search of the area because of decreasing ceiling height.

After several hours of trying to get a triangulation on the radio by the teams in the field, the search was called off in hopes that the morning would bring clear flying weather for the sheriff department.

It has since been determined that there was no downed aircraft; but speculations were made that the informant just observed a low flying plane or one that may have been landing on one of the many privately owned strips in the area.

• RMRU