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## Search and Rescue

### RESCUE

Mission No. 8501M

2 Jan., Wed.  
North Mountain,  
San Jacinto

By Kevin Walker



For January it was unusually warm. And for the first mission of 1985 the call came at 2:00 P.M., for a stranded youth upon North Mountain, just north of the city of San Jacinto. We responded to the Gilman bridge and met with Captain Bill Park and deputies. The informant, a teenager, told us that he and his buddy had gone to hike

up to the top of North Mountain. Along the way they encountered difficult terrain, such as dry waterfalls and steep walls all made up of loose rock and dirt. While going around one of the obstacles his friend became stranded on a ledge on the side of the canyon. The informant then climbed on to the top and hiked out the ridge to where he could go back down and call for help. Early responders to the call were fellow members Jim Fairchild, John Dew, and myself, along with Bob Elliot from Hemet Search and Rescue. From what we were told the fastest way to get back to the stranded youth would be to take a fire control road that runs along the back side of the mountain and then descend down the narrow canyon to where the youth was stuck. Our informant was good at remembering where we needed to go and took us back to where he climbed out.

First off we needed to locate the boy. Bob and I loaded our packs and set out down the treacherous canyon, while John and Jim started readying gear, as more members arrived. We hiked down canyon scrambling over the various obstacles along the way, and after about 20 minutes we made contact with the teen. Only thing was, he was not stuck on a ledge, he was now on an extremely steep slope next to a dry waterfall. He yelled to us that his



ledge had given way to his weight and he had fallen to the canyon bottom. In doing so he had hurt his foot and leg and complained that his head hurt. After taking his fall he tried to continue up and had become stranded again on the slope where he stood. Bob set up an anchor and I rappelled down, secured the teen to my harness and checked and found what appeared to be a sprained ankle. He was able to move under his own power with assistance so with him in tow I jumared back up to Bob.

By now the troops were in full swing bringing the litter down to us and setting up rigging to do a raise out of the canyon. Bernie McIlvoy, Mel Krug, Rick Pohlers, and Glen Henderson arrived with the litter just as it was dark. Up on the top of a side ridge was Jim, John, Bruce Gahagen, Ray Hussey, and Walt Walker putting the finishing touches on the hauling system. With the teen safely secured in the litter we moved back up canyon. Upon reaching the location where the haul was to be, Mel, Glen, Rick and I stayed with the litter and the rest of the guys went up to the top. After the rope was secured to the litter with wheel underneath, everyone on top started pulling and walking down and we started moving up. Being hooked to one rope with a pulley and safety gibs on top, it was just like riding the tram, only we had to contend with foxtails and rocks. Soon though we were on top, and then a quick wheel out to the top of the mountain and the waiting vehicles. The teen was then driven out to the hospital where he was treated and released. For the rest of us it was putting gear away and driving to Dennys for a late supper and then home. • RMRU



RMRU PHOTO BY JIM FAIRCHILD

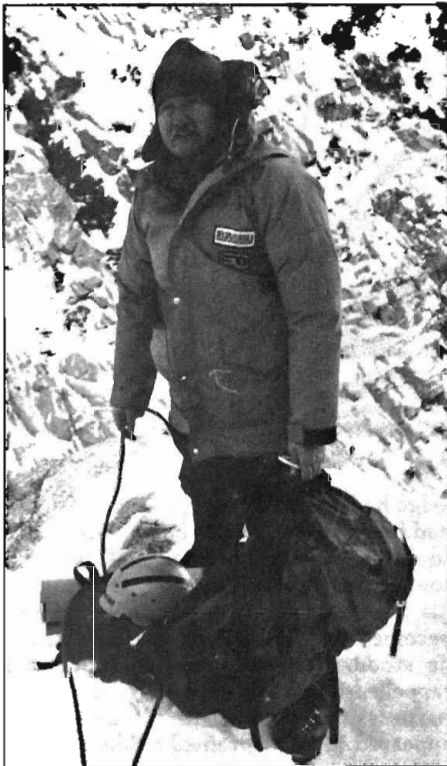
UP ROPE — RMRU members Kevin Walker, Mel Krug (in front), Glenn Henderson and Ray Hussey (hidden) guide the wheeled litter, as it is raised up the very steep hillside of North Mountain. In the litter is injured teenager Bill Evans of San Jacinto.

## SEARCH

**Mission No. 8502M**

**13 Jan., Sat.  
North Face,  
Mt. San Jacinto**

*By Walt Walker*



After 23 years you would think I might get used to having the telephone ring in the middle of the night and not receive a rush of adrenalin. As you will find out as the mission unfolds I should have saved the adrenalin for a couple of times later that day.

Yes, the telephone call was from the Banning office of the Riverside County Sheriff's Department. A 32 year old man, Kenneth Kenaga, was overdue from a solo climb of the North Face. A trio of men had planned to drive to the Snowcreek roadhead Thursday evening. The weatherman had predicted that a storm would probably hit the mountain Friday. Two of the men decided they did not want to go ahead with the climb due to the weather. However, a very determined Mr. Kenaga decided he would do the climb "solo." He left his residence at about nine o'clock Thursday evening, planning to arrive at the roadhead by eleven. He carried minimum gear and planned to climb the face in one day and hike out to the Palm Springs Aerial Tram by Friday noon. At best this was a fairly difficult climb and the worst was that the wind chill factor Friday evening at the tram was minus 27 degrees and that the missing man was only slightly familiar with the area.

The team members started arriving at the Snowcreek roadhead at seven a.m. and began packing for a full winter mission, ice axe, crampons, gaiters, mittens, goggles, and a whole lot more. Then there was the long underwear, wool pants and shirts, wind pants and parka shells, down jackets, stocking caps, vapor barrier socks and insulated hiking boots.

Shortly before eight a.m., pilot Mike Donovan arrived in a Landells Aviation turbine powered helicopter (Jet Ranger). Rob Gardner and I loaded our packs and climbed in. Mike applied power and we were off for the North Face. We flew search over the Isthmus and both Falls Creek and Snowcreek up to the neck of the Isthmus. We continued on up the North Face flying contours from the Falls Creek drainage over to the Snow Creek Drainage. Some 30 minutes later we reached the top of Mt. San Jacinto and began a search pattern from Round Valley to Long Valley. It was decided to drop Rob off at Round Valley and bring two more RMRU members back up to form a team of three.

As Mike and I descended the North Face, we searched our way back to base. We spotted Ken in a side canyon at about the 7500 foot level. He was stranded on a very narrow ledge in a very steep area. Mike maneuvered the bird back and forth and all around the steep slope trying to find a spot to put a runner down on. This was hampered by the irregular wind gusts that pushed the bird around occasionally. He gave up trying to find a spot really close and started looking for anything in the general vicinity. Mike tried one above and to one side, the cliff was just too close to the main rotor blades. He flew out and we climbed up another 150 feet. Mike spotted a promontory and began to hover over it and inch his way toward a rock cliff. I looked up through the plexiglas and watched as the main rotor blades came closer and closer to the granite. Just then the runner on the pilot's side touched down. In RMRU terms, "this was a tight helispot." As we circled around the area I tried to estimate the rope and hardware that would be needed to pull off a very difficult technical winter rescue. I also motioned to Ken to stay put. As we descended towards base I radioed ahead my list of needed equipment. Since this was such a tight helispot we had to minimize our exposure time during the time the helicopter was so close to the rock. We would be flown in by two's and I figured we might be able to do the job with six members but I told base to have six more members ready to go.

When we touched down Bernie McIlvoy was ready to go and he quickly climbed aboard and we were off for the North Face once again. When we got back to the face where Ken was we had Mike maneuver

the bird up and down the area so Bernie and I could make, what we hoped would be a successful plan. We had to consider a route of travel from the helicopter to the subject that would be as safe as possible for him and us.

Both Bernie and I were in the back of the Ranger with our packs in our laps and our ice axes on the floor. As Mike slowly and carefully worked his way down to the helispot, Bernie asked me to hand him his ice axe. Once the pilot's runner was down Bernie slid out of the seat and carefully stepped onto an icy one foot wide ledge. He had done this with his ice axe in the arrest position because of a 300 foot drop off on one side and a 100 foot drop off on the other side. I handed him his pack and then mine. Then I did the same as Bernie had done, ice axe in hand I slipped out of the seat and stepped onto the ice. It was a few seconds of very tense waiting as Mike applied power to the bird and lifted off, the main blades creating first a downward blast and then a sideways blast. Once the bird was gone I held the packs as Bernie got out a rope and worked it around a horn of rock. We clipped onto the rope and moved our packs over to the horn and clipped them on.

Bernie tied into another rope and started across the slope as I belayed him. He ran into a steep section of water ice and detoured around a large boulder. As he was climbing along, about every 25 feet he would place a runner (a nylon like strap)



RMRU PHOTO BY KEVIN WALKER

**RESTING** — RMRU member Mel Krug and stranded climber Kenneth Kenaga take a break, before moving on across the safety rope on the North Face of Mt. San Jacinto.





around a rock or tree and snap the climbing rope into it with a carabiner as a point of safety. Bernie finally reached a group of small trees approximately 275 feet away and about 100 feet higher than the helispot.

The helicopter came into view and Mike worked it into the tight one runner helispot. I was standing there waiting with the safety rope in hand as first Kevin Walker and then Cameron Robbins climbed out and clipped onto the rope. With the long rope secured at Bernie's end Cameron quickly snapped onto it with his Jumars (mechanical ascending devices) and started over with more equipment. Once again the helicopter returned, this time with Mel Krug and Bruce Gahagen, and Kevin and I went through the same safety procedures as the time before. Mel, Bruce and Kevin quickly started over to the small group of trees to assist Bernie and Cameron. I remained at the helispot in case we needed more man power.

As Bernie tied into the end of a 300 foot PMI rope, Mel, Cameron, Bruce and Kevin set up an S.E.A. (Self Equalizing Anchor) to two of the small trees. After that was



RMRU PHOTO BY BERNIE McILVOY

**WINTER TECHNICAL AT ITS BEST (AND DANGEROUS)** — In the first of these photographs, RMRU members Kevin and Walt Walker stand on the narrow ledge that was used for a helispot during the rescue of Kenneth Kenaga. Walt standing furthest to the right is near where the right skid of the helicopter touched down. Kevin on the left is standing approximately where the end of the rotor blades were turning by the rock face. The second photo shows members unloading gear from the bird. From one side of the ledge there was a drop of 100 feet to the main chute, and on the other side it was better than 300 feet to the bottom.



RMRU PHOTO BY BERNIE MCLVOY

**PEOPLE DOING WHAT THEY DO BEST** — From left to right RMRU members Bruce Gahagan and Mel Krug cling to the safety rope on the small ice covered ledge on the north Face of Mt. San Jacinto, as Kevin Walker holds onto rescued subject Kenneth Kenaga, while Walt Walker (furthest right) helps to guide pilot Mike Donovan into the extremely close helispot.



RMRU PHOTO BY JIM FAIRCHILD

completed a multiple brake bar system was secured to the S.E.A. Bernie was then lowered 290 feet down broken rock, water ice on top of rock and soft snow. The mixed terrain made for a very interesting descent to the ledge Ken was on. As soon as Bernie arrived at Ken's narrow ledge he secured Ken to the same rope he had been lowered on.

The entire time we had been working we were in the shade of the massive North Face and standing around begins to be a problem in keeping warm, particularly hands and feet. Since Ken was in good physical condition we would not need any extra manpower on the face. So I clipped

**OFF THE MOUNTAIN** — With mountain pilot Mike Donovan at the controls, the helicopter has just set down after flying off the mountain with Kenneth Kenaga and RMRU member Walt Walker in the back.

onto the safety rope and jumared my way over to the trees. Just after I arrived Bernie radioed up that he had helped Ken pack his gear and they both were ready to Jumar up the 300 foot rope. Kevin radioed back that the rope was secured and ready. Ken clipped onto the rope and Bernie did the same thing right behind him. It took quite a bit longer for them to come up than it had taken to lower Bernie down.

It was time to start back to the helispot and Kevin clipped onto the rope first and led off. Ken clipped on next and he was closely followed by Mel and then Bruce. Bernie, Cameron and I started to clean up the system for the 300 foot rope. With it almost done I clipped onto the safety rope and headed across. Cameron followed along slightly behind me and Bernie waited to untie the safety rope. Once we were all across, Cameron set up a belay for Bernie, Bernie untied the safety rope and tied it to his harness. While he was climbing across we planned our helicopter loads. With that completed I radioed to base that we were ready to have Mike come back and start flying us off the face.

The photograph that Bernie shot of us getting ready to load as Mike maneuvered the bird into the infamous tight helispot does not begin to show the real danger for all of us on the ground and Mike in the air. The main rotor blades were very close to huge granite rocks and gusting winds added to the problems that Mike had to fly under. We were faced with a brief moment, when we had to unclip from the safety rope, and then climb into the bird with huge drop offs on both sides.

When Mike had the runner down on the icy ledge I unclipped and climbed aboard. Ken was assisted to the bird by Kevin and Mel. He was unclipped and helped into the bird and Kevin and I made sure he was buckled into the seat. Kevin signaled Mike for the lift off and we were off for the base at the Snowcreek road-head. When we landed at base we were met by a large group of RMRU members who assisted Ken away from the bird.

Mike flew back to the ledge again and this time Bruce, Mel and Kevin jammed themselves into the back seat of the Jet Ranger for their flight out. Back again Mike went and Bernie and Cameron had the task of standing on the ledge without a safety rope while Mike put the bird on the ice for the last time. They carefully climbed in and were on their way back to base.

At slightly after 2:30 p.m. the mission was completed and my adrenalin was just about used up. We had pulled off another one on the North Face and to many I'm sure it seemed like just another rescue, but not to those of us who were involved on the face and to a whole group of RMRU members who worked and waited at base. I want everyone to know these people

were ready — Glenn Henderson, John Dew, Rob Gardner, Joe Erickson, Rick Pohlers, Jim Fairchild, Kathy Davis, Craig Britton, Bud White, Bill Blaschko, Dave Ezell, Gordon Lee, Colin Chambers and Jack Bowman at the radioes. • RMRU

## SEARCH

**Mission No. 8503M**

**13 Jan., Sun.  
Long Valley area,  
San Jacinto Mountains**

*By Glenn Henderson*



Because of Kenneth Kenaga being overdue in completing an ascent of the North Face (see Mission 8502M for complete information) a friend, Lyn Dessaux went out on skis from Long Valley to try and meet or find his friend the previous day, January 12th. We had been called to search for Ken on the North Face, but when we arrived assistant Ops Leader Kevin Walker informed us of Lyn also being overdue as he was to return to the tram before dark on the 12th. As the first search was getting started Kevin assigned Rick Pohlers and myself to go around to the tram, ride up and start searching from Long Valley for one and or both of the missing men. Just as we were walking into the ranger station in Long Valley Lyn wandered back in also after spending a very cold night out lost in the snow. He was in good shape though. Also news came in that Ken had been located but was stranded on the North Face, so Rick and I hurried back to the tram and returned to base camp at Snow Creek to assist if we could with the search that now became a serious rescue. • RMRU

## SEARCH

**Mission No. 8504M**

**18-19 Jan., Fri.-Sat.  
Coyote Canyon,  
near Anza**

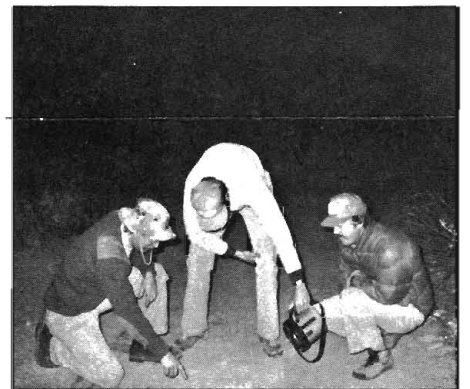
*By Bruce Gahagan*



In the early afternoon we were called out for a search. The team met at the end of the paved road near Anza where it becomes dirt and soon started down in to Coyote Canyon which leads to the Anza Borrego State Park. We were called to look for three men missing for better than one day. First members to arrive following Walt Walker in the No. 1 van were Glenn Henderson who had his 4-wheel drive Bronco, Bill

Blaschko, and Kevin Walker and his Jeep CJ-5. Walt assigned Bill to ride with Glenn and then they headed down the badly eroded dirt road towards Coyote. When Rick Pohlers arrived Rick and Kevin teamed up in his Jeep. They were also assigned to go down to Coyote Canyon and assist as Glenn's vehicle was larger and more cumbersome, where Kevin's was more agile, and could get to places Glenn's could not. Mel Krug, Jim Fairchild and I arrived a little later and we were assigned to search the table land above the canyons. Kevin and Glenn's teams made it into the canyons after dark and started working up the different washes trying to cut prints. We did the same up high.

Just before midnight Mel and I located the trio walking across a field not far from base camp. These characters were all dressed in camo type clothing and had guns with them, they were a real sight. At any rate the canyon boys were called back, and apparently as we waited they had a good time 4-wheeling their way up the road. And at 3:00 in the morning we were all heading home. • RMRU



RMRU PHOTO BY KEVIN WALKER

**NIGHT STALKERS** — RMRU members Rick Pohlers, Bill Blaschko and Glenn Henderson check out some prints found in the Coyote Canyon wash. Coyote Canyon is a popular area for campers and four-wheelers, which made searching difficult.

## CALL

**Mission No. 8505C**

**26 Jan., Sat.  
Long Valley  
San Jacinto Mountains**

During the mid morning while an unusually heavy snow storm was falling in the San Jacinto Mountains we received a call from the Long Valley Ranger Station that two people were overdue from a hike in the mountains. As information was being gathered the pair walked out to Palm Springs where it was even snowing on the desert. • RMRU



## CALL

**Mission No. 8506C**

**27 Jan., Sun.**

**San Jacinto Mountains**

During the late afternoon **RMRU** member Walt Walker received a call from Janny Muratet that her husband John and Bernie McIlvoy, both **RMRU** members, were late in completing a weekend trip in the mountains. While roadheads were being checked John phoned his wife and stated all was OK — just late in finishing the trip. • **RMRU**



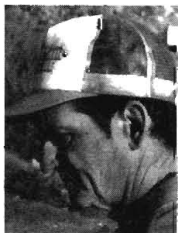
## Winter Technical Skills

**5-6 Jan., Sat.-Sun.**

**Long Valley,**

**San Jacinto Mountains**

*By Ray Hussey*



Bright and early Saturday we met at the lower tram station. Technical gear was gathered and loaded into packs. Soon we were enjoying the breathtaking view as we rode the tram to the mountain station. First

plan for the day was to work off the tramway balcony down a snow and ice chute that we have had missions down in the past. Joe Erickson was assigned to be Ops Leader. Joe took charge of the mock mission giving out tasks such as anchors, a lowering station, and setting up a mechanical advantage. Down approximately 300 feet was our mock injured patient, Cameron Robbins. Two members were lowered down the steep chute. Aid was given to the subject, and then the trio was raised back up and out of the precarious location. The system was broken down and then was redone using different members in the leadership roles.

After lunch we moved down to Long Valley where we set up camp near the well known launching pad, a location that has injured several and killed one in the past two years. With camp set up members

worked on personal winter skills. For some reason when dinner time came, most of the members went up to the tram for what was expressed as being a fantastic prime rib dinner.

Sunday did find us up early (surprised?) We spent the entire morning hours doing systems as we had the day before at our new location. Afternoon we moved to the other side of the tram close to the water tower. This time Kathy Davis was placed in the litter. Again we used our 300 foot ropes to raise Kathy, Glenn and myself up the slopes that had injured one and killed another not long ago.

As the day drew to a close we gathered gear and headed down to the warmer and dry desert to sort equipment before returning home. • **RMRU**



RMRU PHOTO BY JIM FAIRCHILD

**SNOW PLAY** — **RMRU** members Mel Krug (partially hidden) and Kathy Davis help to guide the litter containing Ray Hussey, as it is raised up one of the many steep snow and ice chutes near Long Valley.

