

Volume XXI, Issue XI, November 1985

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Search and Rescue

SEARCH

Mission No. 8548M

12-13 Nov., Tues.-Wed.
Skunk Cabbage Meadow
San Jacinto Mountains

By Glenn Henderson



The first major storm of the season finally arrived, coming in from the northeast instead of the usual northwest route. Thus, its arrival on Sunday was a surprise to everyone and especially to anyone caught

out in the San Jacinto Mountain wilderness area. RMRU was called out on a Tuesday afternoon. Four people were overdue on a two day round trip hike from Humber Park to the upper Tramway station, and back. We had information that a ranger had talked with the hikers at the Hidden Lake divide on Monday morning and because of threatening weather the hikers decided to cut short their trip and return to Humber Park.

We arrived at the upper Tramway station late Tuesday evening only to find that possibly two more solo hikers may also be missing (See missions 8549-8550). Two teams were sent into the field that night, one team to Hidden Lake divide in search of the party of four, and another to Round Valley for the solo hikers. It had snowed hard all day Monday and Monday night so the snow was very soft and deep. Some of us could not stay past midday the next day due to job commitments so it was decided that group would form a team to break trail to Hidden Lake divide and return to the upper Tramway station, thus leaving a fresh team at the divide for an early start on Wednesday morning.

Randy Iwasiuk, Mel Krug, Kevin Walker and myself were trailbreakers and Rick Pohlers, Rob Gardner, Ray Hussey, Joe Erickson and Cameron Robbins were left at the divide. Others were sent to the Round Valley area at the same time to search for the two solo hikers.

The snowshoeing went slow as the wind was picking up and the snow was so deep. In many places we were wading through up to our thighs. With the cloud cover and a new blanket of snow it was hard to find our way in the darkness but I must grudgingly admit that Kevin did a great job in getting us to our destination with very little waste of time in route finding. It took almost three hours to get to the divide and once there some of us went to the edge and tried calling out but there was no reply. The rest were putting up tents or bivvy sheets to spend the night. Four of us then went back to the upper Tramway station. The trail was now well packed and marked so what took almost three hours going one way took only thirty minutes to return. We got back to the Tramway about midnight, rolled out our sleeping bags and got some sleep.

Landells Helicopter Service was contacted and would be landing on top of the upper Tramway station at first light. Mel and Randy had to be back at work so Kevin and I were available for one quick search in the helicopter before we too had to return to work. Pilot Steve DeJesus was right on time so we took off with Kevin and Steve in the nice warm front seats (with heaters) of the helicopter, and me in the back (without the back doors on) of the bird. It was very cold and major wind chill factor back there at that time of the morning. We searched along Willow Creek drainage to Caramba and along the drop into Tahquitz Canyon. We searched up Willow Creek and over to Saddle Junction, when I thought I saw someone waving to us. The trees were so thick that it took two more passes to locate the waving man again. We could only see one person but it was our only hope so far. Steve let Kevin and I off at Tahquitz Meadows and we zeroed in using the hovering helicopter as a guide. When we got to them it was indeed our four missing hikers.

They were all okay though cold and hungry. They said they had been to Hidden

Lake divide and had turned around in the face of the storm. There was very little snow on the ground at that time but as they hiked along, the storm picked up until it was a virtual whiteout. They could no longer find the trail so they stopped and set up one of their two tents and waited the storm out. A wise move as the storm got much worse before it cleared up. Their stove quit working so they were soon out of water and couldn't melt snow for more water, nor cook any food. It had been a long cold day and night for them.

We radioed out that we had found the subjects and we needed more snowshoes and people to carry the subject's gear out to the helicopter. Members from RMRU, San Dimas, and Sierra Madre SAR teams were flown in. We got everyone and all the gear back to Tahquitz Meadow. Everyone was flown out, thus ending on a high note, another successful RMRU mission.

P.S. I have been on search and rescue teams for over eight years and this was my first real "find" of my own. Being volunteers our only pay is thanks from the people we help and their friends and relatives. I've been on a lot of missions but these people through their letters, Christmas cards and donations have made the past eight years of literally blood, sweat and tears worthwhile for me. Thanks to all of you who support us. • RMRU



SEARCH

Missions No. 8549M & 8550M

13-14 Nov., Wed.-Thurs.
San Jacinto Mountains

By Kevin Walker



Every so often a volunteer is tested, yes tested, to see just how much people are willing to give. Not just it's members, but also family members, and yes employers. This week would do just that. Mission No. 8549M and

8550M evolved as Mission No. 8548M drew to a close.

Fellow member and close friend Glenn Henderson and I had to get back to work after being out all night looking for the group from San Diego. But even though that mission had been resolved two new and even larger ones were starting. As we impatiently waited at Skunk Cabbage Meadow for a helicopter flight back to the tram we did not fully understand what was happening elsewhere on the mountain. Once back at base at the upper tram I quickly understood the situation. A full region (California Region of the Mountain Rescue Association) was now in progress for Rudy Brown (8549M) a former State Park Aide, from Los Angeles and for John Kivlen (8550M), from Playa Del Rey, a day hiker in the State Park. Glenn and I were soon flown off the mountain and returned home to our respective jobs. That evening when my dad Walt Walker (Operations Leader) returned home he called me and asked me to come to his house. He told me of how searchers from Sierra Madre, China Lake, Los Padres, San Dimas and San Diego had scoured from Mt. San Jacinto across Jean Peak, Round Valley and Tamarak Valley, the Wellman Divide to Hidden Lake, and also back to Long Valley. Also used throughout the day was a Landells Aviation Bell Jet Ranger, piloted by Steve DeJesus, and Angel 8, a Marine 212 Helicopter and it's crew. But no clues, nothing. Not knowing all about the two subjects I asked Walt to fill me in on what had led to the call out for the two separate people.

The first of the two missing subjects, was Rudy Brown, age 30, an ex seasonal Park Ranger from the San Jacinto State Park. Rudy was considered to be a competent backpacker, and had good equipment when he took out his permit on Saturday, the last day he was seen. His itinerary called for his return to the tram on Monday evening. The second subject was John Kivlen, age 55. Mr. Kivlen took out a day hiking permit on Sunday, and had planned to hike to the Wellman Divide and return to the tram later that day. He



RMRU PHOTO BY KEVIN WALKER

AIR SUPPORT — During the searches for the two couples from San Diego, and for Rudy Brown and John Kivlen, RMRU utilized one Bell 206 from Landells Aviation, and two Bell 212's from the Marine Air Station at El Toro. All of the helicopters were put to good use. The group from San Diego was located from the air with the Landells machine, and one of the Marine choppers transported injured hiker, Rudy Brown to Desert Hospital in Palm Springs. Special thanks go out to the pilots and crew for jobs well done.

was dressed only in light clothing and was not prepared to stay out overnight let alone through a major winter storm. Rudy was reported missing Tuesday as Mission No. 8548M was under way, and Mr. Kivlen was reported overdue Wednesday as 8548M wound down and 49M was under way. My dad and I have our own business which can be advantageous, and sometimes quite difficult. Walt had commitments for Thursday, so even though some of my work was not complete I traded and took over as ops leader for Thursday. Base camp was moved over to the western side of the mountain at the Vista Grande Forest Service Station on highway 243 between Banning and Idyllwild. **RMRU** members and region teams met at the base camp at 6:30 am. Shortly after Steve from Landells Aviation arrived with helicopter 31LA. First off Steve flew in and brought out a team of San Diego people who had been relay the day before on Jean Peak and were left overnight because of strong winds. As Steve was out doing that task, Angel 7 and Angel 8 (Marine choppers from El Toro Marine Base) arrived. After a short briefing, one helicopter started air search as the other and Steven flew teams into the field. Bud White and Ron Pierson (**RMRU**), were flown into Marion Flats. Sierra Madre members were flown into a helispot near a peak called 10,160 north, and onto the Fuller Ridge at the base of Folley Peak (Linda Stoner Helispot). China Lake was flown over into the Willow Creek Drainage near the old Wellman cabin, and also to Little Round Valley. San Diego Personnel were let off again at Jean Peak and at Mt.

San Jacinto. The ground personnel worked on into the afternoon scouring the snow covered mountain looking for anything that might help in locating the two missing hikers. And at the same time, the three helicopters searched the mountain by air.

As the day progressed, base camp looked more and more like a movie set with news crews, and their helicopters coming in to gather stories for the evening news. At around 2:00 pm word was passed to us that Rudy Brown had wandered into the Long Valley Ranger Station with moderate frostbite. We immediately sent Dr. Bill Blaschko over to Long Valley in Angel 8. Bill examined Rudy and then the Marine chopper transported Rudy to the Palm Springs Hospital. Information coming back in was sketchy, except that we were told Rudy was stable.

The search for Mr. Kivlen went on into the late afternoon, with no clues being found. As darkness approached, the three choppers retrieved the field teams from the mountain, and with the last bit of light Mel Krug and Cameron Robbins went up with Steve for one last try for the day. Over dinner that night we discussed what had been done over the three days of intense searching. Given the fact that Mr. Kivlen had no gear to be out in a winter storm, there was five to six feet of new snow on the ground and the fact that volunteer hours had run their toll on searchers, I decided to recommend to the Sheriff that the mission be shut down until some type of information might indicate re-opening the operation. With that all teams were released, and began



RMRU PHOTO BY KEVIN WALKER

THE STORY RETOLD — RMRU Asst. Ops. Leader Mel Krug and Sg. Doug Bordon of the Sheriff's Department interview hiker Rudy Brown. Both hands and both feet were being treated for frostbite.

their journeys home.

Later that night, Mel and I accompanied Sgt. Doug Bordon to the hospital, and listened to Rudy's story. In summary: Saturday, hiked to Mt. San Jacinto, spent the night. Sunday, hiked down the western slope to Deer Springs, then returned to Mt. San Jacinto and spent the night. Monday, with heavy snow made it down to Round Valley. Attempted to contact the Long Valley Ranger Station on the emergency C.B. radio outside of the cabin. Not making contact with anyone, attempted to find his way back to Long Valley. Not finding it, camped again. By his description we felt he was in the Shangra La area or near the base of Harvard Peak (approximately 1/2 mile from the Long Valley Ranger station). Tuesday, moved around the Shangra La area, but was unable to navigate because of snow still falling. In the afternoon found shelter in a natural snow cave formed by large boulders. Wednesday, stayed in the cave. He heard and saw the Bell Jet Ranger, but apparently was slightly hypothermic, as he did not come out and did not accurately describe the helicopter. Thursday, came out of cave and went for broke, leaving the gear behind and wandering down slope until coming upon tracks made by searchers, and then made his way back to the ranger station.

Quite an ordeal, but he made it through luckily, and doctors felt he would not lose fingers or toes to the frostbite. Out of three missions running at the same time, two were resolved with happy endings. Unfortunately not true in the case of Mr. Kivlen. As of this writing, later in the month of November, nothing has been

resolved. To family members of Mr. Kivlen, we of the Mountain Rescue Association teams involved send our deepest sympathies.

I would like to thank everyone involved in the searches. I felt everyone conducted themselves in a professional manner and are to be commended. To the following I say thanks: China Lake, Los Padres, Sierra Madre, San Dimas, San Diego, and RMRU Mountain Rescue Teams. As ops leader special thanks go to Sgt. Dave Duncan, Sgt. Doug Bordon and Sgt. Dave Nordstrom of the Sheriff's Department for overwhelming support. Mary Bowman gets 3 gold stars for her great work as base camp operator. And most of all to Mel Krug as assistant operations leader. Mel worked his backside off taking care of gathering info from the teams as they came and went, and also monitored and kept the helicopters coming and going at base smoothly and safely. To everyone again, thanks for the A-1 effort given in trying to help others. • RMRU

RE-SEARCH

Mission No. 8551M

16 Nov., Sat.
High Country
San Jacinto Mountains

By Mel Krug

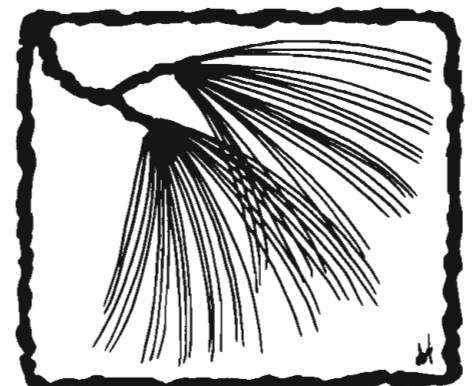


The Kivlen search was officially called off on Thursday evening but due to pressure from the family we decided to give it one more day. We put out a call for any teams in the region that might be able to send members, to search on Saturday. Sierra Madre Search and Rescue responded with a strong team, Tim Fives from the Malibu Search and Rescue team, and many RMRU members turned out. Sierra Madre made arrangements for an L.A. County Fire Department helicopter to come in and help fly search but it was grounded with mechanical problems shortly after arrival.

The original plan was to fly teams into the wilderness and have them search, hiking back towards Long Valley, for any signs of Mr. Kivlen. With the helicopter grounded, it now looked like we would hike the entire search. I say "we" — this was my first time as Operations Leader so I was to be in base with Minor Harkness from Sierra Madre. Dick Sale was to be "air ops" flying search before we found out the helicopter had to be grounded.

The plan to hike to areas where Mr. Kivlen might have been and search back towards Long Valley was carried out. Teams were sent to the peak with instructions to check the North Face escarpment. Teams were also sent to Tamarack Valley and Round Valley, returning by way of Wellman's Divide. People were also sent to Hidden Lake. Unfortunately not a single sign was turned to give us any clue as to the whereabouts of Mr. Kivlen.

Once again we would like to say **Thanks** to all those teams who helped in this week long search. We couldn't have done it without you. • RMRU



TRAINING



Technical Rescue

9 Nov., Sat.
Mt. Rubidoux

By Steve Bryant



Technical practice! The 9th of November found an intrepid group of **RMRUers** waiting at the base of Riverside's Mt. Rubidoux for a day of technical rescue practice. After some problems getting the gate un-

locked (thanks to the Riverside Police for helping us out) we set up anchors on the south part of the top of Mt. Rubidoux. Everyone had to rappel down a rope, jumar back up the rope, set up a mechanical advantage, set up a self-equalizing anchor, tie a victim into a litter for both horizontal and vertical raises and lowers, and participate in both horizontal and vertical raises and lowers. This kind of intensive technical practice is necessary to keep up everybody's skills, since the techniques are complex and the details easily forgotten. We thank Linda and her colleagues at the Riverside Parks and Recreation Dept. for letting us use Mt. Rubidoux for this practice — it is by far the most accessible place for this kind of exercise.

• RMRU



Notice!

The **RMRU Newsletter** is published 12 times per year by the Riverside Mountain Rescue Unit, Inc. It is intended primarily to inform the Regular and Sustaining Members.

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