

Volume XXI, Issue X, October 1985

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Search and Rescue

RESCUE

Mission No. 8544M

5-6 Oct., Sat.-Sun.

Tahquitz Rock

San Jacinto Mountains

By Rob Gardner



A forty-nine year old man fell about forty feet while sport rock climbing at Tahquitz Rock on October 5, 1985. Morris Valkoss lost his grip and fell while lead climbing the Piton Pooper route with his friend Jim. He was near the top of the route when he fell. He was twenty feet ahead of his protection, which did hold.

Morris Valkoss suffered abrasions to the right lower leg, possible broken ribs and possible fractures to the left ankle. The accident occurred at about 1:30 p.m. Other technical rock climbers hiked out from Tahquitz Rock and summoned help by contacting the Riverside County Sheriff's Office.

At about 5:30 p.m. the Riverside Mountain Rescue Unit (RMRU) was called to rescue Morris. Morris' friend Jim remained on the rock with Morris. The RMRU had just completed an extensive day of training in the Mt. San Jacinto range, including a hike to the peak. They had just set up camp at Marion Flats when the call-out came over the radio (See Article on Training 10-5-85).

To expedite movement of RMRU/SAR personnel to Tahquitz Rock, and the rescue of Morris Valkoss a helicopter was released from Landells Aviation. With a moderate amount of difficulty a communication station and a helispot were developed at Marion Flats. As darkness and rainstorms



RMRU PHOTO BY GLENN HENDERSON

PREPARING TO LOWER — RMRU members Rob Gardner, Walt Walker, and Bill Blaschko do a final check on the litter containing injured climber Morris Valkoss before he and litter attendant Bill are lowered down the face of Tahquitz Rock.

moved in from the west, pilot Steve DeJesus managed to fly two trips from Marion Flats to Tahquitz Rock placing four RMRU members near the top of the Rock. This dangerous maneuver was accomplished using one runner landings. Steve made an additional flight in from Humber Park to the Rock, in the dark, bringing Operations Leader Walt Walker and a substantial amount of equipment to the Rock. Steve DeJesus then flew back to Landells Aviation hanger for special lighting apparatus but was unable to return until morning due to the weather conditions.

RMRU members on the Rock with Walt were: Cameron Robbins, Bill Blaschko, Glenn Henderson and Rob Gardner. In addition to personal gear members brought with them, Walt had flown in with two six hundred foot ropes, two 150 foot ropes, litter rigging, edge rollers, a sack of run-

ners, a sack of carabiners, lowering devices, and more. By morning every piece of equipment was to have been used.

Cameron Robbins made first verbal contact with Jim and Morris at about 7:30 p.m. and Cameron was then lowered about two hundred feet down the face of Tahquitz Rock to Jim and Morris. Bill Blaschko, M.D., followed by rappel. Jim and Morris were on a small ledge (now joined by Cameron and Bill). Bill completed the medical assessment, first aid, and splinting of the left ankle.

Rob, Walt and Glenn climbed up Tahquitz Rock, obtained a stokes litter that is stored on the rock and took it to the site from which Cameron and Bill descended. Much of the gear was loaded into the litter and lowered, with Glenn tending. Rob then rappelled, followed by Walt.



RMRU PHOTO BY GLENN HENDERSON

THUMBS UP — With injured climber Morris Valkoss safely on board, RMRU member Kevin Walker gives the thumbs up OK for lift off to pilot Steve DeJesus of Landells Aviation as he holds helicopter 816 in one runner position atop Lunch Rock. RMRU members and Steve had their hands full with this part of the operation as rain squalls that ranged from light to heavy moved over the San Jacinto Mountains.

Each person had as much gear strapped on their back and dangling between their legs as they could manage. Walt, with the six-hundred foot rope on his back and his pack hanging in front of him tied off to his harness, looked like a moving Sporting Goods Store. Everybody regrouped at the small ledge or in cracks and crevices nearby.

Meanwhile, Cameron had established a safety line which everybody and everything was tied into. Anchors were set-up for the lowering operation. When the system was ready Morris was secured into the litter and lowered about three hundred feet into the darkness of the night. The mission was blessed with warm temperatures while threatened with lightning in the distance and rain storms moving towards the Rock.

Bill Blaschko tended to the litter and the patient during the lowering. He stopped on a substantial ledge. Jim, the RMRU members and the equipment again were moved down the Rock, on RMRU members backs as they rappelled.

The operation was halted in mid-night with Morris being stable and all persons

being on a safe shelf. Walt and Rob remained with Morris and Jim. The others hiked out planning to return in the morning with the litter wheel. A few hours of sleep was gathered by all before daybreak arrived.

At first light there was also first rain. Morris and the gear were protected from the rain with tarps. The others broke out their rain garments. The helicopter was dispatched at about 6:30 a.m. Steve DeJesus was pilot again. An attempt was made to pick up the other RMRU members at Marion Flats but a cloud hanging up on Marion Peak prevented the pick up. Alternate plans were being initiated when Kevin Walker suddenly was blaring over the radio that the cloud had lifted for the moment and "it's now or never" in reference to a helicopter pick up. Steve flew to Marion Flats and lifted the other team members (Ray Hussey, Mel Krug, Kevin Walker, Steve Bryant) out and over to Tahquitz Rock (two flights). Sure enough the clouds dropped back down on Marion Peak as the second group was flown out. With all RMRU personnel on the Rock (and

Jack Bowman on the radio in base camp with John Dew) a final lower was carried out in the rain. The final lower was one hundred feet, complicated by angles, boulders and wet lichen. Rob and Walt tended the litter and Morris.

The next move was to carry the litter to Lunch Rock, which was achieved without comment and with good team work. Steve DeJesus brought the helicopter in for another one runner landing and held her steady while Morris was loaded onto the helicopter to be flown down to Camp Maranatha. Subsequently, Jim and the RMRU men and equipment were flown to Camp Maranatha. Morris went on for further medical care. A major sorting of equipment took place, the team had breakfast together, recovered their personal vehicles which were at the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway parking lot (70 miles away), and this writer headed home to get some sleep. • RMRU

SEARCH

Mission No. 8545M

7-8 Oct., Mon.-Tues.

Dark Canyon Camp

San Jacinto Mountains

By Bud White



Early in the evening a pager call punctuated a

thought I had just expressed to my wife Sue, to the effect, "what a lousy night to be out." Temperature 36 degrees, heavy fog, misty rain. I responded to the pager call. Wait told me a thirty-eight year old man had gone for a walk from Dark Canyon campground that afternoon and hadn't returned. The man's father reported this to the Sheriff's Office. I then called Ron Pierson, a new member on the team that lives in Idyllwild. Ron and I met up and drove, or should I say groped, our way to Alandale on the road to Banning in a fog so thick we could barely move. A normal ten minute drive became a forty-five minute adventure. I still don't see how the deputy sheriff, the RMRU vans and other RMRU team members made it up the hill in the thick fog.

Once at Dark Canyon we determined the direction of travel and split into two

groups. Steve Bryant, Ron Pierson, and I went to Camp Azalea Trails and searched all the buildings and surrounding area. The rest of the group searched the road to Pinewood and the Seven-Pines trail-head. No clues, no luck. It was so foggy and wet we would have had to fall over the gentleman to find him. By 3:00 a.m. we returned to base camp, bundled up the best we could, and waited for first light to continue the search.

We split up again sending one group down Dark Canyon to the highway, and another back over the dirt road. On the road we passed a gentleman who advised us he was a caretaker at Pinewood and that he had just given our lost friend a ride back to his father's camper. Needless to say we were relieved he was found because this side of the mountain can be the original needle in a haystack type of search.

Apparently, James Duke had gone for a walk and found the Seven-Pines trail-head, then proceeded on, having decided to see where it led. He lost track of the time, it got dark and he crawled under a

boulder for the night. At daylight he went toward Pinewood instead of Dark Canyon and walked into the caretaker's cabin. Happy ending for all. The Duke, the deputy sheriff, and the RMRU team retired to the Country Corner Restaurant in Idyllwild and had breakfast. We would like to thank Mr.

Familiarization

5-6 Oct., Sat.-Sun.

High Country

San Jacinto Mountains

By Steve Bryant



For October training we planned a familiarization hike from Long Valley to San Jacinto Peak, around the west side of Jean Peak, and over to Marion Flats to camp the night. For Sunday we planned to hike down the Wellman and Desert divides and back to Long Valley, to meet the Tramway. Several members went up Friday night and camped in the high country, while the



rest of us caught the early Tram and met the Friday people on a hill west of the Long Valley Ranger Station on Saturday morning. Saturday dawned bright, clear, and quite warm. Bud White and Bill Blaschko led the intrepid trekkers to the first water break in Shangri La — a lovely flat area to the northwest of the Long Valley Ranger Station. From Shangri La, we walked around to the saddle between Cornell and Frank Miller peaks, staying close to the north face of the mountain. From this saddle, a couple of members climbed the nubbin to the north, and later joined the rest of the bunch on Cornell, where everybody practiced a little rock climbing.

By now, the sun was pretty high, and we fought the heat and brush up the east ridge of Frank Miller peak, with often spectacular views of the San Geronimo Pass and mountains to the north. Along Jean Peak, and over to Marion Flats to camp the night. For Sunday we planned to hike down the Wellman and Desert divides and back to Long Valley, to meet the Tramway. Several members went up Friday night and camped in the high country, while the

Duane Duke for his generous donation to RMRU on his son's behalf.

P.S. I now have fog lights on my car.

CALL

Mission No. 8546C

11 Oct., Fri.

Los Angeles County

We received a call through the California Region of the Mountain Rescue Association for a search in L.A. County. Because of the operations five days earlier, no members were able to respond. • RMRU

ABORT

Mission No. 8547A

21 Oct., Mon.

Pinyon Flats,
Santa Rosa Mountains

We received a call from the Indio station of the Riverside County Sheriff's Department that an elderly man had wandered away from his home near the Pinyon Flats Campground. The call out procedure was initiated, and as members responded to the call, the man returned home safely. The mission was aborted and members returned home. • RMRU

Hot Springs, and had a nice chat with him over the radio.

After lunch, we followed the east ridge "trail" to the top of San Jacinto, where we talked with 30 to 40 people who also thought it was a nice day to be high. After following the trail down to the saddle between San Jac and Jean, it was time for cross-country! We contoured around the west side of Jean, dropping slightly, until we came to Bed Springs. This is a small spring, not marked on the maps (and I'm not going to tell you exactly where it is, either!) beside which lies a rusty set of springs from a bed. Although the original plan had been to camp on Marion Flats, we decided to camp near Bed Springs. After purifying water, setting up camp, and starting dinner, Walt Walker called on the radio, alerting us to the possibility of a technical rescue on Tahquitz Rock. We finished dinner, broke camp, and, sure enough, we were needed to help an injured climber. This story is continued in write-up of Mission 8544M. • RMRU