

# RMRU Fresh Tracks

RIVERSIDE MOUNTAIN RESCUE UNIT

The Official Newsletter of the Riverside Mountain Rescue Unit, Inc.

Volume 36, Number 1

Winter 1998

## Search...Recovery...**RESCUE!**

Story by Lee Arnson

As of Sunday, December 15, it had been almost two months since RMRU had received a mission call-out. When my pager went off that evening, I excitedly called the rescue room and was told that there was an overdue hiker who at last report was somewhere in the Tahquitz Peak area. I responded to Humber Park, where Henry Negrete was setting up base as Operations Leader.

Henry said that the reporting party had informed him that her husband, Alex Toubia, had left earlier in the day eager to try out his new in-step crampons. He was expected home by 3:00pm. It was now 9:00pm and he had not yet returned. Time was considered a critical factor in light of the weather, so the decision was made to call in other rescue teams to assist us.

I was paired up with Ralph Hoetger, a new member to the team, and we were assigned to hike up Devil's Slide Trail, intersect the Pacific Crest Trail, and proceed towards Tahquitz Peak. We would eventually intercept a second RMRU team (Bill Blaschko and Jim Taylor) coming up South Ridge Trail towards the Peak from the opposite direction. There was no snow at base, but within half an hour hike up the trail, conditions became somewhat dangerous with 20 inches of hard packed snow and ice. Ralph and I proceeded, wearing 12-point crampons and with ice axes in hand.

Shortly after passing through Saddle Junction, (2.4 miles from base) we picked up a set of in-step crampon tracks heading in the direction of the peak. Ralph and I took turns following the tracks in the light of our headlamps. We radioed Bill and Jim who were investigating similar tracks they had just come upon below the peak. The tracks both our teams were following led us to each other, and then abruptly disappeared.

It was now about 2:00am. We were at 8,500' elevation, and

were encountering high winds that were pushing a dense fog up the mountain face from the valley below. We were on a 50 degree slope and knew that our next task would be to search the main snow chute. We did not need four people for this job, so Jim and Ralph headed back to base via Devil's Slide.

Bill and I searched two separate fall lines that were about 25' apart, until they merged together some 300' below our current position. Visibility had grown increasingly worse, but we eventually spotted Mr. Toubia's body. It appeared that he had fallen about 250', his body coming to rest against a large pine tree, probably dying instantly.

Bill and I needed to get back to base to discuss the details of what had now become a body recovery...there was nothing more we could there. We arrived back at Humber Park at 5:00am. Henry determined that recovery operations could best be managed from the Keenwild Heliport, and base was moved to that location. Bill, Jim, and Ralph had to go to work, so I was teamed up with long time member Bob Baker for the recovery. We were to be assisted by four members of the San Geronio Search and Rescue team who had arrived the previous evening to help with the search. The Riverside County Sheriff's helicopter flew us to Chinquapin Flats, a good landing zone that was just a short hike to the recovery site.

In the now clear light of day, Mr. Toubia's body could be seen from the trail. I anchored a 300' rope to a large pine tree on the uphill side of the trail, and Bob and I rappelled down to the site. We were followed by Tom Rutledge and Phil Calvert of the San Geronio team.

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Pictured above, "Star 80", the Hughes 500E turbine powered helicopter owned and operated by the Riverside County Sheriff's Department during a recent training exercise. This helicopter played a major role in saving a life during the rescue mission.





RMRU, a member of the Mountain Rescue Association, is a non-profit, all volunteer organization which has been in existence for more than 35 years. It works in conjunction with the Riverside County Sheriff's Office and other emergency relief organizations. RMRU's primary purpose is to provide competent, swift, and effective wilderness search and rescue support. If you would like additional information about RMRU, please contact:

Riverside Mountain Rescue Unit  
Attn. Ms. Gigi Hansen  
P.O. Box 5444  
Riverside, Ca. 92517

## The RMRU Board of Directors

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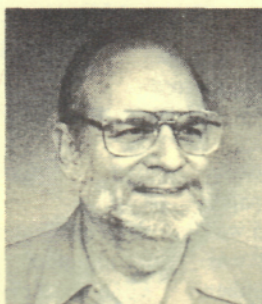
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# From the President's Pack...



**Steve Bryant**

RMRU has had a quiet Fall and Winter so far: after September's six missions, we've had only two, both in December. You can read the details as you explore the rest of this issue of "Fresh Tracks." This, however, is the pattern we usually experience. We have a flurry of intense activity, and then a period of calm. We are happy to respond to either!

RMRU is fortunate to have Ray Hussey as a member, not only for his service on the Board of Directors and his record of attendance on rescue missions, but also because of his work on our new rescue vehicle. RMRU is just as fortunate to have the support of Ray's wife Anne, whose forbearance with Ray's absences we deeply appreciate. The new truck is at the Riverside County Communications Center having the final radio work done. WHOOPS, MY PAGER JUST WENT OFF! It's 2:05 pm, Saturday 1/24.

The page is from Henry Negrete, another Team member. He informs me that a hiker came into the Idyllwild Fire Station with a report that someone has slipped on the ice of Devil's Slide Trail and has a possible broken leg. Idyllwild Fire called the Sheriff's Office and requested RMRU. Since we don't have Sheriff's permission yet, I put out a "heads-up" to all team members. This advance notice lets members get a jump on getting ready for a possible mission, but no one leaves their homes until we get the official OK from the Sheriff's Department. It's 2:14pm.

The "OK" did come shortly thereafter, and RMRU did rescue the injured hiker. Take a look at Ralph Heotger's write up for more info.

Safety is, of course, the number one concern of RMRU; Team safety on missions and trainings, and our education efforts to ensure safety among wilderness users. Various RMRU members teach first aid courses, the Hug-a-Tree program, give talks to various civic groups, and appear at local fairs to give out information on how to stay safe while hiking and climbing.

Another safety concern is our equipment: we inspect our ropes and hardware before and after each mission and training. We look for rope damage, frayed slings, and worn or cracked metal hardware. Then, "if in doubt" we "throw it out." When lives are at stake, equipment integrity is of paramount importance.

Although our metal hardware generally lasts several years, we recently retired several Gibbs ascenders used in our mechanical advantage haul systems. Replacement of "soft gear" is required much more frequently. We recently replaced all our slings and spiders (the ropes at the top of the litter rigging), and retired about 1200 feet of rope that no longer met our safety standards. At a cost of a dollar a foot, it's not hard to work out the math...rescue is a costly business! We keep roughly 3300 feet on hand for various types of missions. Rope replacement is obviously an ongoing need.

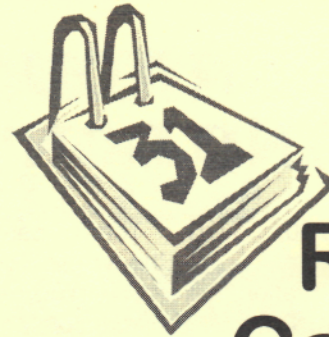
Our other need right now is for radio batteries. The Sheriff's Dept. has let RMRU use many of their old VHF radios as they went to a UHF system. Unfortunately, batteries didn't come with the radios. We now have about 80 radios (one for every team member,) but only enough batteries to send about ten of these into the field. Why only ten? Because everyone takes a radio, battery, and a fully charged spare. New NiMH batteries cost about \$75, and we need some 30 of these to enable us to send 25 people with radios into the field.

I would like to personally thank everyone who has made donations...we will do our best to recognize your generosity in "Fresh Tracks." We can't do our job without your help!

Until next time, as retired member Art Bridge used to say (as we paused to catch our breath) "Let's go Hiking!"



# Meet the Team



## The RMRU Calendar

Name: **DEBBIY RIEGLE**

Age: 39

Where did you grow up?  
**Newport Beach, California**

Where do you live now?  
**Idyllwild, California**

Are you married?  
**Married 9 years to Robert**

Any children?  
**THREE BOYS...Kristopher-6, Michael-5, and Patrick-3.**

Since you don't make any money on RMRU, what do you do for a living? **Housewife (Domestic Engineer)**

If you could change your vocation and do whatever you wanted...what would you do? **I'd like to lead High Adventure Travel Tours.**

How do you spend your free time...what hobbies are you into right now? **Spending time with my family, hiking, backpacking, riding bikes, and swimming.**

Outside of RMRU, what life goals have you accomplished? **I have traveled all over the world climbing and hiking.**

What is your music of choice? **Rock-n-Roll and Classical.**

What kind of books do you prefer and would you have a "must read" favorite? **I like high action books.**

What's your idea of a great weekend/vacation? **Going to the Sierras and climbing lots of peaks...or any vacation that is adventurous.**

How long have you been part of RMRU? **I've been on the team for three years.**

What motivates you to be on the team? **I enjoy working with very qualified and diverse people on our team...Being a member of a team that is able to save lives in almost any circumstance.**

What is your most memorable RMRU moment to date? **The first time I found a lost subject. It is hard to put into words the feeling you get when you find someone!**

With your unique combination of outdoor skills and rescue experience, what advice do you offer to any would be wilderness travelers? **Anytime you go out in the wilderness be prepared to spend the night. Maybe it won't be a comfortable night, but take enough clothing to keep you warm. Also take a topo map and compass and know how to use them.**



RMRU holds a regular Team Meeting on the first Wednesday of the month, at the Banning Sheriff's SubStation. Meetings begin at 7:30pm. If you are interested in learning more about RMRU, this is an easy way to do so. We'll do our best to make you feel welcome, and help you get your questions answered.

**March ...CRMRA Recert for Technical Rock at Joshua Tree**

**April 4-5...Technical Rock Training at Joshua Tree**

**May 9-10...Orientation, GPS, Map & Compass Martinez Cyn Area**

**June 6-7...Tracking Training (area TBA)**

**July 11...Technical Training Idyllwild Area**

**Aug. 8-9...Orientation, GPS, Map and Compass San Jacinto Mts.**



## **WHEN YOU ARE MISSING, AND DON'T KNOW IT...**

A solo male hiker, age 30, was dropped off at the Palm Springs Tramway Lower Station by his parents at 10:00am Tues. Dec. 23, 1997. He had a new pair of snowshoes and was going to climb San Jacinto Peak. His parents planned to pick him up at 5:00pm the same day. When he did not show up, they called the Riverside County Sheriff's Department and reported their son overdue. RMRU got the page at 8:00pm. By 11:00pm, loaded with full winter gear, we were on our way to the Upper Tram Station.

Once at the station, Base was set up in a small office where we can hook up our portable base radio to an antenna on the Tramway roof. Base was manned by Joe Erickson, Rick Floquet, and Gordon Austerman. Ray Hussey, Debbiy Riegle, and myself made up Team 1. Our assignment was Little Round Valley and the San Jacinto Peak area. Team 2, (searching in close around the Tram,) was the two man team of Chris Krammer and Deano Esades.

Team 1 searched and yelled all the way to Round Valley. We found two sets of snowshoe tracks coming down, and a single set going up. When we reached Round Valley it was 3:00am and the temperature was 10 degrees. All three of us were feeling the cold, and starting to get very tired. We opened up the Ranger Cabin and went inside if for no other reason than to escape the wind. We took about ten minutes to get out our sleeping gear and fall sound asleep.

After what seemed like only a few minutes, Base called...it was 5:30am. The subject had apparently just walked out and called his parents to come pick him up. We said, "Fine...we are going back to sleep!" Again after what seemed like only minutes, Base called again...it was 7:15am. "Are you hiking out yet?" they asked. Of course we said "Yes!" We quickly got packed up and came out of the cabin into a beautiful morning complete with a clear blue sky and plenty of new snow. We had a great hike back to the Tram.

### **Story by Pete Carlson**

It turns out the subject never went up the Tram. He went back to Palm Springs and then hiked up the Skyline Trail towards the Tram. This is an 8,000 foot climb over 10 miles of rugged trail. The subject never made it to the top of the trail, running out of day light and being forced to wait out the night until sunrise. He returned to Palm Springs unharmed. RMRU members enjoyed a great breakfast, and were all home by noon on Christmas Eve.

If we had not found the subject, we had another 20 people ready and waiting to expand the search. Special "thanks" to the other searchers who were on the way to help, but not needed. We never know what is going to happen and have to plan for the worst case.

(An equipment note: The new Base radio and antenna, purchased with your generous donations at a cost of over \$1,000, performed flawlessly. Thanks!)

## **"Slip-Recovery"**

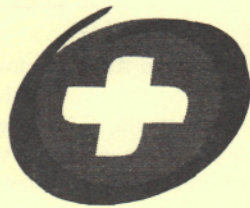
On Jan. 24, 1998 RMRU was called out by the Sheriff's Dept. concerning a possible injured hiker near the top of Devil's Slide Trail. The callout was made at 2:00pm. The subject, Stephen K., was reached by several team members shortly after 3:00pm. The subject reported that he was hiking over from the Tram, when he slipped on some ice and felt his ankle "crunch." This occurred a few hundred yards above Powder Box Spring, where the Team found him. The members performed a physical assessment and confirmed a potential broken left ankle. After completing the assessment, and preparing the subject for

transport, he was placed in the stokes litter for the

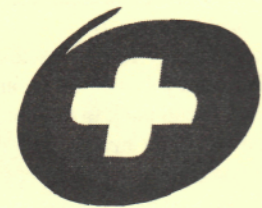
carry-out. Even as the carry-out began, other team members were arriving on scene to render assistance. Great care was needed as the upper trail was very icy in some sections. The trail ice made the carry-out an exercise in what can best be described as "slip-recovery!" All told, by the end of the mission there were no less than eleven team members who responded. We brought the subject safely to Humber Park at 4:30pm, where we turned him over to the care of Idyllwild Fire Dept. for transport.

### **Story by Ralph Hoetger**





# Backcountry Medicine



Have you ever been pulling your gear together for a simple day hike, or maybe a multi-day major wilderness excursion, and as you stare at your now loaded pack, ready to head for the trail, you get that gnawing feeling that you are forgetting something? You know that feeling huh? Could it be that the "something" you are forgetting is your personal first-aid kit? More than one backwoods adventurer has added insult to injury (no pun intended) by realizing too late that they did not bring a first-aid kit.

Hopefully this has never happened to you. One way to help ensure that it doesn't, is to invest some time and a minimal amount of money to outfit yourself with a personal first-aid kit that can adequately meet many of the hazards of backcountry travel. The following list is considered by RMRU to be the bare minimum for a personal first-aid kit. If you make the effort to assemble this kind of kit, first-aid response is obviously important to you. You aren't likely to leave it out of your pack!

Band Aids, 1"	6
Sterile gauze pads, 4"X4", sterile	4
Telfa Pads, 4"X4", sterile	2
Gauze roll, 2"	1
Cloth or plastic tape, 2"	1 roll

by Gigi Hansen, R.N.

Ace elastic wrap, 3" or 4"	1
Safety pins	3
Triangular bandage	1
Moleskin, 4"X4"	3 sheets
Rubber gloves	4
Betadine prep or solution	4 preps
Wire splint, with accessories	1
Tweezers	1
Scissors	1
Razor blade, single edge	1
Needle, 1 1/2"	1
Aspirin, or generic Advil	12
Tylenol	6
Antibiotic ointment	1 tube
Absorbent pack	1
First-aid guide book	1
Thermometer	1 optional
Penlight	1 optional
Snakebite kit (suction only)	1 optional

{Look for Gigi's feature, "Backcountry Medicine" in future issues of *Fresh Tracks* as part of RMRU's effort to help make your outdoor adventures both safe and enjoyable}.

## Looking For A Good Book To Read?



Can we suggest a couple of books that you might find worth your time as you sit in front of the fire on a cold night? First, "*Medicine for Mountaineering*," 4th Edition; by Dr. James Wilkerson. Published by The Mountaineers, it is complete, practical, and easy to read.

If you are into great climbing writing, you know that it is rare. Great climbers usually aren't great writers. However, *Clint Willis* has assembled the best of the best mountaineering survival stories in print in his new book, "*EPIC*." Published by Thunder's Mouth Press, this is an 'armchair mountaineers' dream.

## About Fresh Tracks

RMRU's newsletter "*Fresh Tracks*" is a quarterly publication. It is primarily intended to keep our Members and supporters informed of the Team's activities, events, and people.

Beyond this, "*Fresh Tracks*" seeks to make new friends as it introduces them to RMRU. This all-volunteer organization is continually looking for new members and supporters.

If you would like to receive "*Fresh Tracks*" on a regular basis, and at the same time become a Sustaining Member of RMRU, you can send your tax-deductible donation of \$25 or more to the RMRU address in this publication.



(Continued from page 1)

The recovery itself was text-book. We congratulated one another on a job well done, and began to gather gear so that we could head back to the landing zone. I was ready first and started to make my way to the rope anchored above. The snow conditions were perfect for ice axe and crampon travel and I was happy to be on my way. An unfortunate assignment seemed to be successfully completed.

I paused to catch my breath and check on the progress of those behind me, when I heard someone yell. As I looked back at the recovery site, Tom Rutledge from the San Geronio team had fallen and was sliding feet first on his stomach down the steep snow chute we had just recovered Mr. Toubia from. I yelled for him to self arrest with his ice axe, but within a matter of seconds he must have accelerated to 40 mph. Tom was heading straight for a large Ponderosa Pine which I thought might stop his fall. When he hit the tree, it knocked him completely out of control. Now, with or without his ice axe there was nothing he could do. He continued to pin-ball off of trees and rocks for about 1,000' until I lost sight of him.

Bob immediately began to descend the chute in pursuit of Tom, while radioing base for an emergency evacuation. It took me a moment to get over the shock of seeing a fellow volunteer rescue member fall like this, but I was soon descending the chute to assist Bob in what had now become

an emergency rescue. Tom had come to rest face down in some tree branches about three feet off the ground. He was unconscious and bleeding from the mouth. When we first arrived, Tom's respirations were as low as eight, but within a few minutes rose to fifteen. His breathing was labored and he was having a very difficult time. Even though he was unconscious, we verbally assured him that help was on the way, believing that he could somehow hear what we were saying.

Within minutes, Henry Negrete was flown in to this new accident site with the Stokes Litter. The three of us placed Tom into the litter, packaged him, and lifted him into the hovering helicopter as the pilot performed a very tricky one-skid maneuver. He arrived at Desert Hospital four minutes later! Henry, Bob, myself, and especially Tom were very fortunate to have had the County's best pilot and observer flying for us that day. We all owe a debt of gratitude to Tony Bowen and Kurt Franklin of the Riverside County Sheriff's Dept.

Tom Rutledge spent the next two weeks in a coma with several broken bones, including cracked ribs, a ruptured spleen, and severe head and neck injuries. We are very glad to be able to report that Tom came out of his coma on New Year's Day 1998, and is currently in rehabilitation.

## People Don't Forget

In December of 1996, Marvin Oliver was enjoying a day of hunting in the Carona Hill area. Unfortunately, the day turned less than enjoyable when he lost his footing, and suffered injuries that incapacitated him.

RMRU responded to this call. The following letter is from Mr. Oliver...take note of the dates.

January 26, 1998

Dear RMRU,

*I find it hard to believe, that this time last year I was in a wheelchair, and remained there for two months. It seems like 100 years ago, that I was down in that canyon, yet it was only December 21, 1996. I sat down and chronicled the entire chain of events during my convalescence, and occasionally go back and edit my notes. I will submit the edited version for publication sometime this year.*

*I would again like to express my appreciation to you and the other RMRU Team members for your extraordinary efforts in descending into that hole to facilitate my rescue. Whenever I see a rescue on television I think of you guys, and am again very thankful for your unselfish efforts. I have regained 100% capacity in my leg, but still have some slight limiting of motion in my wrist.*

*I have been hunting again since that fateful day, with limited success, but no injuries. I am enclosing a small token of my appreciation, that hopefully the Team can use for equipment, expenses, etc.. Thanks again for your efforts and assistance, and especially for carrying my rifle out and bringing it to the hospital.*

Sincerely,

Marvin M. Oliver  
Attorney at Law



# The Team Says... "Thank You!"

The following companies and people have recently made donations to RMRU. We are very grateful for your generous support. The truth is, we could not do what we do without you! You enable a well trained, well equipped team to go out into the field. In future issues of *Fresh Tracks* we will feature the many ways we put your contributions to work for the sake of lost and injured hunters, hikers, and climbers.

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All of the above are part of the RMRU Team. Your gift of any amount makes you part of the Team too! Just fill out the form below, enclose your tax deductible donation, and begin to share personally in the life saving adventure of mountain search and rescue.

## Sustaining Member Application

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_ Amount \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

Your donation is deductible from both your state and federal income tax  
(A receipt of your tax deductible donation will be mailed to you.)

- \_\_\_\_ Benefactor Club...\$1000 or more  
\_\_\_\_ Summit Club.....\$500 or more  
\_\_\_\_ Patron Club.....\$200 or more  
\_\_\_\_ Century Club.....\$100 or more  
\_\_\_\_ Regular Club.....\$10 or more

Please send your donation  
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