



RMRU *Fresh Tracks*

December- 2003

The Newsletter of Riverside Mountain Rescue Unit



President's Letter



As the 2003-year winds to an end, we find that we continue to have a slow rescue season. However, we have had a number of significant missions this year. The pinnacle for the team being the successful search and rescue of Marvin Matsumoto in the early part of the year.

As always, we are looking for a few individuals whose love for the outdoors, willingness to learn and desire to help those that they have never met before is stronger than the call of a warm bed on a cold, wet winters night. With the lower rescuer turnout at many of the past missions, our team is pursuing more technologically advanced equipment that can ease the burden on the individuals that are able to assist. This next year poses a daunting task for our team financially as we are going to attempt to purchase two large ticket items. A new digital ELT (the analog units no longer work well with the updated systems in the real world) and a manually operated winch to aid with technical rescues when we have a low participant turn out. RMRU has always been good at saving lives, but as one of our MRA past presidents, Rocky Henderson, once said, we need to improve the ways that we save lives.

It is because of sacrifices of time, money and the resources of our families, friends, employers and individuals like you that make it possible for our team to exist and help others.

As in the past, your support is greatly appreciated! May you and your families have a safe and happy holiday season. God bless you, from the entire Riverside Mountain Rescue Unit.



Pictures by Rick Maschek of the staging area for Mission #26 and then #27. These pictures were taken on the next Saturday to learn more about what happened the week before.

Mission 19 **08/27/2003** **Hwy 74 Vista Point search for possible suicide individual. Missing 24 year old male. Ops leader: Phil Thompson.**

The Palm Desert Sheriff Dept requested RMRU to assist them in trying to locate a missing man from Los Angeles. The man had been dropped off several days before, under very suspicious circumstances. The man had been dropped off on the road route Palms to Pines hwy at about 21:00 about ½ mile below the Scenic outlook parking area. It was reported by the friend that had dropped him off that he had with him two cans of Red Bull, a half gallon of vodka and a 45 caliber pistol.



The man was 5' 8" tall and weight 245 lb. A search was conducted for the missing man with about 20 ground personal and Sheriff's helicopter for several hours. We found no track or any other clues that he had been out there. The information was all turned over to the L.A.P.D. for follow up investigation.

Mission 20 **08/28/2003** **Upper Tram for lost hiker. Aborted**

Mission 21 **09/05/2003** **Lake Hemet. two missing hikers in the mountains above Lake Hemet**

Well, it's 22:30, September 5. As I'm getting into bed I'm smiling about the next day's planned activities. The month's training will be at 08:00 at the Fuller Ridge trailhead. We are going to do a familiarization hike to the Bedsprings campsite, spend the night and then return the next day. At least that's what my wife, Robin, thinks. September 6 is her 50th birthday so my son Travis and I have "forgotten" her birthday because we can't miss training. Really, we are going to hike with the team for half the day then turn back for a surprise party for her at my sister's cabin in Idyllwild. We have 20 to 30 people planning to be there. Ahh, it's 23:00 now and just as I drift off to sleep the PAGER GOES OFF!!! I'm thinking, no way! This can't be happening! But, yes, dispatch says that there are two missing hikers in the mountains above Lake Hemet. We are to meet at the Lake Hemet Sheriff's substation. Travis packs up and leaves to get the rescue van. I get Robin up and while she pages the team out I retrieve messages from the rescue recorder to find out who will be responding to the mission.



Travis and I arrive at Lake Hemet at the same time and meet deputies there that tell us that the sheriff's helicopter has located the missing hikers but the terrain is too rugged to be able to get them out. Travis and I walk over to the helicopter crew, Star 91. As we arrive they tell us that they want one team member to fly in with them to be lowered on their cable winch, get them into a harness and winch them up unto the helicopter. Travis and I both raise our hand as ready to go and I am ready to let Travis go when the pilot says he wants the lighter of the two of us. Ouch, that hurt, as I am substantially lighter than my son. Sorry Travis.

The rescue went pretty much as planned from there. I got my harness and helmet on, put two more harnesses into my pack and we took off. Star 91 already had a GPS position on them so it only too a few minutes to locate our missing subjects. Using Star 91's night vision goggles and their night sunlight, they lowered me down 140 feet to our subjects. While Star 91 hovered above and kept the night sun on me I got both subjects into a harness and ready to be hoisted up. Our two subjects were 19 and 20-year-old boys that got separated from a group that was hiking from the Zen retreat camp. Boy were they excited about getting a lift into the helicopter! Both were hoisted one at a time into the helicopter. As planned, once we had both onboard Star 91 flew them back to Lake Hemet and would return for me.

With the noise, wind, and light of the helicopter gone it was pleasantly quiet with a million stars to light up the sky. Unfortunately it was short lived as a herd of mosquitoes found that dinner was about to be served, meaning me. Fortunately Star 91 quickly returned, hoisted me up and flew me back to Lake Hemet. While I was gone, Brenda DeLuna, Will Carlson, and Rick Maschek had also arrived. We put out a "mission over" signal while we did a short debrief with Star 91's crew.

Since we were all going to go on training the next day I took the liberty of inviting everyone over to my sister's cabin for a few hours of sleep. We got there and every one bedded down in their vehicles at 03:00. My sisters Kathy and Nancy were certainly surprised when they got up the next morning to find cars all over their front yard. They and their husbands Jim and Larry cooked us breakfast. It was great!! Everyone left for training except Travis and I. Since we were already there we stayed and helped get ready for Robin's BD party. By the way, she was surprised and now Travis and I don't have to sleep in a doghouse for the rest of the year.

**Mission 22 09/14/2003 1000 trails – missing 60 yr. Old. Cell Phone directions, picked up the road.
Man and his wife lost with cell phone. Ops leader: Phil Thompson**

A man and his wife were shown a trail head out of Thousand Trails camp grounds by the camp director. The couple had planned a couple hours hiking that trail. At some point they got off the trail and became lost. They both had been trained by the hug a tree method and stopped where they were and called 911 with their cell phone. A Sheriff's Deputy arrived on site shortly after the call was made. He walked down the trail until he was able to make voice with the couple, however although he was able to hear the couple the distance was to far to be able to understand their words or get a good direction for them. The Deputy used good judgment in not going off trail by himself.



The Deputy called RMRU for assistance. I felt that because the Deputy had voice communications with the couple that we would not need the whole team for this search. I called Glen and Travis Henderson to meet me at the trail head at Thousand Trails. While waiting for the other members to get there I was able to talk to the couple by cell phone, they where able to describe the area they where at to me. Based on the information they gave me and the fact that it was starting to get dark I was able to give them a direction to travel to get to hwy 243. They started moving and we moved out to the hwy to pick them up.

Before we where able to get to their location some good citizens picked them up and dropped them off to us. Everyone was fine and we all went home. During dinner with Glen and Travis we received another call for a woman lost out of Long Valley. We and this time the whole team started heading to the tramway in Palm Springs. About ten minutes later we where told that a Park Ranger had located her and we could go home.

Mission 23 09/14/2003 Top of the Tram. 34 yr old woman lost. Aborted.

Mission 24 09/27/2003 Missing 30 yr old woman in Menifee area Ops leader: Phil Thompson

RMRU was called out to assist in the finding of a 30 year old woman who had been missing for three days while staying at a religious retreat in the Menifee area. She had left the retreat with no food or water to go up in the hills for Religious reasons.



We started our search with 15 ground searchers and 3 search dogs. After two hours of searching the local hills the Sheriff's Dept was able to acquire information about the location of the woman. The woman was picked up by the Sheriff's Dept and brought back to RMRU base were it was deemed that she would be put into protective custody.

Mission 25 10/12/2003 Humber Park search for woman. Aborted

**Mission 26 10/19-20/03 Humber Park. Two men fell. DOA. Body recovery on morning of the 20th.
Ray Hussey ops leader on the Rock.**

Incident was reported by adjacent climbers and hikers by cell phone and in person. Three pops and a loud thud were heard by adjacent climbers near the route called the "white maiden", the initial information was that a physician was close by and pronounced them both dead and that the bodies were located just east of lunch rock and 150 ft above the talus. 15 minutes later the story changed that no physician was present and they weren't sure if they were dead. This changed the gear for the bash team, emergency medical gear was added and a team physician was added to the bash team. The 5 member bash team reached the subjects and found that climbers had tied off the upper body to a rock anchor so the bodies would not fall down further. Both bodies were still securely tied together. The upper victim was pronounced dead by a team physician but the lower victim was about 20 ft down the face and was imbedded in brush. This necessitated attaching a lowering device and hauling him out of the brush and it was found that he was partially decapitated and also pronounced dead.



Both subjects were lowered about 120 ft down the face to the talus. Additional team members had arrived with 2 litters and wheels and both victims were placed in body bags and lashed into the litters. By this time it was 21:00 and winch extraction

was requested by the RSO aerosquadron at first light and this was approved by the watch commander. Two RMRU members Michael George and Dana Potts volunteered to stay with the bodies overnight and assist in the extraction in the AM. At approximately 07:00 the extraction was performed. The extraction was complicated by rock fall produced by the helicopter's main rotor downwash but no injuries occurred. The bodies were transported to Keenwild heliport where the Coroner's personnel were waiting.

MEMBERS AT MISSION RMRU (18) Travis Henderson, Darrell Bell, Brad Scott, Kirk Cloyd, Ray Hussey, Deborah Riegle, Gene Baune, Rick Maschek, Glen Henderson, Gwenda Yates, Dave Webb, Dana Potts, Terry Greenstein, Pete Carlson, Steve Bryant, Michael George, Bill Delo, William Carlson.

Mission 27	10/25/2003	Evidence Search concerning accident on Sunday before where two died.
Mission 28	11/03/2003	Four hikers lost in La Quinta, one injured. DeSAR completed. Mission Aborted.

TRAINING MISSIONS

September Training by Jim Fairchild

Because most of our missions occur mostly at night, and involve covering terrain either on trails, near trails, or quite distant from trails, a thorough familiarization with our maintains' trails, ridges, canyons, cliffs, meadows, and water sources is essential, as are basic through advanced skills of hiking and backpacking.

Early Friday morning, September 5, I started up the Fuller Ridge Trail from its road head that is reached along a dirt road about eight miles up San Jacinto Mountain from Banning-to-Idyllwild Highway 243, at an elevation of about 7800'.

My primary purpose for going in a day before the rest of the unit was to make detailed notes describing the five miles from the road head to the Fuller Ridge Trail's terminus with the Deer Spring Trail. Hence, I had a wonderfully scenic and easy-going walk. Along the way one views the San Gorgonio Pass and the mountain massif itself, the many thousands of feet that comprise the Snowcreek canyons with cliffs and tiered buttresses, forests of chaparral and tall trees, fascinating food and medicine plants as well as animal life.

The trailheads easterly and upward in varying degrees of undulations, then crosses the west shoulder of Folly Peak, descending a bit before ascending steeply on switchbacks. It was along this part of the trail that I was entertained by three and a half hours of heavy rain and hail — the trail became a stream with ankle-deep puddles, but my umbrella saved the day. The precipitation ceased just as I came to the nice stream that flows across the trail about four miles up from the road head. The water volume was encouraging — there would be a stream through Little Round Valley. More rain again until I reached the Deer Springs Trail. I turned left and northward for the final steep turns of a mile—and—a-half to the valley. I chose a campsite just west of the valley, where one could walk a few yards to an overlook of the vast, populated lowlands, with good radio and cell phone reception.

Clean air, clean rocks, needles and leaves led to exhilaration that led to preparing a steak dinner and fixing's, cooked to the pleasant hum of the tiny backpacking stove. Quiet evening and night, deep slumber, brilliant star and planet display, no wind, but plenty of condensation inside and outside the low tent.

During the leisurely breakfast on Saturday, I knew teammates were packing, driving, locating the dirt road and later the road head, then proceeding up the undulating trail, no rain or hail, just very warm sunshine. By radio and cell phone it soon became apparent that this was truly a test of and learning experience for familiarization. Also, a test of joints, muscles, and determination. During my hike in I decided that teammates would really prefer to camp where I was, rather than ascend a very steep slope to Bedsprings Camp, the original destination. There was initially some resistance to the change, but when everyone arrived at Little Round Valley, a lot of gratitude and agreement ensued.

To my delight there were: Will Carlson, Dave Webb, Michael George, Dillon Brad Scott, Bill Delo, Kirk Cloyd. Summer _____, Jeri Sanchez, Jennifer _____

After I stood there holding a berry pie for everyone to almost simultaneously consume, we had training modules in tracking, pointing out geographic landmarks, Global Positioning Service and map and compass, reviewing the multi-faceted lore of hiking and backpacking methodology, not to mention pertinent aspects of route- finding!

Then, the joy of everyone pot lucking at suppertime — many kinds of truly delicious and nutritious food — tasting so good in the wilderness. After Sunday's breakfast, also potluck, and after more training, appropriate observations, the group retraced the trails, up and down the undulations, and out. Bill Delo and I did the hike much more slowly, pointing out the myriad of scenic wonders, the uses of many plants, places to camp and bivouac, and telling accounts of former missions. To top it all off we drove to Idyllwild for a fine Mexican food dinner at LaCasita.

October training - South Ridge Trail

For those team members that couldn't get the time off to go to the Sierra's, there was a local training in the San Jacinto Mountains. Rick Maschek, Debbiy Riegle, Janet Deen, Angie James and myself met at Humber Park at 07:00, Saturday October 4. We then all piled into Angie's new Jeep and drove over to the South Ridge Trailhead.

Our plan was to do a familiarization hike via the South Ridge to Laws Camp pointing out various landmarks to new members as we went. Since Rick had to be out today he went along with us and then was going to hike back down the trail to Angie's car and leave it back at Humber Park as that was our route out on Sunday. It was a very pleasant day to be hiking in the mountains. We first reached the fire lookout tower on top of Tahquitz Peak and spent some time pointing out different landmarks around the area. From there we went through Tahquitz valley, Reeds Meadow and down to Laws Camp. Rick left us there and headed back to Angie's Jeep.

Once at Laws we set up camp and proceeded to cook some dinner. As advertised at our team meeting before training we had prizes for the best presentation and for the best meal. Debbiy won for presentation with her tablecloth, Margarita glass, candles, and luminaries surrounding her table. I won for the best meal with my baked salmon, Caesar salad and pasta primavera. This was all accompanied by a fine Merlot. My feelings were hurt by my camping partners that accused me of bringing my wife's cooking on this training. No one refused some of my salmon and all said that it was really great and they still accused me of dishonesty! By the way, when my wife, Robin, found out I won the contest I did have to give her the belt that I won.

Just as we were finishing up dinner Dr. Bill Delo arrived in camp. He had to work and hiked in on his own after finishing his shift at the hospital. (He liked my salmon too).

Sunday morning arrived clear and cool. We all hiked down to Carumba, which is the top of Tahquitz Canyon. Different helispots were pointed out as we descended to Carumba. We then hiked back to camp packed up and hiked out to Humber Park. Before we got to the saddle above Humber Park we met FNG Robert Poe who had hiked in to meet us and hike out with us. After a nice lunch at La Casita's in Idyllwild we called training officially over and all drove home.

High Sierra Fun

Finally, the time had come. There we were sitting at 10,000 feet in a High Sierra parking lot. It was 7:00 and everyone had pulled in sometime throughout the night. We enjoyed a small breakfast as we all packed our gear in the brisk morning air. We had all day ahead of us!

The hiking didn't start until sometime after 8:00, but when it did I knew we were in for an awesome trip. Everyone hiked along at a leisurely pace. Dylan, Travis, Resa, and I reached the junction to Muir Lake in no time at all and decided to take a break to eat and enjoy the view. Dave, Jeri, and Meloney quickly rejoined the group. After the break we continued along the trail toward the area we wanted to camp. We found a wonderful campsite just above Lake Three. This would be our home for two more days. After some talking and joking around it was time to fill up on water and to wash up. Wash up? Yes, jump in the freezing lake. After filling up the water Travis jumped completely into the lake. However, he did not stay in very long because the coolness took his breath away. I was the only other one to go in, although I did not jump in like Travis. The rest of the afternoon consisted of exploring the area and resting for our summit bid the next day.

Around 14:00 Jim strolled into camp. Now, for those of you who don't know him, Jim is a 77 year old mountain goat. He has been with the team longer than anyone I know. Well, now that the last person was in camp it was time to get Jim. Everyone knew that he had brought something good in for desert and we all wanted to know what it was. He would not tell us until it was time to eat it. It turns out that Jim brought in another pie. Yum yum! The pie did not last long.

After eating their share of pie, Jeri and Meloney decide to go for the peak. They quickly packed up their equipment (packs, warm cloths, food, water, headlamps...) and headed for the summit. Dave escorted them to the base of Old Army Pass and gave them a brief description of the route they would be taking. It would be a great night for a summit.

Soon after our stomachs began to rumble, for it was dinner time. Everyone was ready to eat except for Travis who was beginning to get altitude sickness. Dylan and I had brought in extra special dinners. I had stir-fried chicken with fried vegetables and rice. I also had a side of Hawaiian Rolls. Although I can't remember exactly what Dylan had, I know it had to do with chicken. It was truly delicious. Another score for the night was when I brought out the brownies for a second desert. Somewhere around this time Max arrived. As the evening wound down Dave, Resa, Dylan, and I went out for a small night hike to take some pictures of the moon reflecting off of the lake. When we returned we hit the sleeping bags and were fast asleep. Around 22:30 we awoke to Jeri and Meloney. They had not made the summit but they had a great time attempting it. They went straight to bed and we all returned to our slumbers.

"Who turned on the generator?" Travis was wondering what the noise was. "It's just my stove Travis," I replied. Our summit day had arrived! We all ate quick breakfasts and were on the trail around 8:30. I reached the summit around 10:45 and joined Max. Max had started much earlier than the rest of us. Max and I did the normal summit routine and then he headed down. I remained on the summit and waited for the rest of the group. Somewhere in that time I did my summit handstand to make sure I was the highest I could possibly be. Dave and Resa were the next to arrive. They let me know that Travis and Dylan had made the decision to turn around because of altitude sickness. We hung out for a little over an hour and then headed down to camp. I have to say that I truly respect Travis and Dylan. It is not easy to make the decision to turn away from your goal. Only a true mountaineer knows there comes a point when the risks outweigh the benefits.

Back at camp everyone was in lazy mode. Max, Resa, and Dylan decided to head out a day early. Jeri and Meloney had left earlier in the day to get to work on Sunday. It was down to Jim, Dave, Travis, and me. Jim informed me over dinner that Jennifer had come up for the day and then headed back out, also. The four of us enjoyed dinner, I had BBQ chicken quesadillas and we all shared some fish our neighbors brought us. After dinner we all went right to sleep.

The next morning was as beautiful as any morning is in the Sierras. We watched the first sun hit the ridges of the peaks and finally make its way to us. We packed up and headed out. Along the way, we paused in a meadow to watch three deer eat their breakfast. It makes one think about why we don't just stay in the mountains forever. We reached the cars around 11:00 and decided that the best place to eat would be at the Ranch House Café in Olancha. The last day made me think of a quote I once heard. "It wasn't until the way out that I realized I was really headed in."

Members Present: Jim Fairchild, Travis Henderson, Dave Webb, Jeri Sanchez, William Carlson, Max

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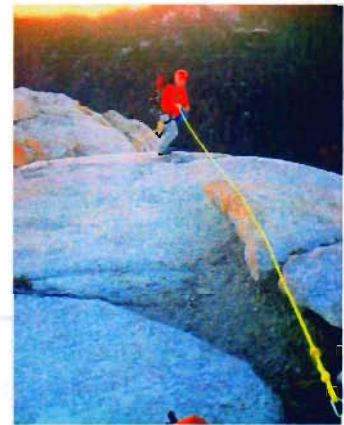
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Pictures by Rick Maschek of the staging area for Mission #26 and then #27. These pictures were taken on the next Saturday to learn more about what happened the week before. A lot of time was spent to document the results of the climb.



Team pictures by Rick Maschek. On the Rock and then after mission meal at a local restaurant.. Picture on the Far right show some of the equipment used. Climbing equipment purchased by team members for their private use and at their own expense. If it is damaged or lost, they replace it out of their own private funds.

A special thanks to **Magdy Farag** of Greybar Printing located in the Banning Correctional Facility. He has found, corrected and in general cleaned up a lot of errors by the publisher. Because of him this looks a lot better.