

A Publication of Riverside Mountain Rescue Unit - Fall 2008

RMRU

Fresh Tracks



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From Olden Days



Starting in the next issue of Fresh Tracks, veteran RMRU member Kevin Walker will “From Olden Days”. A regular feature that will look back at missions, trainings, and memories from the early days of RMRU.

Above, RMRU members Al Andrews and Walt Walker along with RMRU’s only tracking bloodhound “Sugar” visit with a very young Kevin Walker after locating him during a search and tracking exercise in the “Grotto” area of Strawberry Creek. This photo is Circa 1965.

\$ustaining Membership

The Webb Foundation of Palm Desert, California, has graciously donated \$2500.00 to RMRU. With this donation we were able to purchase a new Litter – those are the baskets you see us carrying our injured subjects out of the wilderness in – as well as a new Backboard to stabilize spinal injuries.

Thank You to The Webb Foundation! It's through donations like this that RMRU can continue our lifesaving work, as we have for almost 50 years.

Given the condition of our economy, it is definitely a strain to give when we are all trying to just get by. In spite of this we still are asking for your help! Donations of any size help to maintain and replace equipment when needed. For the past 45+ years, it has been the small and medium size contributions that have been the mainstay of the \$ustaining Membership Program.

If you would like to make a donation to help RMRU save lives, or you are already a \$ustaining Member, please use the handy donation form on page 11 of this newsletter. You may also donate electronically by visiting our website at:
www.rmru.org

RMRU is a non-profit entity, so all donations are tax deductible on both your state and federal taxes.

Former RMRU members Walt Walker, Jim Fairchild and Mike Daugherty in Tahquitz Canyon.



Rescue of Two Lost Hikers

March 23, 2008

Caramba Overlook, San Jacinto Mountains
2008-010

By: Dana Potts

Michael George and myself received a call on Easter Sunday to assist on a mission to recover two lost hikers off of the Palm Springs tram. The two had become lost and called a loved one for help. The Riverside Sheriff's Office (RSO) helicopter had spotted their fire and made contact with them sometime between midnight and one in the morning. Conditions were good with the temperature at 40 degrees at the top of the tram at about 6:30 a.m. Ground conditions were good to icy in the shade. Based on the temperatures overnight, we weren't very worried about the two suffering from hypothermia. The helicopter had also observed that the two had jackets on and were sitting next to a fire that they had made.

We set off from the tram with the latitude and longitude of the subject furnished by the RSO helicopter the night before. We set off cross country from the tram via Hidden Lake and south to the Caramba trail, and found the first sign of the two once they were about a 1/8 of a mile away from them. I found a fresh track in the snow with fresh mud on top of the boot print. We then yelled in an attempt to make voice contact and were successful. Within ten minutes, the four of us were together.

We found that the two had hunkered down next to the Caramba Trail at a stream that was running with snowmelt. There were several patches of snow left around their location. The two were in great spirits and great shape physically. They had just run out of the water that they had brought with them. When asked what food, if any, they had left; they said that they had eaten their last snacks during the evening. They made a small but warming fire within five feet of the water, which was completely smothered with water, dirt and snow prior to our leaving the location.

They had used a map and compass while hiking around the Long Valley area and were drawn by the ever-luring downhill pull of the Caramba area and its drainages. They had made up a checkerboard with broken sticks to pass the time in the morning. When asked how they were during the night, they said that they were both warm due to the fact that they had several layers of clothing with them.

The first of the two was hoisted by the RSO airship shortly after 1:45 p.m. Due to a rescue member from San Dimas becoming injured in a fall on another mission nearby (see write-up for Mission 2008-009), the airship had to divert prior to picking us up. We hiked to a nearby clearing southeast of the Caramba trail where the three of us were picked up by a second airship and flown safely to the tram parking lot.

Lessons:

- Their 10 Essentials came in handy and were used.
- They stayed put once they realized they were lost. They made a fire to stay warm and signal the helicopter.
- They had brought plenty of water and found more.

- Proper clothing. Kept their cool.
- Cellular phone usage: They should have called 9-1-1 first then their loved ones.
- Map and compass only work if you check your map often and know where you are.
- A GPS would have let them know how far out they were.
- No real plan on where to go, which makes it hard for family to provide direction if you do get lost.

The last we heard was that the San Dimas Rescue member was recovering from some minor injuries at a nearby hospital (Mission 2008-009). Our special thanks and appreciation always go out to other teams that come into Riverside County to help us in our missions. As volunteers, out on Easter Sunday away from our families and loved ones, we would all like to thank the Riverside County Air Crews for their professionalism and hard work getting us out safely and back home. This author (and I'm sure other rescuers) would like to thank his wife and family for understanding his passion for helping others even though often times it takes away from precious holidays & time with his children that can never be taken back. ■

Two Mountain Lion Researchers Rescued

April 2, 2008

Hell's Kitchen Area, San Jacinto Mountains
2008-011

By: Grace Manues

As the sun began to set on Wednesday, April 2nd, two men in the middle of rugged terrain known as Hell's Kitchen set off a personal locator beacon (PLB).

This modern-day equivalent of a smoke signal rose up to a satellite then bounced back down to the Air Force's Rescue Coordination Center in Florida. The alert set off a series of phone calls; the first to the registered owner. The wife of the owner confirms that her husband, a respected and experienced wildlife veterinarian, is in the field tracking mountain lions for a conservation project. Given the nature of his work, he has carried a PLB for years and would not set it off if it was not an emergency. The next call, the Office of Emergency Services in California.

As luck would have it, RMRU is gathered at the Sheriff's Hemet substation for its monthly meeting. Those who are able quickly reassemble at the Lake Hemet substation for the all night mission.

Given the nature of the call (possible medical emergency), the location of the subjects (at least 5 hours away by foot), and weather conditions (forecast for rain), RMRU requests air support for the safest and fastest evacuation of the subjects. On one of the rare occasions when an RSO airship is unavailable, a San Bernardino Sheriff's aviation unit quickly responds. Unfortunately, heavy winds prevent the airship from reaching the subjects.

Plan B. Field teams are dispatched at first light. Additional manpower from out-of-county teams is requested. San Diego, Sierra Madre, and San Bernardino teams respond. Members of the Civil Air Patrol - ground and air - also respond to pinpoint the location of the PLB.

Good news; the signal is moving. It appears the subjects are making their way back to their vehicle.

By 11:00 a.m., Team One (Lee Arnson and Jim Manues) reaches the subjects. One has a minor leg injury that prevented them from hiking out the night before. He is now able to slowly hike back to his vehicle under his own power.

To those thinking about carrying a PLB, yes, they are effective. Obviously, knowing a subject's exact location facilitates a rescue operation. However, be aware that unlike 911 in the city where help arrives in minutes, help while you are in the wilderness can be hours away. A PLB cannot replace wilderness skills. Hike safely. Carry the 10 essentials. Never hike alone. Also know that RMRU will always respond as if your life depended on it. ■

Rescue Near Temecula

April 16, 2008
Near Temecula
2008-012

By: Glenn Henderson

I received a call from dispatch that one RMRU member was needed to respond to Hemet Ryan Sheriff's air unit to extract an overdue 67-year-old hiker. It was 12:30 a.m. The Sheriff's department had received a call from his wife reporting him overdue. They flew the area, found him quickly and were able to land a deputy but he was unable to get to our hiker due to impassable brush. They flew back and then called the team for someone to be inserted via the winch.

I responded and we flew out at 1 a.m.. It was a short flight on a beautiful moonlit night. When we got to him TFO (technical flight officer) Chad Marlatt hooked me up and started my decent to the ground. As I got about halfway down the wind came up and started pushing us around. It took a little while longer but I finally reached the ground. I put our hiker into a "screamer suit", hooked him up to the helicopter and he was lifted out. They then sent it back for me. The return trip was much easier than the way down. We landed in a shopping center and transferred our hiker to a waiting patrol car. Many thanks to pilot Craig McDonald and to Chad for a smooth rescue. I got home at 2:45 a.m. ■

Rescue In Massacre Canyon

April 18, 2008
Massacre Canyon
2008-013

By: William Carlson

The gear had already been loaded in the truck and my friends were on board. It was going to be a great weekend of climbing in Joshua Tree National Park. Well, it was, until the call came out for a rescue in Massacre Canyon where a nineteen-year-old male was stranded on a cliff. Joshua Tree was going to have to wait.

I met team members Gwenda Yates and Brad Scott at the trailhead to Massacre Canyon. We quickly gathered ropes,

webbing, and an extra helmet and harness for the subject. Brad and I took off while Gwenda remained at base in case we needed more personnel or equipment.

A quick ten-minute hike brought us to the subject's location. Shawn had managed to climb up approximately two hundred feet on loose rock and dirt before becoming stranded. We decided to scramble up and across to Shawn.

A quick assessment showed that Shawn was in good health. We put a helmet on him and attached a harness. A belay was then set up to assist Shawn across and back down to the trail. Shawn was truly happy to be back on solid ground. A quick hike lead us back to our vehicles and it was off to Joshua Tree! ■

Missing JROTC Students

April 19, 2008
Eight Missing JROTC Students
2008-014

By: Gwenda Yates

Saturday evening at approximately 5:30 p.m. I got the call from the Sheriff's dispatch. We had 9 ROTC juveniles that were overdue. They were to return to Humber Park from a day on the mountain at 2:30. So, like my fellow rescuers when children are involved, I tend to get a little excited. So, after calling the team out, I grabbed the Rescue Truck and headed up to Humber Park. Upon my arrival at 6:30. I came upon a group of kids that were coming off the trail. Asked them if they were our missing ROTC group. Their reply was yes. I gave them the thumbs up and headed to the Deputy on scene. (Nick Nixon fellow team member was also on scene.) I let him know this was our group and headed back down the mountain. Other team members responding were Grace Manues, Jim Manues, Brenda DeLuna, Dan Morgan & Rick Mascheck. ■

PCT Body Recovery

April 21, 2008
Pacific Crest Trail near Antsell Rock
2008-015

By: Fresh Tracks Staff

On Sunday, April 14th, a man hiking south on the Pacific Crest Trail spotted human remains in the area of Antsell Rock. RMRU was asked to assist in the recovery of the remains on Monday, April 15th.

Several team members provided technical assistance to sheriff deputies and a deputy coroner with retrieving the remains, which were flown out by sheriff's aviation helicopter.

RMRU extends its heartfelt condolences to the family and friends of the deceased.

On 4/23/2008, the Riverside County Coroner's Bureau identified the recovered remains as those of Deborah Huglin, the subject of our search in Mission 2008-009. ■

Man Missing Near Pinyon Pines

May 1, 2008
Pinyon Pines Area
2008-016

By: Fresh Tracks Staff

On Thursday, May 1st, RMRU was called out to search for a man whose car had been abandoned in the Pinyon Pines area about three weeks earlier. A suicide note had been found in the vehicle and it was strongly suspected that the subject was no longer alive. RMRU field teams and helicopters searched the area, finding no sign of the missing man.

Another, larger, search was scheduled for Saturday, May 2nd. RMRU, along with Desert Sheriff's Search and Rescue, search dogs, and mounted posse, searched the area. Late in the morning an RMRU search team in Deep Canyon found the remains of a man who matched the description of the subject. With assistance from DSSAR, RMRU was able to retrieve the remains for the coroner.

Our heartfelt condolences to the family and friends of the deceased. ■

Missing PCT Through-Hiker

May 7, 2008
Fuller Ridge Trail
2008-017

On Wednesday, May 7th, RMRU was called out to search for a missing Pacific Crest Trail through-hiker. Brandon W. had failed to make an expected call to his father and it was believed that he was missing somewhere between the Fuller Ridge Trail and Cabazon.

As RMRU field teams arrived on scene at Black Mountain Road, a deputy checked the PCT register at the bottom of Snow Creek and found that Brandon had already passed through there. It is now assumed that he is all right and hiking in the San Bernardino Mountains. ■

Two Missing Female Hikers

May 10, 2008
San Jacinto Mountains - Palm Springs Tram
2008-018

This mission was accomplished in two parts. The eastern part focused on the Long Valley Drainage, above the Palm Springs Tram. The western part, in which the subjects were actually rescued, was on the Marrion Mountain Trail.

Eastern Part – By: Pete Carlson

Saturday night before Mother's Day 8:30 p.m. the call comes for 2 missing women who hiked to San Jacinto Peak from the Tramway and got lost. One had called her husband at 6:30 p.m. saying they had started down from the peak and lost the trail. Only 4 people responded at first and we met at the

Rick Maschek and I climbed aboard Sheriff Helicopter STAR9 with pilot Craig McDonald and TFO (Technical Flight Officer) Chad Marlatt for a short flight to Round Valley at 9,000 feet. Using night vision goggles the Pilot and TFO did a great job getting us into Round Valley at 11 p.m. at night. We then started hiking the trail to Wellman's Divide yelling the women's names (Nadia and Elena) every 5 minutes. The trail was mostly under snow with patches of dirt where we could find it sometimes. But we had no real problems getting to Wellman's Divide since we both know the area very well. From Wellman's Divide the trail was easy to follow for about ¾ of a mile, and then it got hard again for about ½ mile. Then it was easy again until the saddle between Round Valley and Little Round Valley just 1/3 mile from San Jacinto Peak. At this point the trail could not be found at all. There was almost no wind and our voices carried for at least ½ mile, but no response. We went up the Cabin just below the peak and around 2:00 a.m. decided to get some sleep until 6 a.m.

Gwenda Yates and Marty Syrett rode up the Tramway and set up base camp in the upper station. Marty went out and hiked around Long Valley calling the women's name but with no luck. By midnight they were settling in for the night and trying to get some sleep. Sunday morning at 6 a.m. Jim and Grace Manues, Mike George, Patrick McCurdy, and Lew Kingman were riding up the first tramway car. Gwenda had made up assignments for them to cover. Jim, Grace, and Marty would hike up the Round Valley Trail to Wellman's Divide and then down the other side to Wellman's Cabin and on down to Willow Creek Crossing. Patrick, Lew, and Mike would hike up to Hidden Lake Divide and on down to Willow Creek Crossing.

Rick and I started down from San Jacinto Peak to the first area that we thought they might have gotten off trail ½ way between Wellman's Divide and the Peak. There we split up and I went down the old trail to Tamarack Valley while Rick went down drainage to the South of me. We were ½ to ¾ of a mile apart and could hear each other yelling for the Women so we knew we had good coverage of the area. During this time the woman called her husband again and said they had found the trail and were hiking back to the tramway. With this news we all started to head back to the main trails to try and find them. Kevin Walker and Jeri Sanchez had just come up the tramway and they started hiking back up to Round Valley as Rick stared down from Round Valley and I closed in down the Sid Davis trail. We thought we would find them quickly. No such luck. Within 90 minutes we had covered all the major trails around the tramway and the missing women were not found.

We now were convinced that our secondary search area, the West side of the mountain down into Little Round Valley, was to become our primary search area. Gwenda sent Jim and Grace up to San Jacinto Peak and Marty down to Round Valley to cover this section of trail once again to be sure they had not come back onto the trail up high. Kevin and Jeri went over to Hidden Lake Divide and down to Willow Creek Crossing and on to Laws Camp. Patrick, Lew, and Mike took a high trail from Hidden Lake to Round Valley. Rick met up with Marty to search Round Valley to Tamarack again. Also the Helicopter STAR9 was returning to help move people around from Round Valley to Little Round Valley and other areas on the West side.

I went back to the Upper Tram Station to help Gwenda

run base and the operation. Gwenda was trying to make contact by cell phone with the woman. Final with voice mail they were able to communicate. We found out they were on the Marion Mountain Trail on the West side. Glenn Henderson was on his way to base and I sent him to the Marion Mountain Trail head. I also called Lee Arnson to see if he could hike up the Marion Trail since it is close to his home. As it turned out STAR9 picked up Glenn from the Marion Trail head and took off searching the trail. Lee started hiking up the trail (see Lee's write up) and made voice contact.

This was a great search with everyone hiking many miles of trails and cross country to clear the area and be sure the women were not on the east side of the mountain. Gwenda did an excellent job with her cell phone texting and leaving voice mails to find out where the women were and to get them to go out in the open and stay put waving jackets if the helicopter came near them.

As always the Riverside Sheriff's Aviation Unit did a super job flying us around and picking up the subjects. By 5 p.m. we were on our way to a dinner before getting home around 8 p.m. Mothers Day night. Special thanks to all the Moms who put up with husbands and Sons who left them all day to search and to the Mom's who were out on the search missing special breakfast's with their families (Gwenda, Jeri, and Grace).

Western Part – By: Lee Arnson

Mothers Day. I know there is a mission going on. In fact it's been going on for over 20 hours now. I've called in to say I was not available for this one. I hate these situations. Missions on holidays present the toughest decisions for volunteer rescuers.

The Team is looking for two women who went missing after not returning from a day hike to Mt San Jacinto. Base camp is set up at the Palm Springs Tram, and I occasionally call to get updated. The team is working very hard to find these women. Everyone wants to go home. I can't say enough about the team members who are out on this one. Dedication beyond description.

Around 2 p.m., Pete Carlson, who is at base, calls and tells me that they got a call from the subjects and they think they are on the Marion Mountain trail. There are no rescuers in the vicinity, and he asks if I can go and clear the trail. I only live about 15 minutes from the trailhead, so I tell my family I'll be home in two hours, max.

I hit the trail carrying only food, water and first-aid. My plan was to go light and fast, only stopping once and a while to call out for the subjects. The Marion Mountain trail is the steepest trail in the San Jacinto mountains, offering the most direct route to San Jacinto Peak. I've been on this trail many times before, so I feel confident going out by myself.

By now, Star 9 (our sheriffs' helicopter) is flying overhead and I am in radio contact with them. They are my only contact, since base is on the other side of the mountain and I have no line of sight for communication.

After hiking for about 40 minutes and constantly calling out for the subjects, I finally make voice contact. This is one of the most exciting things that can happen on a mission. I direct Star 9 to the area where I think the voices are coming from, and they spot two women about 300 yards down slope of the trail. Star 9

down the hill trying to get a visual on the women. After getting to them I determine if there are any injuries and what it's going to take to get them out of here. They explain that they are not injured, but cannot hike any further. I relay this to Star 9 and they go back to Hemet-Ryan Airfield to reconfigure the helicopter so they can come back to do a hoist raise of the subjects. Approximately 40 minutes later, Star 9 lowers two of their "Screamer Suits," or body harnesses, I put them on the subjects and they are raised on board of the hovering helicopter. Their day hike ended with the ride of their life.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who helped out on this mission. My involvement was minor compared to all the time that was put in previous to my going out. You gave of your time on a special day of the year. Be proud. ■

Sick Man Rescued

May 19, 2008
Carumba Camp
2008-019

By: Nick Nixon

A telephone call before 7 a.m. and the phone indicating it is from Gwenda, can only be one thing. I guess today's schedule is going to get altered. The first thing Gwenda says is can I get to the Aviation Unit at Hemet Ryan Airport. This sounds like fun already. Kevin Walker joins me on the mission. A husband and wife spent Sunday night at Carumba Camp. About 11 p.m. he started feeling the worse pain of his life in his abdomen. In addition, he began vomiting. Early in the morning, a couple ladies also camping in the Carumba area hurried out to get help.

We spotted the pair fairly quickly from the air. However, due to the elevation and the temperature we flew back to skunk cabbage meadow to let me off while Kevin was landed at the site southwest of Carumba. Then I was next taken in. It only took us about 15 minutes to hike down to the subject. By then he was feeling better and considering hiking back to the tram. We presented a better offer with a helicopter ride. After about 25 minutes hiking back up to the airship the subject was on his way out.

We were out of there by 11 a.m.. Kevin described it as a textbook mission. I have to agree. It could not have been any better and the view from a helicopter in good weather is always great. Thanks to pilot SGT Steve Bertling and TFO Mike Caldwell on Star 94. ■

Missing hiker from P.S. Tram

May 20, 2008
San Jacinto Peak
2008-020

RMRU was called out to search for a hiker who made it to San Jacinto Peak, but got lost finding his way back to the Palm Springs Tram. With search teams en route the hiker showed up at Pine Cove Market, on the opposite side of the mountain from his intended destination. ■

Hikers Stranded in Snowstorm

May 22, 2008
Fuller Ridge Trail
2008-021

By Chad Marler

On May 22, a report of two lost hikers was sent out to RMRU team members around 9:30 p.m. The report said that two hikers had taken the Palm Springs Tramway earlier in the day and were currently near "Castle Rocks" on the Fuller Ridge Trail cold and lost.

Team One consisted of RMRU members Lee Arnson and myself, both Idyllwild residents who were able to start our way up Fuller Ridge Trail by 10:50 p.m. Approximately 45 minutes into the search, we established voice contact with the lost hikers who were approximately 1/4 mile away. We were pleased to find the lost party, a husband and wife from British Columbia, cold but in good spirits and very thankful to see help had arrived. Along with the hikers was a very helpful PCT through hiker who offered assistance to them before team members arrived.

According to the couple, they had taken the tramway up that morning and then hiked to San Jacinto summit. On this mid-May day, Southern California had an unusual cold weather front that engulfed the San Jacinto summit with thick cloud cover and snow. According to the husband and wife, the near white out conditions was so disorienting that they accidentally took the wrong trail from the peak, in the opposite direction of the tramway. At some point on the trail the hikers were able to get cell phone reception and give 911 their approximate location which proved to be vital in a quick rescue. The other reason why the hikers were found so quickly is that they stayed in place from their last known location.

Extra clothing and lights were given to the hikers and we led the hikers back to the parking lot at the Fuller Ridge trailhead where other RMRU team members had gathered with the team vehicle to provide transportation back to highway 243 where a Sheriff's deputy awaited to transport the missing hikers back to their vehicle at the Palm Springs Tramway valley station. RMRU team members were all thanked by the Canadian couple with handshakes and deep appreciation. ■

Two Missing Climbers on Tahquitz Rock

May 24, 2008
Tahquitz Rock
2008-022

By: Fresh Tracks Staff

The team was called out at 10 p.m. to respond to Humber Park in Idyllwild to search for two overdue climbers on Tahquitz rock.

The weather has been extremely foul for the last two days, and I can't even imagine why anybody would be out, let alone climbing on the rock. A short while later we got a "stand down" message because the subjects had called in on their cell phone saying they are okay and were hiking back to their car. I

drove up to Humber Park anyway to meet with the deputy and affirm everything was alright. Over two hours had passed since the two climbers last called in, and I was starting to get concerned since it is not that long of a hike back to where they were parked. The deputy decided it was probably a good idea to re-call out the team. As I was driving back to Idyllwild where I can get some decent cell coverage to do just that when Gwenda called me to tell me she just heard on the scanner that the climbers had made it out safely. ■

Missing Person Near Warner Springs

May 26, 2008
Lost Valley Boy Scout Camp, near Warner Springs, San Diego County
2008-023

By: Fresh Tracks Staff

RMRU was called out Sunday to assist San Diego County rescue teams in searching for a camper missing over 24 hours. The San Diego teams had been searching for the 37-year-old man since Saturday.

The search was staged at the remote Schoepe Scout Reservation, a 1,400 acre Boy Scout camp in a beautiful valley about 15 miles from Warner Springs, in northern San Diego County.

RMRU teams had just got field assignments and were deploying into the rugged mountains nearby when a helicopter spotted the missing man. After several attempts the helicopter was able to rescue the man from the ridge he was on and flew him back to the command post at the scout camp.

Numerous San Diego county and federal agencies were involved. Riverside County teams included RMRU, Desert Sheriff's Search and Rescue, and Riverside County Search Dogs. ■

Search/Recovery For Man Missing Five Days

June 21, 2008
Ramona Trail, Garner Valley
2008-024

By: Fresh Tracks Staff

On June 21st, RMRU and Desert Sheriff's Search and Rescue were called out to look for man who had last been seen five days earlier. Based on information gathered by investigators, it was suspected that he might have committed suicide. As his car was found at the trail head for the Ramona Trail, that is where the search started.

Within the first hour of the search RMRU's newest member, Brian Wood, found the subject's remains in a rugged ravine. After deputies had checked out the scene, about a dozen members of the two SAR teams, working with ropes and a stokes litter, were able to bring the remains back to the trail head where the coroner took over.

Our heartfelt condolences to the family and friends of the deceased. ■

Missing Hiker on Marion Mountain Trail

August 10, 2008
San Jacinto Wilderness
2008-025

By: William Carlson

"Don't jinx yourself," I had been thinking seconds before the pager went off. I had taken note of the perfect weather, a busy weekend, and a lack of rescue call outs to piece together the coming events of this night. Sure enough, 8:30 p.m. brought word of a hiker last seen on the San Jacinto summit who had contacted his friend stating that he was lost.

Lee Arnson and I headed up the trail as Team One. With the information we received we were sure we could find the missing hiker in a couple of hours. Our first decision was to search the Marion Mountain Trail as this was the trail the missing hiker planned to use. Setting out at brisk pace, we promptly remembered the torture required to quickly hike this steep trail with overnight packs. After calling out for what seemed like eternity we reached the Deer Springs Trail Junction, still with no luck. Our thoughts of a quick find were slipping away into the night.

Knowing the subject was in a clearing gave us continued hope that we would find the subject before reaching the summit. We called out often, taking care to make multiple attempts just up the trail from our last call. We wanted to be sure the missing hiker could hear us and that we didn't walk past him. Our callouts were double edge swords of sorts. As seasoned searchers we knew that we could hear a response at any moment. However, we also knew the frustration of not hearing anything. We continued up the trail, shouting up and down each canyon and ridge, with no sign still of the missing hiker.

We reached Little Round Valley and checked the out-house to no avail. Suddenly a voice! "Who are you looking for?" Not exactly the voice we were hoping to hear at one in the morning. We had located a couple camping in Little Round Valley and advised them of our missing hiker. They said they would keep an eye out for him. Continuing up the trail we were down to a small amount of hope. We knew we wanted to find him tonight so we kept telling ourselves that the missing hiker was in the summit hut, a rock building with bunk beds, sleeping bags, and other equipment to be used in an emergency. We reached the saddle between the east and west slopes of San Jacinto and gave another unsuccessful callout toward the Palm Springs Tramway.

It was 2:15 a.m. when we reached the summit hut. I held my breath as Lee opened the door. A shockwave of frustration hit me like a gust of wind. Lee and I both knew the situation was not looking good but neither of us wanted to say it. We dropped our packs and headed to the summit to make some final callouts before we turned in for a couple hours of sleep. From the summit we were able to call out in all directions. Still, the only sound was the whisper of the still air of the San Jacinto Wilderness. Frustrated, tired, and hungry, Lee and I returned to the hut. After making some cell phone calls to order more teams and a helicopter for the morning, we made a quick batch of hot oatmeal and curled up to try and get some sleep. Surprisingly, sleep didn't come easy at 3 a.m.

Thoughts on where to look riddled our minds. Knowing that the subject's cell phone had been handled by a tower in Hemet told us he should be on the west side of the mountain. However, many years of Search and Rescue experience also told us that he could easily have made it over to the east side of the mountain. Then after finally dozing off we received a call from an RSO deputy stating the helicopter would be up in the morning. Between 5 and 6 a.m. brought the best sleep. However, the first rays of sun creeping through the window shortly reminded us that there was work to be done.

After a quick breakfast of oatmeal, coffee, and red vines, we headed to the summit to call out again. Our Riverside County Sheriff's Aviation helicopter joined us in the skies above San Jacinto peak even as many team members were arriving at base. A quick radio discussion sent the helicopter to search the east side of the mountain.

With daylight on our side we knew we had a good chance of finding the missing hiker before sunset. Jim Bakos arrived and took over the communications and logistics side of the search. Lee and I took charge of field operations and quickly passed along assignments for incoming teams. Shortly thereafter, Jim and Grace Manues headed up, searching the Seven Pines Trail. Nick Nixon, Jeri Sanchez, and Brenda Deluna began searching the Fuller Ridge Trail. These two trails have successfully been used many times in the past to locate hikers missing from the summit.

Feeling confident with the teams that were in the field and en route to the search, Lee and I continued our assignment heading to Jean Peak and across to Marion Mountain. You never really know how hard you work in Search and Rescue until you search all night and start up again in the morning. We were not slow, but there was definitely no spring in our step. Near the summit of Jean we located a single set of tracks that appeared to be somewhat fresh. We were not totally excited, yet we did not count them out. Continuing along we would occasionally locate the tracks again and then quickly lose them among the pine needles.

The process of calling out was again becoming frustrating. We had now covered a good portion of the upper mountain with no response. The only hope we had going for us was the single set of tracks heading out across the ridge. (Note: the main reason we were not too excited about the tracks was the fact that many locals hike this route daily). We reached a flat area just below Marion Mountain and again called out with no response. However, we found a sandy area which again yielded the single set of tracks. This time, however, the tracks wandered around a bit. Often times during searches certain clues tell you that you are on the right track. This was one such clue. We followed the tracks for about thirty seconds before deciding to give a callout. As we glanced up before giving a yell, the missing hiker said "hello" from about 300 feet away. We were astounded.

A brief conversation confirmed that this was indeed the missing hiker. He was in great condition for having been out all night. Apparently he had been able to crawl under a rock and sleep most of the night. We made contact with the helicopter and arranged to have the subject picked up from a boulder a couple hundred yards from our location. Pilot Tony Bowen and TFO Chad Marlatt brought the helicopter in and together we performed a textbook hover-step pickoff. Our missing hiker

was then flown the Keenwild Heliport to meet up with his friends. Tony and Chad returned a few minutes later to perform the same operation. In a matter of minutes we were all back to base discussing another successful mission for RMRU. ■

Suicide Rock Rescue

August 31, 2008
Suicide Rock, Idyllwild
2008-027

By: Lee Arnson

It's 1:30 in the afternoon and I'm at my office watching the rain come down. Not real heavy, just enough to get the road wet and create that great smell that goes with it. I hear sirens and the see Idyllwild Fire drive by and then shortly thereafter Pine Cove Fire goes by. I figure there is a fire in Fern Valley or possibly a car accident.

A little while later Gwenda calls me and said she heard on her scanner that there is a climber down on Suicide Rock. Now that I know what is going on, I put out a "heads up" for the rest of the team, assuming we are about to be called out to assist. Only a few minutes later, Gwenda called me back and said that Idyllwild Fire was with the subject, I now put out a "90", meaning to abort and stay home. Since these write-ups are both reviews and critiques, I must admit this was my first mistake.

Now I'm just plain curious as to what is going on, so I drive up to the trail head to see if I can at least "observe" Idyllwild Fire in action. This was my second mistake, because if you belong to search and rescue team you don't observe other people doing rescues, you get involved or you don't go at all.

As I'm hiking up to the base of the rock, I meet up with Clark Jacobs, a local legendary climber who witnessed the whole accident. He saw a young couple climbing on a route known as Captain Hook, when all of a sudden the leader falls over 100 feet and lands on his head. Clark was able to get to the climber, who was turning blue and suffering mass trauma to his head. Clark was able to move the climber just enough to open his airway, make sure he was breathing and then call 911. Clark tells me that he has seen many falls in his 40 years of climbing, but this is the worst one ever. I reassure him that he did the right thing, but he is visibly shaken.

We both decide to go up to the site where the climber is now being taken care of by Idyllwild Fire and CDF paramedics. The CDF helicopter has already lowered its medic, and the subject is packaged in a litter, ready to be airlifted to an awaiting ambulance. As the CDF helicopter moves back into position for the hoist, mother nature decided that it wasn't going to happen that easily. The rain turned to hail the size of golf balls and was coming down so heavy that you couldn't even look up any more at the hovering bird, which by now is pulling out because the conditions are too dangerous to fly. Now the mission has turned into a carry out. Henry Negrete from Idyllwild Fire looks at me and asks me to grab the wheel that attaches to the bottom of the litter. Now I'm involved, and we start to bring the climber down in the worst conditions any of us have ever seen. The whole hillside is just melting away from the rain and hail, we are not even sure where the trail is at times, and on top of this the subject is screaming at the top of his lungs in pain. We are

doing the best we can in getting this guy down, following Clark Jacobs because he knows the area better than any of us. Mark Lamont from Idyllwild Fire offers me his helmet, because I'm the only one without one, and he pulls his fire jacket over his head. I'll never forget that. We were all getting pummeled from the hail, and going down this hillside in knee deep mud, and the whole time trying to protect the climber.

Eventually, we get down to the flats, and the going gets pretty good all the way to the ambulance. He is loaded up and taken to the helicopter that is waiting at an LZ in Idyllwild. The hail has stopped by now and turned to rain, so the subject is flown to a hospital in Riverside.

Wrap up: Climber no.1 suffered a broken neck, but miraculously is still alive. Permanent damage is yet to be seen. He was wearing a helmet when he fell. The girlfriend suffered fractured cheek bones and numerous contusions from the hail. ■

Woman Stranded near Skyline Trail

September 4, 2008
Chino Canyon, San Jacinto Mountains
2008-028

By: Fresh Tracks Staff

A woman hiking up the notorious Skyline trail missed the turn west near the top of the trail and ended up stranded on some very steep rocks in Chino Canyon. State Parks personnel were unable to talk her out, so called RMRU. As the team was arriving, State Parks personnel were able to get her unstuck and she walked out under her own power. ■



RMRU members await the arrival of one of the Riverside Sheriff "Star 9" helicopters at the lower tram parking lot.

Without our Sheriff Airwing, our rescues would be much more difficult, and would likely fill many more pages in this publication.

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