

*Fresh Tracks*

Fall 2009



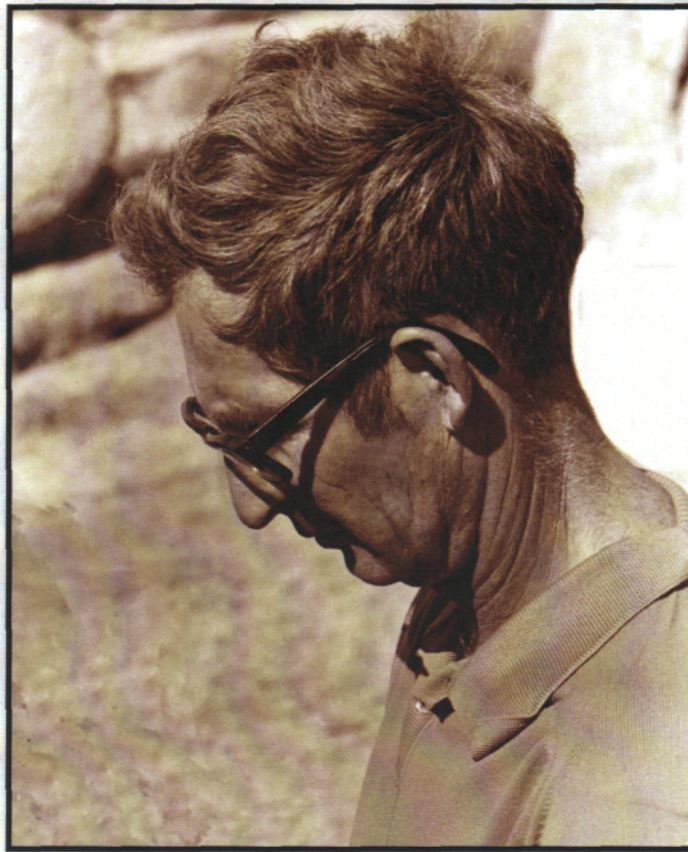
A Publication of the Riverside Mountain Rescue Unit



*Jim*  
**Fairchild**

1926 - 2009





## **James B. Fairchild**

**July 17, 1926 - February 8, 2009**

April 18, 1983 – 2:10 AM – Tuesday *“I’ll never cease praising the Lord for that scene! It’s my opinion that had we not found them until dawn, tragic results would have made a different ending.”* – Jim Fairchild

This is an excerpt from the April 1983 edition of the *RMRU Newsletter*. As the senior member on scene Jim decided to have a new and untried operations leader coordinate the mission so that he (Jim) could do what he did best – search and rescue. Leading a team of searchers and utilizing his search dog Kodi, Jim and his field team searched into the night, located, cared for and saw to the safe return of Jeff Muir (age 6), sister Lauren Muir (age 4), and Christopher Murray (age 5), all from the community of Idyllwild. These three precious children are an extremely small percentage of those who this team has helped ... a small percentage of those who Jim Fairchild has helped.

In September 1961 Jim was one of six men who founded RMRU. For over 45 years Jim has been and will be remembered as mountaineer, master tracker, rescuer, unit leader, first aid instructor, training chairman, newsletter editor, team photographer, operations leader, friend, guide, but mostly – teacher. There are those among us who have some, even many, of those gifts, but never to the degree of passion and commitment as Jim. Lost children, injured hikers and climbers too many to count owe their lives to Jim. But even untold more are alive today because of those who have followed in his footsteps ...

*Those members who he shared his God-given gift with.  
The gift of search and rescue.*



## Man Missing After Car Wreck

September 30, 2008  
Deep Canyon  
2008-030

By: Lew Kingman

The text messages were sent out to RMRU members regarding a search for a 42-year-old man whose new Hummer had gone over the side of a mountain road. The location was given as Cahuilla Vista Point on Highway 74, about 10 miles above Palm Desert. The point overlooks Deep Canyon, which is a very steep, deeply cut drainage running north out of the Santa Rosa Mountain area towards Palm Desert.

On arrival at the turnout, I saw a group of Sheriff's deputies, BLM Rangers, and several RMRU members. Apparently the 42-year-old man and his father had driven over the berm at the viewpoint and descended a few hundred yards before the car turned on its side. Able to extricate themselves, the father proceeded up the slope, while the son inexplicably ran down slope. Initial efforts to find him by firefighters and deputies only caused him to run away from them. The word was that the subject had removed all of his clothing at this point.

So this was not going to be an ordinary search for us. Considering the mental instability of the subject, and his apparent lack of physical injuries, and the onset of nightfall, the Sheriff's department told us we could initiate the search in the morning, and all teams in the field would have a Deputy accompany them for their safety.

The BLM Ranger suggested that we could utilize the Visitor Center for the Santa Rosa/San Jacinto National Monument as our base camp where support facilities and a helicopter landing area were available.

We met at 6 a.m. to organize our resources, where we were joined with a large number from the DSSAR team. As the Riverside Sheriff helicopter was not yet available, a helicopter came to our assistance from the CHP. With team members aboard as observers, the subject was quickly found. He was making his way down the canyon carrying an old tire, a piece of plastic sheeting, and a few other assorted items. And yes, he was still more or less without clothes. It was confirmed that he had on shoes, and what might be a jacket! The subject did not respond when efforts were made to communicate from the helicopter, and he would not even acknowledge them by looking upward. The CHP ship was not able to land any team members, but his condition and GPS coordinates were brought back to the base camp. A second flyover a short time later had difficulty finding the subject until the old tire he was carrying was seen outside of a cave-like entrance. When taken to a low hover, the subject was spotted lying inside with obvious physical injuries. He now seemed to acknowledge the helicopters presence with an arm wave. The CHP helicopter returned with the new coordinates and information.

It was here that a unique tool was utilized for the members of all the elements of the search. The Visitor Center had a large plasma screen installed as an educational tool

which utilized Google Earth. A center employee entered our subjects coordinates and "flew" us into the canyon to see the point where he was located. It was a unique setting, to see all members and agencies involved standing in a half circle around the large screen, and able to see where we had to go and what was needed to get there, all at the same time. An insertion point was chosen about a quarter of a mile below our subject where we could easily move up to his location. A team was selected to be inserted by the Sheriff's helicopter including one deputy, a member of DSSAR, and myself for medical assessment and treatment. About this time, our RSO helicopter arrived.

Taking two trips to shuttle the three of us into position, we were dropped on a rock several miles up in the narrow canyon. The canyon walls even sent down small rocks from the steep and loose material as the helicopter flew away. We walked up to the point where the cave-like entrance was, clearly like the image seen on the Google Earth screen. Our subject was lying at the base of a dry waterfall in a crevice deep enough to look like a cave. He acknowledged us, and allowed us to begin examination and treatment. His only garments were a black cape attached around his neck, a leather belt around his waist, and tennis shoes on his feet. With a follow up flight to bring medical equipment to stabilize him for the flight out, we carried him out enough into the open to have him hoisted up by the helicopter winch. He was then flown to medical care.

The three of us in the canyon waited for the return of the helicopter, which extracted us in two separate flights. When I was flown out, the crew needed to refuel at Thermal Airport, so I actually got three rides that day. And that was the end of a not so usual search and rescue operation. ■

## Missing Mentally Disabled Man

October 9, 2008  
Cabazon  
2008-031

By: Grace Manues

On Wednesday, October 8th, employees of the Water District found an abandoned vehicle on Water District property south of I-10. The car was traced back to a missing man from the East Coast. Records of his ATM usage showed that he had driven from the East Coast to Washington State, then south to Mexico, and back north ending his journey in Cabazon.

After Sheriff's deputies searched on Wednesday, more than a dozen members of RMRU and DSSAR joined the search Thursday afternoon. Typically we look for sign, such as tracks or other clues, that might give us a sense of his direction. High winds, soft sand, and vehicular and foot traffic left no indication of which way this gentleman headed. Complicating matters, we were told the man was schizophrenic and most likely off his medication. Further, we did not know whether he had driven there willingly, under coercion, or whether someone else dumped his car there. We had little to go on.



After combing the surrounding area until dusk, a more limited search was conducted Friday afternoon with a bloodhound. No hits. So a more extensive, grid-type search was planned for Saturday when more team members would be available. As we began assembling that chilly Saturday morning at 6:00 a.m., the disoriented subject was found by a Deputy a few blocks from the Sheriff's sub-station. ■

## Two Missing Hikers

October 20, 2008  
Idyllwild  
2008-032

By: Chad Marler

On October 20, 2008, around 9 p.m., a call went out to RMRU to search for two missing hikers who informed 911 with their cell phone that they had become lost after trying to cut between between South Ridge Trail and Ernie Maxwell Trail near Idyllwild. Sheriff's helicopter observer, deputy Eric Hannamen, informed me that they had spotted the two hikers approximately 500 yards south from the last house on Circle View Trail. Eric also provided GPS coordinates of the hikers. The party's cell phone battery died shortly after making this call.

I followed Circle View as far as the road would go and ended up at the house that Eric had described. Sergeant Sedwick and deputy Carrasco, and newest RMRU member, Bob Bakos arrived to this location shortly after I did. Because of deputy Hannamen's 500 yard estimation of the hikers location from this house, I called out for the subjects from this location. On my second call, I could faintly hear their return holler.

Bob Bakos and I then took to the steep loose terrain and frequently called out and listened to maintain our heading. After about 15 minutes of hiking, we were with the hikers who had lit a small signal fire which Bob and I carefully extinguished and told the party that they were lucky to contain this small fire in the middle of October.

The hikers were very happy to see us and explained that they made the mistake of trying to cut the trail to save time. They had no idea that they were only 500 yards from civilization and were pleased to learn the hike out would only be 15 minutes. Besides a few cuts on their legs and being tired and hungry, they were in good shape.

The hikers had no map, no food, light clothing, and a small amount of water. Facing the 40 degree night, the party greatly appreciated our timely assistance. The search terminated around 11 p.m.

Note: Bob Bakos drove from Nuevo to attend this mission and had work at 6 a.m. the next morning and still needed to find time to study sometime that night.

Also: Pete Carlson was on his way to this search from Lake Arrowhead but after I established voice contact, I called Pete to tell him we had this one handled. ■

## Missing Hunter

November 7-9, 2008  
Dinky Creek, Fresno County  
2008-033

By: Glenn Henderson

The team was called out on an OES (Office of Emergency Services) call to help search for a missing deer hunter in the Dinky Creek area of Fresno County. This was to be our training weekend in Joshua Tree but training was diverted to the search instead. We left in two vehicles at 5 p.m. on Friday evening. We arrived in Fresno at midnight, rented rooms and got a few hours sleep. We were at the Dinky Creek campground by 7 a.m. to get our assignments. Since none of us had ever been in the area (as were most out of county teams), we were assigned a search deputy from the Fresno Sheriff's department. The area is a maze of dirt roads with few if any signs. We were assigned to David Rippe. Our team of eleven were split into two teams and sent into two areas. It was fairly cold with patches of snow on the ground. Our missing hunter had been missing since last Saturday, November 1. His truck was parked off the side of a dirt road with only his deer rifle and four bullets from a box of bullets missing. Everything else was still in his truck. It looked like he saw something and was planning on not being gone long.

We got to our search area, started up our GPS units and spread our team out to search along a creek to the end of a dirt road. We completed our search in 4 hours and radioed in for another assignment. We got that and finished at dark. We returned to base camp to be debriefed and were released to return home. We all returned to Fresno for the night and drove home Sunday, getting in about 3 p.m. Kirk Cloyd remained at Dinky Creek as his truck would not start. He stayed and took another search assignment on Sunday while a tow truck was hired to tow the vehicle to a repair shop. Kirk got home at midnight, Sunday night.

Members attending were, Kirk Cloyd, Gwenda Yates, Kevin Walker, Glenn Henderson, Lee Arnson, Chad Marler, Jim Manues, Roger May, Rob May, Nick Nixon, and Brian Wood.

As of February 7, 2009 no sign has been found of our missing deer hunter.

Fresno did a great job of running this operation. As soon as we arrived in base camp they had our assignments ready and when our first assignment was finished and we asked for another, it was ready in about 10 minutes. They had breakfast, lunches, and dinner ready for all searchers. They did a great job of keeping us informed at the morning briefing and of anything new as we returned to base. They did a very professional job. ■



## Hikers Stranded

December 29, 2008  
Chino Canyon, Palm Springs Tram  
2008-035

By: Glenn Henderson

We received a call from our aviation unit at 7 p.m., that we might be needed for a rescue in Chino Canyon. Four hikers had left Palm Springs and intended to hike up to the Lower Palm Springs Tram. They became separated and two had gotten lost. They called in on a cell phone and Star 9 was able to locate them but was not able to land and get them out. They called RMRU so Will Carlson, Pete Carlson and I, Glenn Henderson, responded to the lower tram. Since I got there first and was ready to go when Star 9 landed then flew me in and lowered me down to our two shivering hikers. I quickly got a harness on each of them and called for Star 9 to winch each of us up. With 4 of us in the back of the helicopter it was quite cozy but we were able to get everyone out in one trip. We were all home by midnight. ■

## Missing Hiker

February 3, 2009  
Suicide Rock/Humber Park  
2009-001

Part 1, Tuesday, By: Chad Marler

At 9:44 p.m. our team was called to search for a lost hiker who was believed to be near Suicide Rock. Lee Arson and I arrived to Humber Park where we were briefed by the attending Sheriff, who had spoken to the subject's concerned sister in Arizona, that the man in his mid 30's had left Humber Park at 11 a.m. and had expected to return to his car by 4 p.m. The subject had made a cell phone call around 1 p.m. that had "pinged" off a tower in Idyllwild and had placed the call 3.1 miles from that tower.

Lee and I knew that 3.1 miles placed him nowhere near Suicide Rock so we started up the Devils Slide Trail towards Saddle Junction. Approximately 3/4 mile up the trail we looked towards Suicide Rock where we spotted a light coming from near the top of the massive rock. We called out many times and did not get a response. Because this light was so obvious and clear to our eye we decided to head back down the trail and move towards Suicide Rock and investigate, keeping in mind that the original report was that our subjects destination was Suicide Rock.

Calling out along the way, Lee and I scrambled up snow covered rocks and logs along the climbers trail where we eventually reached the top of Suicide Rock. The light source was now gone and we failed to get a response which proved very frustrating. The time was 2 a.m. and we decided to clear Deer Springs Trail back to Highway 243. We called a Sheriff to provide a ride back to our vehicle and decided to call it a night around 4:30 a.m. The next morning the search

continued and Lee and I, tired from the late night before, joined other team members. See below for details on February 4th.

Thoughts and critiques of this Tuesday night mission...

It is my opinion that we should have mapped out 3.1 miles from the Idyllwild cell phone tower (Which actually placed the subject near Willow Creek where he was extracted the next day) prior to starting our search. In hind sight, because we did not get a response from the top of Suicide Rock from Devils Slide Trail, we should have continued towards the saddle and not of turned back. Our thoughts at the time were the light was so obvious and it had to be investigated. To this day we still don't know what produced the light.

Part 2, Wednesday, by Pete Carlson

We arrived at Humber Park at 8 a.m. to search for a missing hiker who had been missing over night. Lee and I started up the Devil Slide Trail to the Saddle and then were going to search the valley systems to see if he had gone that way. Jim M, Chad, and Tom followed us up to the saddle and then headed up towards Tahquitz Peak. Grace and Lew headed up the climbers trail to Tahquitz Rock. We really had no clear idea where the hiker had gone and had conflicting reports from relatives. The upper part of the trail to the saddle was covered with hard snow and ice and is tricky to get up without failing. Once in the valley systems Lee and I went across the valleys looking for fresh prints and found none. During this time the subject had contacted his Mom by cell phone and said he was OK, but lost and could see a city in the desert. Grace and Lew had finished their assignment and went back to base. Then Lew, Jim B, and Ray went around and started up the South Ridge Trail. We also got help from the Desert Sheriff's Search and Rescue team (DSSAR). DSSAR members were sent to Gardner Valley to hike up to the PCT and look for any fresh prints on that trail. Also a DSSAR team covered the Ernie Maxwell Trail. Nothing was found by anyone. Using cell phone technology we found out a direction back from the cell tower to his phone. We then had the Riverside County Sheriff fly their helicopter along that line and sure enough they spotted the missing hiker way down in Tahquitz Canyon. They were able to pick him up and fly him back to base.

After talking to the subject we found out he had gone up the Devil Slide Trail and then started up to Tahquitz Peak. He stopped to eat and decide that it was getting late and he would go back. He could not find the trail from the rock he had lunch on and started back in what he thought was the correct direction. By 3 p.m. he knew he was going the wrong way, but was getting cold and wet in the snow, so he decided to follow a stream that would take him down out of the snow and back to a road. In the local mountains of southern California following a stream down to a road is the wrong thing to do. Most stream end up in steep canyons and it can be over 10 miles to get to a road. He did get down out of the snow and gathered fire wood and started a fire to dry out and keep warm. The next morning after no sleep, but warm, he started



down Tahquitz Canyon. This canyon is 12-15 miles long and has many water falls over 100 feet. The hiker literally wore the soles off his hiking boots and then wore out his socks. When he was picked up he was hiking barefoot, still trying to get out.

It was hard to decide where to search on this one and we did not think the hiker would have gone that far based on first reports from relatives. We had other team members working base camp and several more arriving as he was found. We would not have found his tracks until the next day if the helicopter had not found him. All in all it was a good team effort with help from DSSAR and the Riverside Sheriff. The hiker was correct in going down to get out of the snow and starting a fire was a smart thing to do. But then he should have stayed with the fire and keep it going during the day making it smoke a lot. If he had done that he would have been picked up first thing in the morning by the helicopter, not late afternoon walking it bare feet. ■

### Fallen Hiker Lost

February 5, 2009  
Skyline Trail, San Jacinto Mountains  
2009-002

By: William Carlson

Having enjoyed my first "lazy day" in over a month, I dozed off reading a book. The loud, unexpected, noise of my pager woke me up. I learned that RMRU had been called out to rescue a hiker who had fallen down an ice chute while on a day hike up the Skyline Trail out of Palm Springs. He was wearing shorts and a t-shirt and it was now snowing on him. My dad, Pete Carlson, and I quickly packed our winter call-out packs and headed for the lower Palm Springs Tramway.

We arrived at the lower tram parking lot at 10 p.m. Jim and Grace Manues, Chad, Lew, Nick Nixon, Jim and Robert Bakos, Brian Wood, and Lee were waiting for us in the tram car. Grace had spoken with subject and learned that although he could not see the tramway, he could hear the tram. As we all headed up we shouted from the tram car, and toward the top received word that he had heard our calls. Listening to the wind from the comfort of the tram car we were not terribly excited about heading outside.

Once at the upper tram station we moved all of the team gear to what we call the "command room." There we put the final touches on packing gear and discussed our best course of action. We decided, initially, to send in five members to reach the subject and determine what, if any, other gear and personnel would be needed. Jim Manues, Pete, Chad, Lee, and I would be teamed together as the initial five. We knew the conditions were bad, but were not expecting what was to come.

As our group of five opened the tramway door leading outside, we were greeted by a gust of wind so strong it almost pushed us back inside. Our only hope was to reach the bottom of the ramp, leading away from the tram, where we would be able to turn and put our backs to the wind. Snow was still falling and every wind-driven flake that reached bare

skin felt like the pierce of a needle. Once we reached the bottom of the ramp we placed crampons on our boots to help with footing. The blizzard like conditions made for slow going.

As we began to descend the north-facing slope we became a little more sheltered from the wind. Our progress remained slow as we descended a mixture of snow-covered ice, snow covered rocks, and snow covered rocks on top of ice. We called out to the subject frequently and after approximately an hour and descending almost 2,000 feet, we got a response. A few minutes later we were to the subject.

Emin was huddled against a tree in the middle of a fifty-degree ice chute. He was only wearing a tee shirt, a light sweatshirt, and shorts and was dusted with snow. His boots were still on his feet, but were torn apart from the fall. It was apparent that Emin was extremely cold.

Because of the steepness of the slope it took a few minutes to situate ourselves. We chopped a ledge out of the snow and put down a sleeping pad. We then moved Emin onto the pad and took off all of his wet clothes. We then gave him some dry clothes and placed him in a sleeping bag. Knowing the danger Emin would be in if we were not able to warm him up we also poured hot water into bottles and placed them in the sleeping bag with him.

We continued to warm Emin and learned how he ended up where he was. Apparently he had lost the trail at the top of the ice chute and slipped while looking for it. He had fallen a little more than 400 feet when he was able to catch himself on a tree. After a few attempts he realized he was not going to be able to move without falling further down the ice chute. That's when he called for help.

It was now 1 a.m. and we knew we were not going to be able to spend the night in the middle of the chute. Lee and Pete hiked to the top of the chute and decided that it would be a more suitable location to spend the night. Pete and I climbed back to the top of the chute and set up a tent while Lee, Jim, and Chad prepared Emin for the climb to the top. The wind was really beginning to pick up so once the tent was up Pete remained to keep it from blowing away. I returned to the others to begin setting up a rope system.

We decided the best method would be to set up a system of running belays, which would allow us to safely leapfrog our way to the top. I set the first two belay stations while Lee, Chad, and Jim figured out a way to put Emin's boots back together as they had blown apart in the fall. They then placed crampons on Emin's feet and we began to move. Progress was slow due to the steepness of the chute and the combination of snow, ice, and rocks. Emin was extremely weak and remained cold even while moving. We knew the situation was bad and how important it was to move Emin to an area we could better help him. Lee and I leapfrogged the belay system to the top as Jim and Chad assisted Emin up the slope.

The wind was really gusting when we got to the top. Gusts strong enough to bring us to our knees blasted us as we moved Emin into the tent. It was now 2 a.m. and most everyone was exhausted. Pete, Jim, Chad, and Emin spent the remainder of the night in the tent, while Lee and I stayed in bivvy sacks outside. Although each of us did get some sleep,



for the most part it was a restless night. The wind never let up, and continued to batter us though the night. You could hear each gust coming ten or more seconds before it would hit. We were dreading its impact every time.

It continued to snow on and off throughout the night. Morning brought a slight clearing, but the winds continued to blow. Knowing that the helicopter would not be able to fly we packed up and started down the Skyline Trail. The winds began to subside and eventually we all began to warm up. Finally we got the break we were looking for. The sun came out.

Not long after we called for a helicopter we heard the sound of an A-Star from the Riverside Sheriff's Department. In a matter of minutes the pilot picked out a location for a hover-stop a few feet from us. Emin was quickly loaded on board and the helicopter headed back just as the clouds began to rebuild. With another storm approaching we knew we might not have another opportunity to bring in a helicopter. We continued hiking. Because we were now out of the snow and out of water, Robert and Brian started up the Skyline Trail. Their packs were loaded with breakfast burritos and water for all.

A few hours of hiking brought us another opportunity to bring in a helicopter. However, the new storm had already set in over Hemet and the Riverside Sheriff's Department helicopter could not take off. Luck was on our side! Landell's Aviation did have a helicopter available. Within twenty minutes we were back at the lower tram parking lot. A huge thanks to Elaine Landell, owner of Landell's Aviation, for the unexpected use of her helicopter and to Steve DeJesus for his skilled flying. Also, we would like to thank the Riverside Sheriff's Department helicopter crew for taking a chance, and picking up our subject. It would have taken another eight or more hours to walk Emin down to the trailhead.

Members Present: Jim and Grace Manues, Jim and Robert Bakos, Pete and William Carlson, Lee Arnson, Chad Marler, Lew Kingman, Nick Nixon, and Brian Wood. ■

### **Hiker Missing in Heavy Snow**

March 1, 2009  
Palm Springs Tram, San Jacinto Mountains  
2009-003

By: Bob Bakos

While I was kicking-back on my day off, I received a page around 1830 for a late hiker coming out of the Skyline trail (a treacherous route in our mountains). We learned he was at an approximate elevation of 7500 feet, or about 1000 feet below the level of the Palm Springs Tram.

Pete Carlson, Dana Potts, Dave Webb, Michael George, Jeff Toscas and I responded to the page and met at the lower Tram station. After a minimal briefing by the sheriff's deputy in charge it was decided to send in a hasty crew including: Dave, Pete and myself. We went down to the subjects to initiate the rescue, while a second crew of Dana and Michael would then deploy into the field once they had established a base of operations.

Snow conditions on the way down were terrible in that the snow was very easy to punch through, often times sinking up to our hips. This invariably slowed progress down the Skyline Trail. Faint voice contact had been established around 2130. Visual contact of the subjects waving their headlamps occurred around 2200. The initial subject was found at 2230, with his friend who was wrapped in an emergency blanket, wearing shorts and no shoes or socks.

The subject's friend had apparently convinced him to do the hike expecting very different conditions and, once the subject had been forced to stop due to exhaustion, the friend continued up the trail until his "guilty conscious" forced him to come back down and wait it out with the subject. Both gentlemen lacked any trauma or any other medical concerns.

Both were given water, food, and warmer clothes and were convinced to proceed up with the aid of Team 1. Team 2 had reached the launching pad prior to Team 1 making contact with the subject, but was advised to return to the warmth of the tram station and await further instructions. Team 1 initially started up the trail with subjects at 2300 and through gradual process Team 1 and the subjects reached the tram station at 0300 where they were given food, water and coffee, and the opportunity to rest for a couple hours 'till the first tram car would take them down. ■

### **Climbers Rescued on North Face**

March 3, 2009

Mt. San Jacinto

2009-004

By: William Carlson

It's six o'clock in the morning and I find myself standing with a group of friends. The wind is gusting and the first rays of light are revealing clear skies. I look up at the 10,000 feet we could potentially climb and briefly think about the warm bed I left at 4 a.m. We are standing at the base of the North Face of San Jacinto Peak and the friends are all members of the Riverside Mountain Rescue Unit.

We received a call Monday night that two climbers were twenty-four hours overdue from a climb on the North Face. The climbers, Chris and Andrew, had left early Saturday morning in an attempt to climb the North Face. The two climbers expected to finish by Sunday evening. By Monday night, family members were beginning to worry.

Standing in the blustery pre-dawn conditions we worked to formulate a plan. We already had team members Nick Nixon and Tom Mahood hiking toward the summit of San Jacinto from the top of the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway. Their primary goal was to search the summit hut and look for tracks leading out of the North Face route. At this point we also had our Riverside Sheriff's Office helicopter flying a search pattern up the North Face. Upon an initial search the helicopter did not locate our subjects but had located two sets of footprints leading into avalanche debris and disappearing.

We wanted to get a closer look at the avalanche debris to try and see if the tracks walked over the debris and also



to get into the area and check the current snow conditions. Lee Arnson and I were flown into the 7,000-foot level on the North face, just above where the footprints disappeared. We quickly located faint tracks walking over the past avalanche. We then spent some time digging a snow pit to check the snow stability allowing the helicopter to continue searching further up the North Face. We found the snow to be stable and well consolidated which allowed us to continue up.

We began climbing the mixed snow and ice slope mentally preparing for a long day. We were both excited to be climbing in such beautiful conditions. With every step came the crunching sound of ice beneath our crampons. We were making good time and hoped the two sets of footprints would lead us to the overdue climbers. We climbed 300 feet in just over five minutes and took a quick break to take off some layers. The climbing was steep and we did not want to over-heat.

Just then the helicopter spotted a lone person waiving from up on a rock. Hopeful this was one of our climbers we waited to hear from the helicopter. A drop bag was lowered to the lone climber with a radio and water. We learned that Chris and Andrew were not injured, just tired and hungry. The snow was soft which made for slow going. They were just below Kristen Peak and we told them to continue up to that summit.

The helicopter returned and picked up Lee and I and took us to a clearing on the ridge above Kristen Peak. We were lowered by hoist and walked down the ridge to meet and confirm that we had located Chris and Andrew. We broke trail for them back up to the helispot. The sun was now out in full force and the snow was very soft. The view was spectacular. Clear skies and snow all around. We would have loved to have stayed out and climbed the rest of the day. However, Chris and Andrew were hungry and really wanted to go to Sizzler, so we waited for the helicopter to return from refueling.

The helicopter returned and, after two successful trips, brought us safely back to basecamp on Snow Creek Road. We talked to Chris and Andrew briefly and watched as they were reunited with their families. We were once again a group of friends standing beneath an intimidating mountain face in the gusty desert winds.

Members Present: Nick Nixon, Tom Mahood, Kevin Walker, Chad Marler, Lee Arnson, William Carlson, Pete Carlson, Rob May, Pilot: Tony Bowen and TFO: Erik Basham, Andy Rasmussen ■

## **Two Missing Hikers Near Palm Springs Tram**

March 8, 2009  
San Jacinto Wilderness  
2009-005

By: *Fresh Tracks* Staff

RMRU has been called out this afternoon to search for a man and woman reported lost in the San Jacinto Wilderness near the Palm Springs Tram. ■

## **Teen Missing One Month in San Diego County**

March 15, 2009  
Escondido, San Diego County  
2009-006

By: Patrick McCurdy

RMRU was asked to assist today in an ongoing search for Amber Dubois, a 14-year-old girl who tragically went missing a month ago while walking a few blocks from her home to her high school. She has not been seen since and authorities have no solid clues in the case.

Glenn Henderson, Jeff Toscas, and myself drove down on Sunday morning to join over 100 members of over a dozen different search and rescue teams from San Diego, Imperial, Riverside, San Bernardino, Orange, and Los Angeles Counties in a large effort to locate Amber. We searched an area near the highway, going over our assigned area twice to make sure we didn't miss anything.

The search turned up no evidence of Amber and she remains missing. Our thoughts and prayers are with Amber and her family. ■

## **Man Missing Near San Jacinto Summit**

April, 7th 2009  
Mount San Jacinto  
2009-007

By: Lee Arnson

The beginning of every mission brings about many questions, the one we could not answer at the time is why we were told to meet at the Palm Springs tram at 5:00 A.M. when it doesn't even open until 6:15. None the less, there we all were staring at a locked gate in the early morning hours wondering how our day was going to proceed.

The only information we had so far was that our subject, "Perry" left on a day hike the previous day with a friend. At the end of the hike, only the friend made it back to his car, at which time he called 911 and then we were called out.

We had phone contact with Perry earlier in the evening and we knew he wasn't injured, just stuck to the point where he could not get out. We also had a rough idea of where he might be.

Finally, 6:15 rolled around and we were able to catch the first tram car from the valley floor to the mountain station. Grace Manues stayed back to act as operations leader and possible observer on Star 9, our sheriff's helicopter. The rest of us, Nick Nixon, Tom Mahood, Jim Manues, Les Walker and myself decided we would make the hike to Shagri-La and then onto the overlook which would give us a clear view of the Eastern ridgeline leading up to Cornell Peak. This is some of the steepest, roughest country in the San Jacinto's and as we all gathered at the overlook I know we were all thinking the same thing... "Man, I hope he's not down there".

We called the subjects name as a group several times and got no response. Eventually the "thump, thump, thump"



of Star 9 broke the morning silence and we all held our positions as the helicopter started searching the canyons below.

It wasn't long before Star 9 called in and said they spotted the subject in the middle of a very steep looking ice chute at the 8000 foot level. Grace was able to make phone contact with Perry while Star 9 was overhead and it was confirmed this was our guy and there were no injuries.

Star 9 was now asking for one rescuer to high-tail it down to Long Valley to be flown in to do a hoist rescue. I was chosen to do this, so once again I find myself running thru the woods with a 40 pound pack on my back.

Before boarding Star 9, I asked if I could put my crampons on, something not normally done, but since I was to be lowered into the middle of the ice chute, this made sense to the pilot and the T.F.O. I now had to be extra careful not to touch or scratch anything in the million dollar bird.

We flew back to where the subject was and I was lowered down with my ice axe and the "screamer suit" for the subject clipped to my sit harness. As my feet touched down, I was thankful for having my crampons on. The ice was hard on what appeared to be a 45 degree slope.

Perry helped with getting the screamer suit on and then was hoisted on board the hovering helicopter, I was the lifted up and we were flown to the lower parking lot of the Palm Springs Tram.

This mission was a success thanks to all who participated and to the amazing flying abilities of the Sheriff's Aviation Unit. ■

### **Injured Hiker Saddle Junction**

May, 2nd 2009  
Saddle Junction  
2009-008

By Grace Manues

RMRU was called to assist Cal Fire and Idyllwild Fire with the evacuation of an injured hiker with a suspected broken ankle. The hiker was near Saddle Junction, 2.5 miles above Humber Park. However, good weather and availability allowed the Riverside Sheriff's Aviation Unit to land nearby and quickly evacuate the injured hiker to the Lake Hemet Sheriff Substation.

Responding team members included some of RMRU's newest members who were just returning from an all day, multi-team training exercise in Joshua Tree; they included Les Walker, Chuck Springer, Tom Mahood, and Bob Bakos. Other veteran team members responding included Pete Carlson, William Carlson, Grace Manues, Jim Manues and Dana Potts. Thanks to all. And a special thanks to Henry Negrete of Idyllwild Fire for keeping us posted on the situation. ■

### **Missing Hiker on the Skyline Route**

May 24, 2009  
Skyline Trail - Palm Springs Tram  
2009-009

By: *Fresh Tracks* Staff

RMRU was called out Sunday evening for a missing hiker on the Skyline Route. The subject and his friend had hiked more than halfway up the Skyline Route when the subject was overcome by heat and exhaustion. Unable to continue upward to the Tram, the friend turned around and descended into the heat of the valley floor. The friend left the subject with water and told him to stay put, he would send help. The friend, severely dehydrated, made it to the trailhead and notified authorities of the subject's plight -- As RMRU began assembling, we were notified that the subject had just hiked out on his own.

While hiking downhill might seem attractive when you are hot and tired, it can prove to be a fatal decision. One week earlier, another hiker in his late twenties died from heat stroke under very similar circumstances. It was reported that his core temperature was 108 degrees. There are many hikers who love the Skyline and hike it on a regular basis, but they WILL NOT hike the Skyline during the heat of the summer. There is no water on this route and it is very exposed. Please do not underestimate the danger of heat exhaustion and heat stroke. Save the Skyline for later in the year when temperatures are cooler. There are many other beautiful and challenging trails in the San Jacintos. ■

### **Tahquitz Rock Climber Calls for Help**

May 31, 2009  
Idyllwild, Tahquitz Rock  
2009-010

By: Pete Carlson

We got the call around 2pm that someone had heard a climber calling for help from Tahquitz Rock. Arriving at Humber Park I was informed that (Les Walker, Jim Manues, and Randy Yates) were already hiking up the North East side of Tahquitz Rock to find if anyone was in trouble. Bob Bakos and myself started hiking up to Lunch Rock to see if we could find anyone in trouble. Both groups talked to climbers coming down from the rock and no one had heard anyone calling for help. Meanwhile at base (Gwenda Yates, Grace Manues, Nick Nixon, Patrick McCurdy, Jeff Toscas, Dave Webb, and Brad Scott) had arrived and were waiting to see if they would be needed in the field.

We found nothing to indicate anyone in need and returned to base. At that time the Sheriff called off the search and decided that the person probably just heard climbers calling to each other as they always do. We had a nice dinner in Idyllwild and returned home by 9pm. ■



## **Skyline Trail Hiker Stranded**

July 26, 2009  
Palm Springs Tramway  
2009-011

By: Pete Carlson

We received a call at 8pm that a man was off the Skyline Trail around the 5,000 foot level and stuck. He was tried and could not find his way up or down. While we were packing up and starting to drive to the Tramway we got another call at 8:50pm that the man had gotten back on the trail and was able to make it out on his own. ■

## **Fallen Hiker on Deer Springs Trail**

August 1, 2009  
Marion Mt Trail  
2009-012

By: Pete Carlson

At 7pm the Sheriff called us about a man who had taken a fall on the Deer Springs Trail and was injured. William and I quickly grabbed our gear and started the drive to the trailhead. Team members Chad Marler and Les Walker who live in Idyllwild got to the trail quickly and started the 90 minute hike up several thousand feet to where the hiker was reported to be located. The State Park personnel in the area hiked over and found the man and determined he was not badly injured and he was going to hike out on his own. We were told that we were not needed around 8pm and everyone returned home. ■

## **Overdue Hikers San Jacinto Peak**

August 1, 2009  
Marion Mt Trail  
2009-013

By: Pete Carlson

We had just had a call earlier in the evening and now we were asleep in bed when the call came at 11:30pm. The report was that a man and his son had not returned from a day hike to San Jacinto Peak from the Tramway. The Sheriff's Helicopter was searching and we were requested to be at the Tramway at 5:45am for the first morning car up at 6am. Around Midnight the Helicopter spotted the hikers and they were OK, just waiting for daylight. The San Jacinto State Park Rangers said they would go escort the hikers down at first light. So we were told we would not be needed and went back to sleep. ■

## **Missing Man in Idyllwild**

August 10, 2009  
Idyllwild  
2009-014

By: Les Walker

Approximately 5 pm RMRU received the call out for a missing man suffering from Alzheimer who had wandered away from his home in Idyllwild. There was a huge response from RMRU, The local volunteer Mountain Community Patrol and DSAR was on stand by if needed.

The search ended soon after the call out, with the man being found a short distance away from his home by some passing tourist on highway 243. The man had fallen in a driveway and needed medical attention, Idyllwild Fire attended to him and transported him to a local hospital. ■

## **Missing Mountain Biker Pinyon Pines**

September, 23,24 2009  
Idyllwild  
2009-015

By: Les Walker

Curt Johnson 54 a Pinyon Pines resident with potential health issues was reported lost on his mountain bike somewhere between Pinyon and Palm Desert along Dunn Road. Approximately 7 pm Wednesday RMRU received the call out for the missing man on his mountain bike.

Lew Kingman, Nick Nixon, Chuck Springer, Randy Yates, Brain Wood and Les Walker responded on scene with Gwenda Yates handling phone communications from the Hemet base.

The Team assembled at the north gate of Palm Canyon Road South and Dunn Road in Pinyon Pines where Riverside Sheriff unlocked the gate and we began the search for Mr Johnson.

We encountered a visible mountain bike track down Dunn Road and continued to follow it in our vehicles until it wandered off track and into a sand wash. From there Team One of Walker and Springer followed on foot with their rescue packs. Nick Nixon came up with the idea of comparing the bike track Team One was tracking with the bike track outside of Mr. Johnson's home. Yates and Wood "Team Two" returned to My Johnson's house to photograph the bike track pattern outside his home and returned to meet up with Team One to confirm track.

After having a positive match we knew we where on the right path and continued down Palm Creek wash following Mr. Johnson's track. After 5 miles we found Mr. Johnson's bike abandoned where he continued down the wash on foot. The Team notified the mobile base of Nixon and Kingman of the bikes position and then continued down the path following Mr. Johnson's footprints. We followed the prints over many rocks, down small cliffs and down a few waterfalls over the next 10 miles throughout the night.



We took a small break on a high ridge above the canyon at dawn to get a better visual and radio contact with then now DSAR coming up from below. After confirming our location with Kingman, Nixon and DSAR we dropped down into the canyon again to follow Mr. Johnson's track. Approximately one mile from the end of the canyon, we received a radio communication from DSAR that Mr. Johnson had walked out and was ok, exhausted but ok.

Now at 7:30 am the Riverside Sheriff's helicopter offered the Team a much-needed ride back up the canyon to our vehicles.

## Stranded Marines Skyline Trail

October 16, 2009  
Skyline Trail  
2009-016

By: Nick Nixon

The first callout text came just after 6:00 pm on Friday, October 16, 2009. Gwenda advised me that a group of seven Marines were on Skyline Trail and were in need of water. Apparently a group of about 26 Marines started up Skyline trail Friday morning. They divided into three groups, a fast group, medium speed group and a slow group. The first two groups made it to Long Valley without any problem. However, the seven individuals in the slow group became even slower as the heat of the day hit and they ran low on water. One of the Marines that made it to Long Valley went to the Ranger Station about 1:30 pm and reported that the slow seven were having problems due to the heat and inadequate hydration. Ranger Sahl and one Park Aid filled their packs with water bottles and started down Skyline. One early estimate was that the Marines were about 3,000 vertical feet down from Grubbs Notch (also called the "launching pad"). That would leave the steepest part of Skyline to still be climbed.

I got a quick start towards the tram. Three other RMRU members – Carlos Carter, Les Walker and Chuck Springer responded but were some distance behind. It appeared they would be about an hour behind me. Upon arriving at the tram I went to Grubbs Notch. One experienced State Park Volunteer was waiting for someone else to accompany him down with water. It was already dark, the tram was only scheduled to run until 9:45 pm, and I believed that the next RMRU member was an hour behind (I later found out that Carlos Carter was only about 15 minutes behind me). The Park Volunteer and I started down with ten liters of water. Those of you who have been down Skyline know that the trail is very hard to identify towards the top. It is even worse in the dark. The footing can be very bad. In any event, the Park Volunteer and I met up with the first six Marines and Ranger Sahl at about the middle of the "traverse of the fluted ridges". The Park Aid was behind them with the last Marine who was moving very slowly and having problems with dizziness and a headache. We gave half of our water to the first six and then headed down toward the last Marine and Park Aid. We met up with them starting the traverse. After hydrating the Marine

we started up very slowly.

Carlos, Les and Chuck positioned themselves at Grubbs Notch and maintained radio contact with us. The last couple of hundred vertical feet, Les and Chuck came down with water and to assist us up the final slope. Les was even kind enough to carry my pack. I wasn't so proud to pass up that offer. The tram stayed open to carry us down at 11:00 pm.

This ultimately was a successful joint effort by the State Park and RMRU. The Marines were very appreciative and I'm not sure if they called me "sir" out of military courtesy or respect for my advanced age. Anyway, all went well and everyone was fine. ■

## *A note from the Editor*

When I joined this elite team, I had a mentor, his name was Jim Fairchild. Jim didn't teach me Technical Rock Skills, or Search and Tracking, and, literally, nothing about Snow and Ice.

He taught me to feel compassion for my fellow man.

He taught me how to be a Rescuer.

To quote: "If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants" -- Isaac Newton.

God bless you Jim Fairchild. We do miss you.

-- Jim B. ■



*Jim Fairchild tending to a fellow injured RMRU member.*



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