

**RIMRU**

*Fresh Tracks*

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## **Eight Hikers Stranded**

May 12, 2008  
Windy Point, near Palm Springs  
2008-008

By Patrick McCurdy

On the morning of Saturday, May 12th, eight hikers, all in their early twenties, set out to hike from the top of the Palm Springs Tram down Blaisdell Canyon to a vehicle parked down along Highway 111. While a couple of them carried adequate water, most of them carried only one liter each - far too little for this time of year. Late in the afternoon four of the hikers became dehydrated, with cramps, and thought they could not go on. Leaving those four with most of the remaining water, the remaining four decided to hike out and get assistance. RMRU was notified at 7:30 p.m. and was on scene within forty-five minutes.

By the time we got there the party of four hiking out had found a cache of bottled water and two of this group hiked the water back up to the original four, while the remaining two continued to hike out for help. Shortly thereafter we were informed that all eight, possibly in three different groups, were hiking out and we could see headlamps on the terrain above us.

Two RMRU members, Pete Carlson and Lee Arnson, blazed overland (off trail) up to the descending hikers, while four others (myself, Jeff Toscas, Brad Scott, and Jeri Sanchez) all piled in Jeri's SUV to try to find a dirt road the led up closer to the subjects. Lee and Pete intercepted the descending group and were able to give us directions to a rough road from which we would be able to drive out all subjects and rescuers, so we (now joined by Michael George) returned to base for 4WD vehicles, found the road, and ferried everyone involved back to the incident command post (which was run by Gwenda Yates, Glenn Henderson, and Kevin Walker). The whole mission was wrapped up by about 11 p.m.

Lesson 1: The party had been warned not to try this trail this late in the year, but ignored the advice. This area can be quite hot and devoid of water this time of year, requiring extra precautions when hiking. They carried far too little water for a day-long hike.

Lesson 2: Headlamps are relatively cheap and very light. It's a good idea to pack one even if you don't anticipate being out after dark. I'm sure the one young man who hiked miles last night be the light of his cell phone will be packing one from now on! ■

## **Missing 11-Year-Old Boy**

May 18, 2007  
Near Mountain Center  
2007-009

By Fresh Tracks Staff

RMRU got the call for a boy missing from his home on a small acreage near Mountain Center. His parents insisted that they had searched the property and that he wasn't there. As RMRU field teams were starting to deploy, a deputy found the boy hiding in some bushes near the house. ■

## **Hiker Down With Compound Fracture to Leg**

May 27th, 2007  
Wellman's Divide  
2007-010

By Glenn Henderson

Team President Gwenda Yates and I were at our new training tower getting ready to practice jumaring up ropes and had just finished setting up the ropes when Gwenda's phone rang. Sure enough, it was dispatch calling about a hiker with a broken leg near Wellman's Divide. Gwenda asked me, "Do you want to fly?" "Star 9, our Sheriff's helicopter unit, made the call and wanted one RMRU person to be inserted via winch to assist the Park Service personnel that were almost on scene. RSO had talked to them and State Parks said they would have our victim, Julie Hennes, packaged and ready for transport when we got there. Since I already had my harness and helmet on plus my rescue pack was with me I took off for the hanger at Hemet Ryan Airport. It took about 15 minutes to get there and pilot Tony Bowen and observer/winch operator, John Irish were almost ready to go. It was almost 7:30 p.m. and we only had about 40 minutes of daylight left. We lifted off and were on scene in about 15 minutes. John hooked me to the winch and lowered me into a small clearing and then sent down the litter.

Tony then gained altitude and circled while I and State Parks personnel carried the litter about 100 yards down the trail to Julie. Her ankle had a really bad compound fracture that they had already splinted. We rolled her onto the litter, strapped her in and carried her back to the small clearing I had landed in. I have to admire her, she never complained even though I know she was in great pain. Tony flew back and John lowered the hook down again. I hooked her up and they lifted her to the helicopter and flew her to Desert Hospital in Palm Springs, about a five minute flight.

The PLAN was for them to fly back to Round Valley where they could land and then pick me up to fly home. It is a 30-minute hike to Round Valley so the State Parks and I took off immediately. At Round Valley, they said their good bys and left for Long Valley and home. I figured about 30 minutes for them to fly back. It was a spectacular evening to be in the mountains, no wind, a little cool; the moon was rising bright enough that I could see deer moving across the valley.

I waited another 30 minutes, then another 30 minutes, then another 15 minutes when I decided they weren't coming back for me. Ooooookay, I guess I'll hike out to the upper Palm Springs Tram, catch a tram car down and call for someone to come get me. It's about a 2-mile hike and mostly downhill so it would not take long to get there. About 15 minutes down the trail I heard the WHAP, WHAP, of the helicopter coming back.

Just my luck, too far to go back before I knew they would take off again when I didn't meet them. I was using their radio, as I did not have mine with me. I called them but no answer. They did take off and began searching for me along the trail calling me on the radio. When I answered, no response.

My radio would receive but would not transmit. I knew that they knew I was hiking out but I wanted to assure them I was ok but this piece of \_\_\_\_ radio would still not transmit, even when they were right over me but couldn't see me because of the trees. They continued calling so I picked up the



pace to get to the tram as fast as possible. After a while I could not hear the helicopter any more but could still hear them calling me on their radio. I knew then that they had landed on top of the upper tram station and were waiting. I quickly met them there and complained about the radio and that I was glad to see them. I thought they had been called out on another call but they were stuck at the hospital waiting to get the litter back.

They never did get it back and left without it. We lifted off and flew back to the hanger. My thanks to Tony and John for a great job of flying and to the State Parks Service, they did a great job of having Julie ready when I got there. It really was an easy mission for all except Julie. We all hope for her speedy recovery and will someday see her hiking in the San Jacintos again. ■

## **Two Lost Hikers Found Safe**

May 29th, 2007  
Cactus Springs Trail  
2007-011

By Patrick McCurdy

On the long Memorial Day weekend, four backpackers decided to hike the Cactus Springs Trail near Pinyon Pines. On Sunday, two decided to head home to Orange County while two others, Jonathan and Jeni, decided to stay out through the following day. That afternoon Jonathan and Jeni got separated from their camp and were reported missing when they didn't show up at home Monday night.

RMRU was called out that night and had several search teams in the field, searching all night long in the dry, rugged terrain for the two missing backpackers. Additional, Riverside County Sheriff's helicopters repeatedly flew the area in search of the two. By morning, RMRU put out the call for more people and Desert Sheriff's Search and Rescue (DSSAR) joined RMRU in the search. Sheriff's helicopters were flying search teams into their assigned area as well as making water and food drops to the teams who had spent the night in the field.

I arrived about noon to find Gwenda Yates and Lew Kingman running base. With the weather promising to be quite hot, the decision had already been made to go through state Office of Emergency Services to request 30-50 additional searchers from SAR teams in other counties.

By the time John Dempsey arrived to join me in a field search team, I already had secured our assignment: We were to be flown to the subjects' camp, scout the area, then head down Deep Canyon as far as we could make it and be flown back out from there. While the helicopter circled the area of the camp looking for a place to set down, Jonathan and Jeni were spotted in a deep dry wash that ran into Deep Canyon. While their clothes blended in with the terrain, Jonathan was waving a red bandana over his head and that stood out like a signal flare.

The helicopter set John and I down a little up-canyon from the two backpackers and we were to them in a matter of minutes. They had found some silty water in Deep Canyon and except for being tired, hungry, and a little scraped up, they were fine and eager to get back to civilization. John and I hiked them back up to the waiting helicopter and we were all four flown

back to the incident command post where they were checked out by DSSAR's paramedic Sharon Ollenberger.

Many thanks to all the members of DSSAR who helped in this search, along with myself, John Dempsey, Lew Kingman, Gwenda Yates, Grace and Jim Manues, Liz Sands, Jeff Toscas, and Marty Syrette of RMRU. ■

## **Climbers Stranded on Tahquitz Rock**

June 3, 2007  
Tahquitz Rock, Idyllwild, CA  
2007-012

By Kevin Walker

At approximately 11:00 p.m. Sunday night I received a call from Glenn Henderson. The Sheriff was asking for one RMRU member to ride along with their helicopter to do a night fly over of Tahquitz Rock. Three climbers had called for help just before nightfall while attempting to complete the Sahara Terror route on the rock.

I responded to S.O. Aviation at Hemet Ryan Airport. Chief Pilot Tony Bowen and Flight Officer John Irish were standing by with the helicopter prepared for night flight. We lifted off shortly after my arrival and flew towards the San Jacinto Mountains. With the aid of specialized night goggles (even me), we were able to see the mountain with extreme clarity and depth. Within minutes we arrived at Tahquitz Rock. John spotted the three moving slowly, but nearing the end of the climb. Using the loud speaker, John told the climbers to stay put on top of the rock and that they would return with sleeping bags, food, water and flashlights.

We flew back to aviation and shut down. We rigged a large duffle bag with the stated supplies. Tony and John fired back up and flew back to Tahquitz Rock with the rescue items on board. I headed home for a few hours sleep. Once back at Tahquitz Rock, the duffle was lowered down to the climbers who were now on top of the rock. Also in the duffle were instructions telling them to spend the night up on top and not attempt to make their way down in the darkness, and that the rescue team would be hiking in at first light.

Next morning several of us responded to Humber Park to hike in and aid the climbers in descending the third class (hiking) route down from Tahquitz. Our people were only a short distance up the steep trail when they met up with the three men hiking down. The grateful party was soon back at the road head. We were cleared and headed home and back to work. ■

**Riverside Mountain Rescue Unit  
purchases all it's lifesaving equipment  
and supplies through donations from  
the public — folks like you.**

**Your continued generosity has kept  
us saving lives since 1961.**



## Missing Hikers

July 5, 2007  
San Jacinto State Park  
2007-13

By Jim Bakos

I was unable to physically respond to this search because of my three minor children soundly sleeping in their bedrooms. I was, however, contacted by Incident Commander, Gwenda Yates, who was running the search from the Mountain Station of the Palm Springs Tram.

We had two team members on the western side of the mountain, and Gwenda didn't have radio communication with them. Since I'm one of the communication "Geeks" on the team, I have a high-power commercial radio to use on our rescue frequencies. I fired up the radio and made contact with Lee as he headed up the Marion Mountain trail. That was soon followed by contact with Pete as he headed up the Deer Springs trail.

We now had all our rescuers in communication contact. Lee finished his sweep of Marion Mountain (at about the speed most jets fly) and headed out. Pete, equally fast, hit Strawberry Junction, and was preparing to head east on the PCT toward Wellman's.

Soon after, I received a call from Gwenda that Travis and Rob, at Wellman's Divide, had voice contact with the lost hikers. Minutes later they had the lost hikers in-tow and headed back to the Mountain Station. ■

## Two Deputies Injured In Rugged Terrain Near Elsinore

July 6, 2007  
Elsinore  
2007-014

By Grace Manues

*"We have a rescue. Down Deputies."* While every call-out is important to us, this text message got my heart pumping more than most. As volunteer employees, we're members of the Riverside County Sheriff's Department family. On every mission, there is a Sheriff's Deputy there to watch our backs. They take care of us, so it was critical that we respond quickly and efficiently to render whatever assistance would be needed.

The initial page came out at 2 p.m. The heat was sweltering. Traffic was terrible, of course. But despite there having been an all night search less than twelve hours before, RMRU team members responded en masse. One of the largest initial turnouts this year included Steve Bryant, John Dempsey, Glenn Henderson, Jim and Grace Manues, Patrick McCurdy, Brad Scott, Jeff Toscas, Kevin Walker and Dave Webb.

John, Jim and I were the first RMRU members on scene as we live just twenty minutes south of the incident. Upon arriving, the Incident Commander briefed us on the situation. At approximately 11 a.m., a Sheriff's Deputy responded to a report of a woman yelling for help somewhere below the Ortega Highway near the lookout. After searching numerous (long abandoned) vehicles over the side, the Deputy was overcome

by temperatures topping 100 degrees. A second Deputy came to his aid but fell/slid down the loose hillside, injuring his knee. Additional Deputies and CDF crews were dispatched to render assistance.

A CDF helicopter had been called in to airlift the injured Deputies from the field. However, that helicopter clipped its tail rotor on vegetation during the process and was pulled out of service. That's when we showed up. At the time, it was uncertain whether another helicopter would be available to airlift the Deputies, so John and Jim donned technical gear and headed in.

As it turned out, ten minutes after they started in, a second CDF helicopter arrived on scene. John and Jim continued hiking to the subject and other awaiting personnel to provide whatever assistance was needed. Thankfully, the second CDF helicopter crew did a great job and made quick work of extracting the two injured Deputies. Both were taken to the hospital with non-life-threatening injuries.

Although it turned out that our technical expertise wasn't needed for this incident, we were happy to be there as a precaution and for back-up. Part of why we do Search and Rescue is to give back to the community. To give back to the Sheriff's community was especially rewarding. ■

## Man Missing After Hike to San Jacinto Peak

July 8, 2007  
Round Valley  
2007-015

By Fresh Tracks Staff

A 65-year-old man phoned in about 8 p.m. that he was moving slowly and behind schedule on his return from a hike to San Jacinto Peak. At 11 p.m., with no further contact with the man, sheriff's dispatch alerted RMRU for a search. Within about 30 minutes of the initial call the man walked out and RMRU's response was canceled. ■

## Missing Hiker

July 30th, 2007  
Black Mountain Area  
2007-016

By William Carlson

Three back to back text messages at 9:30 on a Saturday night could only mean one thing... a change of plans. I called the Rescue Line to learn that a 40-year-old man, Joel, had left Black Mountain Group Campground around 7:00 in the morning, and had not returned. After returning home and packing summer search equipment, Pete (my dad) and I headed for Black Mountain.

We arrived at the group camp and met a Riverside Sheriff Office (RSO) deputy and fellow team member Dan. We gathered the basic information about the subject and began creating a search plan. Shortly after, team members Gwenda, Marty, and Jeff arrived. We decided to first search the promi-



nent Fuller / Mill Creek drainage directly behind camp. Pete and I would be Team One and search from the group campsite down the drainage to the Pinewood area. Team Two consisted of Dan, Marty, and Jeff. Their assignment was to drive down to the Pinewood area and work the drainage up toward team one.

We began our assignments right at midnight. We began calling out the subject's name from the group camp. Our voices carried for what seemed like miles which was helpful because we knew if the subject was in the area he would hear our calls. Though Team One made good progress, the terrain was extremely steep and littered with obstacles. At many points we had to climb back out of the drainage to avoid 30-foot boulders. Team Two encountered the same difficulties and opted to remain in the Pinewood area in case the subject came out. Around 2:30 in the morning Teams One and Two met up and returned to base to catch a few hours of sleep in preparation for an early start in the morning.

In what seemed like the wink of an eye 6:00 rolled around. We picked our achy bodies up off the ground (our bed) and enjoyed a quick cup of coffee while planning out the next assignments. Around this time team members Patrick, Glenn, Brad, and Grace arrived. We quickly handed out assignments.

Gwenda and Glenn would run operations at base. Pete and I would be Team Three. Our assignment would be to hike up the Fuller Ridge Trail to an unnamed peak and work our way down the second drainage away from the group camp.

Team Four was Grace, Marty, and Dan. Their assignment was to stay on the ridge north of camp and search for any sign that our subject may have headed down toward Cabazon. Team Five was Jeff and Dana. They were starting at the group camp and covering the area between the camp and the second drainage which Team Three was searching. Lastly, Team Six, consisting of Patrick and Brad, was assigned to cover the initial Fuller / Mill creek drainage again. This was in case the subject was asleep the night before when it was searched.

Pete and I reached the unnamed peak in no time at all. However, the sight of a twenty foot high sea of brush made us rethink our assignment. We realized the subject would not be in that immediate area so we decided to return to the Fuller Ridge trail head and work our way through easier terrain to our original assignment. It only took us an extra twenty minutes to regain the ridge in the area we wanted to search.

Approximately a quarter mile down the ridge we reach a sandy area. To our amazement a single set of tracks walked right through the sand. We radioed in to base that we had found tracks and that we were going to follow them. They seemed to be walking in circles and then went uphill to a small point. When we reached the point we gave a yell, and to our amazement got a response. Our Sheriff Department helicopter flew overhead and guided us through the maze of boulders straight to the subject.

The subject was dehydrated and tired, but overall in good condition. We took a few minutes to give him food and water, and put out his signal fire. The subject had been hiking since 9:00 the previous morning and had realized he was lost around noon the previous day. His condition improved rapidly. We walked him back toward team five and eventually back to a camp full of relieved campers. Another successful mission for RMRU.

Members Present: Gwenda, Glenn, Dan, Pete, Will,

Marty, Jeff, Patrick, Brad, Grace, Steve, and Jennifer. Special Thanks: RSO Aviation, USFS Rec 52 and Patrol 54. ■

## **Injured Hiker**

August 12, 2007  
Long Valley Canyon, SJ State Park  
2007-017

By *Fresh Tracks* Staff

RMRU was alerted about 7 p.m. about hiker who had fallen and injured his head in Long Valley Canyon, below San Jacinto State Park, near the top of the Palm Springs Tram. The sheriff's helicopter was already flying on this mission and State Parks personnel were with the subject, but were asking for RMRU medical assistance.

We staged at the visitor's center at the bottom of the tram road as it appeared the helicopter would land and transport the subject to the hospital, which is exactly what happened. Hats off to the San Jacinto State Parks folks and to the Riverside Sheriff's aviation unit for affecting this rescue.

The initial RMRU responders were Lee Arnson, William Carlson, Glenn Henderson, Jim & Grace Manues, Patrick McCurdy, Daniel Morgan, Jeff Toscas, and Marty Syrette. ■

## **Fallen Climber Tahquitz Rock**

September 8, 2007  
Tahquitz Rock  
2007-018

By *Fresh Tracks* Staff

At about 4 p.m., RMRU was called out to rescue a climber who had fallen on Tahquitz Rock, near Idyllwild. Having spent most of the day practicing technical rescue skills on our new climbing tower, few of us were keen to respond. Nevertheless, members mobilized to assist the injured climber.

As members were arriving at Humber Park and preparing to deploy into the field, fellow climbers succeeded in carrying out the injured climber and our services were not needed. Kudos to the resourceful climbers who succeeded in "self-rescuing" the injured party. ■

## **Lost Hunter**

October 7, 2007  
Cahuilla Mountain, Near Anza  
2007-020

By: Grace Manues

Opening Day of deer season is much anticipated by hunters. Such was the case for Mike S., a 52-year-old high school wrestling coach, his son, Nick, and Jared, his assistant coach. On Saturday, October 6th, what should have been a great day on Cahuilla Mountain took a turn for the worse after Mike left the group at 0830 to take a look around and never returned.



Although being an experienced outdoorsman, Mike made a critical mistake. Only expecting to be gone for a short time, Mike left his pack. The pack contained his food, water, radio, cell phone, flashlight; items that might have prevented him from becoming lost in the first place or that may have effected a faster and simpler rescue once he became lost. Being as knowledgeable as he is about the outdoors and being a teacher, I don't think Mike can believe he made such a basic error. That error could have cost him his life.

Once he realized he was lost, Mike decided to head downhill. Cahuilla Mountain, after all, doesn't seem very big; about 4 miles from side-to-side. There are homes around three sides of the mountain and a service road to its north.

Not knowing what had become of his father, Nick and Jared tried to track Mike but his prints disappeared into the brush. They returned to their vehicle expecting to find Mike there. He was not. The two went back up to look for Mike, alerting other hunters they came across about Nick's missing father. There were now many hunters actively looking for Mike - to no avail.

At 1900, Nick reported his missing father to the Riverside Sheriff's Office. The Sheriff's helicopter canvassed the mountain for almost two hours. No sign of the missing hunter.

Of course, Mike had no light source with him. Everything he could have used to signal the helicopter - a flashlight, cell phone, even the light from his watch - was in his backpack. Everything, that is, except a rifle and a pistol that he had with him. (Mike later told us that he had shot a round from his rifle to signal the airship. Being in a narrow drainage would have made the muzzle flash difficult to spot.)

RMRU members started arriving on scene at first light, Sunday morning. A hasty team was dispatched to the Point Last Seen (PLS) to determine the direction of travel. Several members of the Riverside County Search Dogs arrived. As the day progressed, more and more resources arrived to aid in the search including one of the Sheriff's helicopters, Star 9, seven members of the Desert Search and Rescue Team (DSAR), and an additional seven members of RMRU who had just finished a strenuous three-day training exercise.

There were several major concerns about the missing healthy, athletic, experienced hunter. Why had he not responded to verbal calls from the numerous hunters on the mountain? Why had he not used 3-shots to signal his distress? Why had he not responded to the helicopter? Was he hurt? There had been multiple mountain lion sightings and large mountain lion tracks could be found all over that mountain. Had a mountain lion gotten him? Things were not looking good.

My team (Jeri Sanchez, Patrick McCurdy, and Grace Manues) had been given the assignment to clear a drainage that extended west from the PLS to a dirt road. The drainage started out broad and naturally narrowed as we descended.

Early in the assignment, we came across a hunter that told us he and his partner had looked part-way down this drainage and the drainage to the north, both last night and again this morning. They had found nothing. When I thanked him for his efforts and apologized for ruining his hunting that day he shrugged it off. He said, *"We have to look out for each other."* That sentiment is at the heart of Search and Rescue whose motto is, *"These things we do so that others may live."*

Our search down the drainage yielded potential clues:

a broken branch here, a possible footprint there. By 4 o'clock that afternoon, we had descended 1400 feet in elevation over 1.5 kilometers. Although we hadn't found Mike, we could say with confidence that he was not in that drainage; important information for Base to have when formulating their search plan. Just about that time, Jeri thought she heard something. We gave another shout out. We got the response we were looking for.

*"Help me. I need help. I'm Mike S\_\_\_\_\_."*

Given our location and the terrain, we were unable to communicate directly with Base. A team further up the mountain was able to relay the good news. We had verbal and visual contact with Mike and, best of all, he was unhurt. Within minutes, Star 9 executed a flawless hover recovery of the very grateful hunter. Soon thereafter, as daylight was fading, Star 9 extracted 13 personnel from the field. It was a great end to a successful mission.

Mike's distance from the PLS, the terrain, and wind conditions worked against him and may explain why the hunters and the helicopter couldn't find him on Saturday.

Huge thanks and kudos to all who made this a safe and successful mission including members of the Riverside County Search Dogs, the Desert Sheriff's Search and Rescue Team, our heroes of the Sheriff's Aviation Department - you guys are the best! - the six members of RMRU (Gwenda, Patrick, Michael, Steve, Jeri and Grace) who responded Sunday morning, and especially to the amazing seven (Glenn, Kevin, Lee, Rob, Lew, Jeff and Marty) who after spending three hard days training in the field hiked with full packs from Wellman's Cabin back to the Palm Springs Tram then drove 50 miles over to Anza to fulfill their commitment to RMRU.

I want to suck up to, I mean acknowledge, the President of our Team, Gwenda Yates, who mission after mission is there to get us out of bed, get us organized, keeps tabs on us in the field, and makes sure we get home safely. She never gets the thanks she deserves. We hope you know how much you are loved and appreciated. ■

## Stranded Hiker Rescued

October 17, 2007  
Cahuilla Mountain, Near Anza  
2007-021

By Martin Syrett

Late Wednesday evening the second message came. Help still needed for missing women at Cahuilla Mountain. I met Gwenda at the sheriff's station at approximately 21:30 hours and we headed up to the last known location of the missing woman. Within minutes, Lee arrived at the scene to join us.

While Lee and I headed towards the deputy, Gwenda set up the base camp. The deputy up the trail informed us that he had voice contact with the subject. Lee set up a beacon light to mark our current location and we headed out in the direction of Rebecca's faint voice. The terrain was rough and steep. Manzanita made the trek almost impassable at times forcing us to our hands and knees to proceed towards Rebecca. As we traveled toward her, Rebecca's voice would vary as if she too was on the move in the opposite direction.



At approximately 00:30 hours, Lee and I spotted the subject. Rebecca was located on the face of a rock about 75 feet above our location. In order to bring her down safely, Lee and I hiked up and around the rock to drop into her location. When we found her, she was huddled on the ground with her bare feet buried in a shallow hole and her spaghetti strapped tank top pulled over her daisy duke shorts for warmth. To say the least, she was quite unprepared for this adventure. Between Lee and I, we clothed her with two pairs of socks, a long sleeve shirt converted to pants, rain pants, a beanie, gloves and Lee's RMRU rescue jacket. We stayed in that location and provided her with food, water and hot chocolate before heading back down the mountain. Steve had arrived and was waiting to assist us at our starting location. Through radio contact, he warned us of increasing fog conditions.

Lee and I packed up and Lee scouted out a possible route down the hill. Using several drainage crevices, we were able to lead her towards the beacon light. During this time, Rebecca explained that she had recently moved from Washington where several of her friends had died in a plane accident. This may help explain how she ended up in this precarious situation. About an hour and a half later, we arrived at Steve's location where the subject seemed even more relieved to have another search and rescue individual present. We soon met up with the deputy who had made original voice contact with Rebecca. He commented on our efforts and was pleased that we were able to bring her out safely. Another successful mission completed by RMRU.

Members Present: Gwenda, Lee, Steve, Marty. A special thanks to the Deputies who arrived on scene first. ■

### Lost Hiker at Night

October 22, 2007  
Santa Rosa Peak  
2007-022

By Lee Arnson

Monday, October 22, 2007 was quite possibly the windiest day on record in Riverside County. At around 9:00 p.m., Gwenda Yates, our team president, called me and asked for me to respond to the Cactus Spring trail head in Pinyon for a helicopter rescue involving a stranded hiker on the North side of Santa Rosa Peak.

I met team member Kevin Walker in Mountain Center and could hardly open the door to the rescue van because of the wind. Kevin and I were both confused as to how we were going to run a helicopter mission in these conditions.

As Kevin and I pulled into the parking lot we both noticed that the helicopter was waiting for us and that there was no wind. We proceeded to be briefed by the pilots and were told they only wanted one rescue member to be flown in to do a night hoist rescue. The other member would stay at base in the parking lot in case backup assistance was needed.

As luck would have it, I was the one chosen to go into the field. I quickly packed the team's sit harness, an extra helmet and our med-pack because we did not know if the subject was injured or not. Flying off into total darkness, using only

night vision goggles, was very exciting.

The subject was located by the pilots using the GPS coordinates they had charted earlier in the evening, when they had spotted the stranded hiker. We were able to fly directly to the hiker, and hover about 100 feet above. I was lowered down and the pilots flew off so I could make voice contact with him, who it turns out, was only about 100 yards away.

I approached the subject who told me his name was Pierre and that he was not hurt. I helped him get into the sit harness and he was hoisted into the helicopter. I soon followed, and we all flew back to base. This mission was yet another example of the many I have been fortunate to be involved in where the helicopter pilots saved the day with their unwavering skills. ■

### Missing Hiker, San Jacinto Wilderness

November 9, 2007  
Palm Springs Tram, San Jacinto Wilderness  
2007-023

By Patrick McCurdy

A lone hiker, Richard, was reported missing Friday when he did not return from a hike on Thursday. RMRU searched all afternoon and into the night for him in the area above and below the upper station for the Palm Springs Tram.

Jim Manues and I were flown into and out of an assignment on the Skyline Trail and I left about 10 p.m., as we were already planning a big ramp-up for the search for the following day with many people coming in from out of county SAR teams.

After about 4 hours of sleep I drove back out to the tram to help get the sheriff's command post running and to get our operations section ready for a lot of search crews coming in. After a few hours we had sixteen field teams deployed and an amazing six aircraft either in service or expected shortly.

After our own sheriff's Star 93 helicopter had finished inserting search crews on the mountain, I got in to fly as an observer. Our assignment was to fly the infamous north face of Mount San Jacinto, one of the tallest escarpments in the country.

Just as we got off the ground I switched from my helmet to an intercom headset which allows me to talk to the flight crew. The pilot, Tony Bowen, asked me if I had heard the latest radio traffic. The U.S. Forest Service had reported a small fire in the Snow Creek drainage, an area we were supposed to search anyway, so we headed there first. Within minutes of entering the drainage we could see a small column of smoke and almost immediately Tactical Flight Officer Chad Marlatt calmly said "There he is."

Richard was on a very steep, rocky canyon wall, very close to a small fire, and waving his arms over his head. Tony flew in closer to check out the situation while Chad got on the PA and told the guy repeatedly to put out the fire and that we would be right back. This was not a good location for a helicopter operation. Winds were difficult, the canyon wall was very steep, and there was no way to put the helicopter down near him. Richard could not really move anywhere as there was fire below him and steep rock above. Tony asked me if I was



equipped for a hoist, which I was.

We flew to a nearby hill where Tony could set down. Chad got on his harness, rigged the hoist, and gave me a quick refresher on a sling device called a Bauman Screamer Suit that you put on the subject like a very loose, sleeveless straight-jacket. I decided there was little use in taking my pack down the hoist as there would be no time for a medical assessment. If he was standing and waving his arms, he was healthy enough to be hoisted, and the rotor wash would have fanned the flames of the fire meaning we needed to get this done quickly.

When we got back to him 5-10 minutes later the fire had grown. Chad handed me the hook from the hoist, but told me to stay inside the bird as Tony carefully edged in close enough to put me down on the rocks where Richard was standing rather than into the fire. Odd canyon winds and the closeness of the canyon wall to the rotors made this very dicey flying. Finally Chad signaled me to get out on the skid and quickly had me descending to the subject.

The helicopter hovering overhead had beat down the flames, but it was fanning the coals and I could feel the heat of the fire as I descended. Richard started grasping at me as I got down close to him, but I signaled him to stand back - footing was going to be tough enough without someone grasping at my legs. When the hoist had enough slack in it to put me down, I finally got my footing on the steep rock, unhooked, and signaled Chad I was off-hook so Tony could back the bird away from the canyon wall.

I turned to Richard and asked him how he was doing. He was in tears and sobbing, physically scratched up pretty badly, but otherwise not apparently injured. He was an emotional wreck, repeatedly telling me he had thought he was going to die. It was about then that I heard a big whoosh-crackle-crackle-crackle. I turned around to see 10-15 foot flames about 30 feet away. Oh, man. That scared me. The rotor wash had heated up the coals and embers and, when Tony pulled the bird away, the fire had taken off. I looked around, but there as nowhere to go - fire on one side and steep rock on the other. We had to get out of there fast.

I got Richard into the harness and signaled Chad I was ready. Tony brought the bird back in and Chad guided the hoist hook to me as the rotor wash blew ash and hot embers at us. I snapped the hook onto the harness, signaled "ready for lift," and Richard was on his way up. Tony backed the bird off again so Chad could get Richard in the bird and situated. This took a couple of minutes and the fire kicked up even more. I again looked for someplace to go, but was basically stuck where I was. All I could think of was "Oh, please don't leave me here, boys!"

Tony then brought the bird back in and Chad had a little difficulty getting the hoist hook to me because of the wind, but I was fairly quickly on the hook and off the ground. When I got into the bird and we were headed back, I checked on Richard and he was still sobbing and emotional, but grateful to be rescued. We landed back at the command post a few minutes later and Richard was transferred to a waiting ambulance, then to a local hospital.

It took hours to fly all of the other search teams out of the field, as they were scattered all over the San Jacinto Wilderness from the tram, to Little Round Valley, to Saddle Junction, to Carumba, with numerous teams near the peak and over the

north face. Given his emotional condition and state of exhaustion, I seriously doubt he could have made it out alive on his own.

This was definitely the most exciting (and spooky) thing I've done with the RMRU. I've been hoisted into and out of remote locations before, but I've never hooked up a missing person to be hoisted out. I've no problem with that part of it, but I could quite easily skip the whole fire part of the story next time.

## Lessons Learned

In addition to a map, compass, and/or GPS, a few other articles in your day pack can make a big difference.

Even when looking right at Richard from the air, it was hard to make him out from the surrounding rocks and vegetation. This was largely due to his clothing which consisted of a black t-shirt and camouflage shorts. Bright clothes would be ideal, but any brightly colored cloth that you can wave over your head would work to signal an aircraft (see write up for Mission #11 from earlier this year.)

I'm also confident that Richard would now agree that some amount of warm clothing is appropriate to pack even for a day hike in pleasant weather. With temps near freezing for his two nights out, even a light polarfleece sweatshirt and light winds pants would likely have made a huge difference in comfort.

Always plan ahead for every hike. It can make your experience much more pleasant and might just save your life.

## The Big Picture

This was a big search and had the potential to get much bigger over the weekend. Riverside Sheriff's SGT Webb and CPL Garvin served as Incident Command. LT Sawicki and Deputy Lanning of the Sheriff's Emergency Response Team (SERT) had their crew bring out multiple motor home command posts, trailers, etc., to supplement RMRU's humble operations truck for the Incident Command Post (satellite phones, computers, radios, etc.). The SERT Team also coordinated all the support from out of county, including an amazing six aircraft - the most I've seen at any one time on any search.

The Sheriff's Office brought tremendous resources to the search but let RMRU run field operations. A search this big requires a lot of "overhead." These are people who would much rather go into the field searching, but end up serving in a management role in the overall search operation. Steve Bryant served as Plans Chief, Deano Esades was Operations Chief, Jim Bakos served as the Communications Unit Leader, Dana Potts as Logistics Chief, Dr. Ray Hussey ran the helibase, John Dempsey ran communications at the top of the tram, and Dr. Bill Delo served as Command Post Liaison and standby medical support. Nearly every single member of RMRU served either at the ICP or in the field.

In addition to our own team, numerous other volunteer SAR teams assisted in this search. Our friends with Desert Sheriff's Search and Rescue are always the first to be called to help us, but this search also saw assistance from San Bernardino Cave Rescue Team, Rim of The World Search and Rescue, San Diego Mountain Rescue, San Geronio Search and



Rescue, Palm Springs Mounted Search and Rescue, Central Mountain Search and Rescue, and San Bernardino Mountain Rescue as well as State Parks Rangers and their group of volunteers. Thanks also to the Palm Springs Tramway, which always gives us fantastic support during our numerous missions up there.

Air assets included San Bernardino County Sheriff's Air Rescue 7, CHP's H60, Los Angeles County's Air Rescue 5, and Riverside's own Star 93. Both CHP and San Bernardino had other aircraft en route to the search. Hat's off to Riverside's SERT for getting such an incredible mutual aid response rolling in such a short amount of time.

My own particular thanks to Tony Bowen and Chad Marlatt from Star 93, with whom I flew. We train often with all Riverside Sheriff's pilots and crew. It is due to this training and their expertise that rescues like this one are possible. ■

### **Missing Hiker With 3-Year-Old Daughter**

November 11, 2007  
South Ridge Trail, Idyllwild  
2007-024

By William Carlson

"What an amazing day!" was my thought as I lay on the couch at my friend's apartment while she kindly prepared dinner. We had spent the day climbing in the cool temperatures of Idyllwild and were enjoying a little rest and relaxation when the (recently) all too familiar sound of my pager broke the silence. "All RMRU we have a search / rescue on the Southridge Trail." Dinner was quickly transferred into a to-go package and I headed out.

I followed our rescue vehicle to the Southridge Trailhead where Lee was in the field and Grace, Jim, Nick, and Patrick were packing. Grace took over as our base coordinator and a quick planning discussion with Lee revealed it would be best for a team of three to follow the trail to the south searching for Pablo and his three year old daughter Veronica. Patrick headed north up the trail to tie in with Lee as team one. Jim, Nick, and I headed out as team two.

We began calling for Pablo a few hundred feet down the trail. To our surprise we instantly received voice contact with Pablo. From where his voice was coming from we figured he was a half mile east of our location in thick brush. Due to the treachery of bushwhacking at night, we chose to have our Riverside Sheriff helicopter locate the subject's exact location and provide us the quickest access.

Thirty minutes passed while the helicopter searched for Pablo and Veronica's exact location. This was due to the fact that they were standing in twenty foot high brush and they did not have a flashlight to signal with. The helicopter did eventually locate the two and decided the quickest way to reach the subjects would be a hoist operation, even though this would be tricky due winds and the fact that it was now 11 p.m.

Crashing through brush would be a last option due to the probability of injury at night. All of the field teams regrouped at the location where we had voice contact and I was driven to Keenwild helispot to perform the hoist operation. After receiving a briefing from pilot Tony Bowen and TFO John

Irish, we were ready to begin.

A three minute flight left us hovering over the missing hikers. Tony and John spent about ten minutes working against the winds trying to find an open area to safely put me on the ground. (As a side note from listening to their conversations through the headset I would like to commend their professionalism. Their teamwork and level of communication made me more comfortable as a rescuer.) Eventually a quality location was found and I was called to the door. I was lowered from the helicopter and with a little work set down in a small clearing just above the missing hikers.

It is always amazing how quiet the air becomes when the helicopter flies away. With a quick yell I was able to decide which direction to head. Pablo and Veronica were only a few hundred yards away. However, it took me ten to fifteen minutes to crawl through the brush in order to reach them. Both Pablo and Veronica were in excellent condition when I arrived. Veronica was a little cold but a jacket warmed her up quickly.

Tony and John flew to Hemet to refuel the helicopter which gave me time to attach a harness to each of them and explain the process of being hoisted into the helicopter. The local winds began to increase while the helicopter was gone and at some point became too high for a hoist operation. We then turned to Plan B in which Tony and John dropped an overnight pack with sleeping bags, jackets, food, and extra water. With the high winds we were going to have to spend the night.

Camp took a little work to set up considering there were no flat spots to be found in the area. Pablo and I created small ledges to sleep on. We all crawled into sleeping bags to get as much sleep as we could before morning. The plan was for the helicopter to return at 6:30 a.m. for a hoist operation.

The winds really began to increase around 4 a.m. I lay in my sleeping bag dreading the inevitable hike through brush to hike Pablo and Veronica out. The one reassuring thought was the nine reliable teammates at base camp that were eager to help. 6:30 a.m. rolled around and pilot Steve Bertling and TFO Andy Rasmussen advised they would not be able to perform a hoist but would however be happy to help with route-finding from the air. They flew back to Keenwild helispot while we packed up and began hiking back up to the closest trail where the rest of the team would meet us.

After a couple of hours of crawling through brush we (with the help of Steve and Andy from the air) were able to make it to the Southridge Trail. We quickly met up with Jim, Rob, Patrick, and Mike. Together the seven of us hiked back to the trailhead where Pablo's family was eagerly awaiting his and Veronica's arrival. It was another happy ending for RMRU and another reminder of why volunteer organizations such as RMRU exist... "So others may live!"

Members Present: Patrick McCurdy, Lee Arnson, Nick Nixon, Jeri Sanchez, Jim Manues, Grace Manues, Rob May, Mike George, Brenda DeLuna, and William Carlson ■

### **Body Recovery**

November 12, 2007  
Deer Springs Trail  
2007-025

By *Fresh Tracks* Staff



Following on the heels of two successful rescue missions on the Veteran's Day weekend, RMRU was asked to assist the Riverside County Coroner and the California State Parks Department in recovering the body of a deceased person several miles up the Deer Springs Trail.

Despite the team being worn pretty thin from our other missions this weekend, about a dozen members responded, several coming directly from the previous night's mission with little or no sleep.

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

### **Missing Hiker in Long Valley Canyon**

November 26, 2007  
San Jacinto Wilderness  
2007-026

*By Fresh Tracks Staff*

RMRU was alerted mid-afternoon about a missing hiker from the Palm Springs Tram.

The missing man was reported to have intended to hike down to Palm Springs from the tram. RMRU teams searched numerous canyons down from the tram and regrouped late in the night at the upper tram station to plan operations based on newly-developed information that the man had gone down Long Valley Canyon.

Search assignments were planned for first thing in the morning, focusing on the narrowed search area. Desert Sheriff's Search and Rescue (DSSAR) was to join us at first light to continue the search. About midnight the subject was located at home. RMRU and DSSAR were told to stand down. ■

### **Missing Off-Roaders in Santa Ana Mountains**

December 7, 2007  
Santiago Canyon, Santa Ana Mountains  
2007-027

*By Fresh Tracks Staff*

RMRU was alerted early on a very rainy Friday morning about a search for missing off-roaders who were stuck in the Santa Ana Mountains in a rain storm. As we were gearing up and getting on the road, the missing persons found their own way out. ■

### **Hiker Missing in Major Storm**

January 7, 2008  
Green Valley Lake, CA (near Big Bear)  
2008-001

*By Fresh Tracks Staff*

RMRU was called today to assist in a search for man missing

over two days in the San Bernardino Mountains near Big Bear. These two days coincided with a major storm system that blanketed the area in snow.

Four RMRU members responded to the mid-day call and were deployed by snow cat to search areas where they searched until after dark.

Six RMRU members responded to Day Two of this large search. We augmented about 50 other searchers that came in from out of county to assist San Bernardino in searching for the lost man.

We searched all day following side trails, gulleys, and washes to the sides of the road the man is said to have been hiking on when he got lost. Sadly, even tracks from people who had searched the area Sunday had been obliterated by Sunday night's snow.

RMRU members responded on several further days of this search until it was called off with no success. Crews continued to be deployed by helicopter and snow cat throughout the week and weather provided good search conditions, but no sign of the missing man was found. ■

### **Three Hikers Stranded in Snow on Skyline Trail**

January 21, 2008  
Skyline Trail, San Jacinto State Park  
2008-002

*By William Carlson*

The long holiday weekend had left me physically drained, and the idea of going to bed early had provided pleasant thoughts throughout the day. As I crawled into bed around eight p.m. I felt like the luckiest person in the world. The notion of a full night sleep, however, is often short lived at the end of a holiday weekend. With a storm lingering amidst Southern California, this Monday night was no exception.

I never heard the pager go off. Nearly sleeping through a phone call I reluctantly answered. Gwenda asks, "Were you sleeping?" My response was, "YES!" Then she asks, "How fast can you get to Hemet-Ryan?" "It will take me about an hour." "We have some stranded hikers on San Jacinto; you and Lee will be going up." "Ok, I'm on my way."

Lee Arnson and I met pilot Tony Bowen and Tactical Flight Officer (TFO) Andy Rasmussen at the hanger. We outlined every detail of the mission, including what we would do if the subjects were in serious condition. With the details of the mission worked out we loaded our packs into the helicopter and lifted off for the lower parking lot of the Palm Springs Tramway.

Once at the Tramway we shut down while Tony and Andy reconfigured the ship for a hoist operation. The plan was to lower Lee and me into an open area on a ridge line just east of the subject's location. With a radiant full moon overhead, we took to the skies again. The temperature dropped rapidly as we ascended the mountain. Bare ground quickly turned to snow and soon we were over the subjects.

I was lowered first and within a few minutes Lee was on the ground. Together we walked over to the subjects and their campfire. The three men were cold, but otherwise in good condition. One of the three was colder than the others. We de-



cided that he would need to go first to assure he made it out if any situation arose that would hinder our whole group flying out that night. Well, that situation arose quickly. Tony came across the radio, "We need to make this happen now! We have a bank of clouds pushing in from the West. We really need to get moving!" From a rescuers standpoint, these are not encouraging words.

We quickly pulled the three harnesses out of our packs and within three minutes had the first subject on his way up to the helicopter. The entire operation of hoisting the subjects into the helicopter took no more than fifteen minutes. As the ship flew back to the tramway the air became very still and quiet. Lee and I could not think of what to say at the time. If we could have it would have been something to the extent of, "This is so cool!"

All alone for the time being, we spent a few minutes putting out the subjects warming fire and reminiscing of past rescues. Lee and I joined RMRU around the same time and have experienced the highs and lows of search and rescue. All of the memories are unforgettable. With the fire out, we strolled back to the ridge-line where we would be picked up.

Soon the silence was shattered by the sound of our ride home. A beautiful night to stay on the mountain... well not to-night! We landed at Hemet-Ryan Airfield around one in the morning and added another textbook rescue to our memories of search and rescue. An extra thanks to Tony and Andy for their precision flying and professionalism. ■

### **PLB Activation Near Baldy**

January 22, 2008  
Mount Baldy, Los Angeles County  
2008-003

By *Fresh Tracks* Staff

RMRU was called early Monday to assist West Valley Search and Rescue on a search near Mount Baldy in San Bernardino County. A Personal Locator Beacon (PLB) had been activated late Monday and weather (cloud cover and snow) had prevented a helicopter rescue.

Rick Maschek and Patrick McCurdy responded and assisted West Valley SAR, San Dimas Mountain Rescue, Sierra Madre Mountain Rescue, Altadena Mountain Rescue, and Montrose Search and Rescue with the search.

One of the initial teams in had voice contact within a few hours by following the GPS coordinates provided by the PLB via satellite. A quick medical check of the young backpacker showed that he was in good condition and all teams were soon hiking out with him.

This young man showed a great deal of common sense. He was well-prepared with overnight gear appropriate for the cold, snowy conditions. When cloud cover made him disoriented, he quickly admitted he was lost and activated his PLB. Most importantly, he pitched his tent, made camp, and stayed put.

PLBs are relatively new technology and, in this instance, it worked perfectly. I'm sure the rescued young man thinks it was worth every penny he paid for it. ■

### **Two Missing Marines Rescued**

February 2, 2008  
Skyline Trail, San Jacinto Wilderness  
2008-004

Part One by Pete Carlson

We received the call around 8:30 Saturday night that two persons were stuck on the upper part of the Skyline Trail just below the tramway on hard packed snow and ice. By 10:30 we had Kevin Walker and Grace Manues (who would run base), myself, Jim Manues, Dave Webb, and Patrick McCurdy (who would be going over the side) in the tram car riding up to the upper station.

Each of us took a 200 foot rope and a 100 foot rope with us along with the normal winter gear. Winter gear (sleeping bag, ground pad, bivy sack, stove, fuel, food, extra clothes - jackets, gloves, hats - crampons, ice axe, and other misc. things) adding up to 40+ pounds. We took the short hike to the top of the Skyline Trail and put on crampons and fixed the first 200 foot rope over the side. Dave went down first and then tied on his 200 foot rope to the first one and continued down. At 400 feet he had voice contact. The rest of us came down and Dave added the third 200 foot rope and continued down. At 600 feet he added the last 200 foot rope and as luck would have it he was able to reach the 2 persons. But these 2 were not who we were looking for. (See the write up for Mission 2008-005 for details).

We now made voice contact with another person, so Dave, Jim, and I continued on down to the voice. This was Lance, 1 of the 2 we were looking for. He told us that he and Lucas had been coming up the Skyline Trail and gotten into the snow filled canyon. They did not know where the trail went and continued across the canyon until they hit hard snow and ice and at that point both of them slipped. He was able to punch a small hole in the hard snow and sit down in it. Lucas was below him just barely hanging on and did not have a good spot to stay.

They called for help on there cell phone, but after a couple of hours Lucas slipped again and went over a 10 foot cliff and stopped at some point below. He called to Lance that he was OK. Latter on Lucas slid down farther into the canyon ending up 1,000 feet below Lance. But we did not know this right now.

Dave and Jim got Lance to a safe point and started taking him up. I set up a 100 foot rope and repelled down over the 10 vertical drop and tried yelling for Lucas. No contact. I tied on another 100 foot rope and went down again. Still no voice contact and I was out of rope. Without more rope we could not safely continue down. So we all came up and got back to the tramway around 3 a.m. Sunday morning. Base had already called for more people and we would have more rope at 6 a.m. So we got a few hours sleep until morning.

The rope and more people arrived at 6 a.m. and Lee Arnson, Rick Maschek, and I each took a 200 foot rope and started back out to where I had left a few hours ago. We quickly descended the ropes that we had left in place and got down the first 1200 feet. We set up the first 200 foot rope I carried and Lee went down first. He then tied on his 200 rope and continued down a total of 400 feet. Rick went next carrying his 200



foot rope. Lee and Rick decided that they could continue without using ropes as the snow was softer and not as steep. They still had no voice contact. It was decided that I would stay where I was until they could determine if Lucas was down this way or not.

#### Part Two by Lee Arnson

After repelling down the 800' fixed line, Rick and I added another 200 feet and repelled to the end of that. It was then that we decided it was best to get off rope, carry 200 feet of rope with us and use our crampons and ice axes to continue on into the depths of Chino Canyon. After about 10 minutes of travel down a 40% slope, we had no voice contact and could see no sign that anyone had fallen. We continued on for another 15 minutes, losing another 500 feet in elevation, when eventually Rick spotted some skid marks in the snow. We picked up the pace, continuing down into the canyon, yelling out, and after another 15 minutes and 500 feet in elevation, we made voice contact.

At this point I felt as though I was running down the slope because I knew the subject was in this canyon, and still alive. I came upon a large boulder and there on the other side, was the second U.S. Marine, Lucas Ellison. He was in surprisingly good spirits and uninjured. His feet were numb from exposure, so we put him in a sleeping bag, covered him with two tarps, and made him something hot to drink. Now the rush of finding him was starting to wear off and the realization of how we were going to get him out of the canyon was starting to sink in.

We went back and forth with Kevin Walker at base discussing several options, none of which seemed viable due to the weather conditions. We were faced with the reality of having to backtrack the route we had just come down. Our subject agreed he was willing to give it a try as he stuffed his frozen feet into his frozen boots. I put my crampons on his boots, Rick put a helmet on him, we roped up and started our ascent.

Rick led the first 1000 feet until we got just below the fixed rope where we were met by Will Carlson and Jim Manues. They had brought us food and water and were also very helpful in kicking some good steps in the snow so we could get onto the fixed line. We were now able to attach Lucas to the rope with an ascender and he literally pulled himself up the last 1000 feet, one step at a time until we were at the top of the launching pad where we were greeted by the strongest winds any of us had ever been in. We all grabbed hold of each other and made our way to the top of the Tram station where we were met by Grace Manues who had the best hot chocolate in the world waiting for us.

The names I have mentioned in this article are only a fraction of the actual number of people who participated in this mission. We were supported by other teams, as well as many more people from our own team, without whom we would never have been able to pull this off. Thanks to everybody.

Editors Note: Many thanks to the teams from Sierra Madre, Altadena, San Dimas, San Diego, Rim of the World, and Wrightwood, who assisted us with all three missions on this weekend. ■

## Two Hikers Rescued On Skyline Trail

February 3, 2008  
Skyline Trail, San Jacinto Wilderness  
2008-005

By Patrick McCurdy

On the night of Saturday, February 2nd, RMRU was called out to search for two Skyline Trail hikers who were stranded on an icy stretch of trail near the top (See Mission 2008-004 for details on that search). With David Webb leading, myself, Jim Manues, and Pete Carlson paid out 800 feet of rope from the top of the trail to the area where the hikers were reported to be stranded.

At that point we found two other hikers (not the ones we were looking for) who had attempted the same trail, but had failed to make the top before nightfall. One of them was exhausted, hypothermic, and unable to manipulate his own gear (snowshoes, etc.) As the other three RMRU members continued down the steep slope, I gave each of these two an ascender on our rope and the three of us headed straight up the slope to the top. The more exhausted of the two dropped his pack after just a couple hundred feet to make the climb easier.

Once at the top we headed the short distance to the upper tram station where we arrived about 2 a.m. and provided them with dry clothes and loaned a sleeping bag to the hiker who had left his pack behind.

The two hikers slept at the tram while the search continued for our original subjects. The pack was retrieved the next day and the grateful hikers were on their way home no worse for the wear, if a little more tired than expected.

To date RMRU has rescued seven Skyline Trail hikers this year alone. Please consider that before attempting this unusually difficult climb. ■

## Local Hiker Rescued After Breaking Leg

February 4, 2008  
Mount San Jacinto  
2008-006

By Fresh Tracks Staff

RMRU found 53-year-old Ellen Coleman today, alive after two nights out in a fierce winter storm. After falling and breaking her leg Saturday, she crawled for several hours to take shelter in the small hut just shy of San Jacinto Peak. Rescue crews spotted her early Monday morning and splinted her leg before she was flown directly to a local hospital where she was reported in good shape and excellent spirits. ■



## Missing Man Overnight

February 16, 2008  
Mecca Hills, Near Thermal  
2008-007

By Patrick McCurdy

RMRU has a technical rope rescue reaccreditation with the Mountain Rescue Association coming up in March and has been doing a number of extra trainings lately to get ready. Saturday, 16 March, was the date for one of these trainings at 9 a.m., but we got a call at 7 a.m. to assist Desert Sheriff's Search and Rescue (DSSAR) with a search for a missing hiker in Painted Canyon in the Mecca Hills east of Coachella.

DSSAR had been searching all night for the man and requested help from RMRU and Blythe Search and Rescue in the morning.

Twelve RMRU members responded for the 90-mile drive out to the search area. I drove directly there from my home in Riverside. As I rolled up Painted Canyon Road on the way to the search, I saw a man walking at the point the road turns from straight gravel to curvy sand. I slowed and asked him if had been out all night, but he said he had not. He asked if I could give him a ride a couple miles up to his car, and I said sure, as that was the direction I was going anyway.

As we got going I asked him if he was just out hiking and he said he had been hiking the day before, but had lost his keys and was just now going back to his car, having spent the night at a friend's house in Thermal. I got suspicious and said that we were searching for a man whose car had been parked up the road all night long. I mentioned that the man we were looking for was diabetic. The very friendly man then looked somewhat shocked and sheepishly said that he was diabetic.

I was pretty thrilled at that point to have found the subject of the search before I ever even made it to the DSSAR command post to check in. Larry was quite friendly and we chatted on the two mile drive to the CP, where both DSSAR and the sheriff's deputy on scene were somewhat surprised when I arrived and said "I found him!"

The team regrouped in Thermal, grabbed a bite to eat, then headed back to our scheduled training which was only delayed three hours! We got another mission later that evening. See Mission 2008-008 for more details. ■

## Scout Leader Sick

February 16, 2008  
Saddle Junction, San Jacinto Mountains  
2008-008

By Glenn Henderson

After rolling on a search in Thermal Saturday morning, then spending the rest of the day doing technical training with the team at Big Rocks we all finally got home about 5:30 p.m. At 8 p.m. we received another call for a scoutmaster at the Saddle above Idyllwild that was having difficulty with diabetes. He had only recently been diagnosed with the disease and had

started on new medications the same day. There was a group of scout leaders that were preparing themselves for snow and ice camping and were headed out when scout leader, Wally, became disoriented and could not continue. They did the right thing by setting up tents and sent two down the Devils Slide trail to get help.

When we got the call our helicopters were not available but they were trying to track down a pilot that was cleared to fly in the mountains at night. In the meantime the team was activated and preparing for a long night of hiking up the trail and assessing whether to carry Wally out or keep him in the tent until morning. While we were enroute we got a call from Gwenda Yates that Tony Bowen and Kevin Boss were at the heliport and ready to fly. They requested two RMRU members to assist. Kevin Walker and I were the closest and responded within 20 minutes.

After discussing how we were going to try to get this mission done we took off to find our scout leaders. We found them almost immediately at the saddle but could not find a place to land so Tony flew us to Skunk Cabbage Meadow and dropped us off there. We were expecting soft snow but when we got out it was hard packed enough that we could walk on top of it with out any problems. Kevin and I hiked the half-mile to the saddle where we found Wally and friends waiting for us.

Wally was feeling much better but we were afraid to leave him there so we put him into a "screamer suit" where Tony and Kevin hoisted him up into the helicopter. They flew Wally to Keenwild Fire base where an ambulance was waiting. They then flew back to Skunk Cabbage Meadow and picked up Kevin and myself and flew the 11-minute flight back to Hemet/Ryan air base thus ending another long RMRU day at midnight.

Our great THANK YOU to Tony and Kevin. Without their skill flying in the mountains we might still be carrying Wally out instead of me sitting down writing this report on Sunday morning. ■





## Missing 54-Year-Old Woman

March 21, 2008  
Apple Canyon, Garner Valley  
2008-009

By Patrick McCurdy

On Friday, March 21st, RMRU was called out to search for a woman missing five days in the Apple Canyon area of Garner Valley, in the San Jacinto Mountains. The woman, Debbie, had last been seen the preceding Monday and there had been a fair amount of rain and snow in the area.

That night one team went up the trail from the Zen Center to where it intersects with the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT). Another team, along with several members of Riverside County Search Dogs (RCSD), worked down the canyon from the Zen Center toward Pine Springs Christian Ranch. No sign of the woman was found.

Saturday we had a very good turnout from RMRU, RCSD, and Desert Sheriff's Search and Rescue (DSSAR). Multiple field teams searched the draws from the canyon up to the PCT, several peaks in the area (Spitler, Apache, etc.) and north and south along the PCT. William Carlson and Jim Manues found some outer clothing above an icy shoot that dropped to the east from the PCT. The clothing was confirmed to be Debbie's.

Sunday, with the search now focused on the PCT, RMRU requested through our Sheriff's Emergency Response Team for help from out of county teams qualified in snow and ice conditions, as the PCT had large patches of ice and snow covering it. San Dimas Mountain Rescue Team, Sierra Madre Search and Rescue, and San Diego Mountain Rescue each sent 6-8 members to assist RMRU in the search.

Teams were searching their assigned areas when a search member fell on a ice patch and needed to be rescued himself (See below for William Carlson's comments on this part of the search.) By the time that searcher was rescued there was little daylight left and, with no good leads on Debbie's location, the search ended for the day.

The same teams again went out on Monday, but with similar lack of results. The official search was called off Monday evening.

RMRU held an unscheduled "training" the following Sunday with assistance from the Riverside Sheriff's Air Wing. The idea was to fly teams into Murray Canyon from the east, then have them search down that canyon with the hope of locating signs of Debbie. Extremely high winds prevented the helicopters from inserting our field teams very high up the canyon and two team members almost had to spend the night on a ridge, only being airlifted out at the last minute through the skills of pilot Tony Bowen and TFO John Irish.

While the official search is over, RMRU has not given up on finding Debbie. As we did with John Donovan, we will continue to search this area on training weekends and when team members can get out there on their own. ■

## Searcher Injured

Cont. 2008-009

By William Carlson

Rescuer Down! Two words you never want to hear in your search and rescue career. We had spent the morning searching an ice chute for a missing hiker when we got the call that a San Dimas rescuer had fallen 150 feet on an ice slope and was injured. Perfect cooperation between Sierra Madre Search and Rescue Team, Riverside Mountain Rescue Unit, and San Dimas Search and Rescue allowed us to execute a complicated alpine rescue in a timely manner. The patient was transported across the ice field to an open area where a Riverside County Sheriff Helicopter transported him to a waiting Mercy Air Heli-

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copter. All teams then returned to the command post where the search would continue one more day. ■

## Website News

Our RMRU webmaster (Patrick McCurdy) is testing a new feature on our website. It is Real Simple Syndication (RSS). This will allow interested people to subscribe to the RSS feed and get an automatic update every time something is added to our website — like new mission write-ups.

This feature is still in the test phase, so please don't expect perfection here in the beginning. However, if your computer savvy and would like to help us test the RSS feed, please feel free to sign-up. — Ed

## Presidents Letter

R.M.R.U. held its' annual election on April 2, and I have the honor of being the Team president for the following year. The board of directors is made up of Kevin Walker, Glenn Henderson, Gwenda Yates and Ray Hussey. We look forward to working with all team members on whatever issues arise.

This team is functioning at a very high level right now, and it is my hope that over the course of the following year we keep rising up the ladder of the professional rescuer.

I also want to thank Gwenda Yates for 2 years of unparalleled service as our past president. It is because of her that we are working together so well. She has made many great de-



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Your donation is deductible from both your state and federal taxes  
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C/O Riverside Sheriff's Office  
43950 Acacia Street  
Hemet, California 92544

Or at: [www.rmru.org](http://www.rmru.org)

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**The team saves a lost family**



**RMRU in the Sierra's**



**Patrick, Jeri and Grace find a lost hunter**



**Patrick searches on Mt. Baldy**



**Jim and Lew search for a missing hiker**