

Climber fell with report of broken leg

**January 2, 1978
Tahquitz Rock
1978-001**

By John Dew

The year was less than two days old, the Superbowl had just finished being played by an hour when the phone rang and the pagers were activated telling us that there was a problem on Tahquitz Rock. The unit, each one where ever he was spending that New Year's Day, assembled gear and rolled to Idyllwild as quickly as possible. Upon arriving at the road head and talking with the Deputy Sheriff, we were informed that two men, Robert Szarowski and David Albriton, were climbing on the Rock, darkness was coming, they were trying to hurry, and one of them had fallen breaking a leg.

Rescue after dark on a vertical rock face is difficult at best, but with the prospect of a broken leg on the side of the rock in the middle of the night, we knew our work was cut out for us.

Immediately the first ones to arrive started hiking with all first aid gear and as much technical climbing gear as they could carry. The others when they arrived were to bring the litter, the hardware for handling the litter on the face of the rock and other gear that might be necessary. The night was calm, it was cold until we had been hiking a few moments, and then it didn't seem nearly so cold. Only did we notice the cold when we walked around the South corner and ran square into the wind, then we could tell just how cold it was.

The first three, after they had been hiking about 30 minutes, and were in the vicinity of Lunch Rock made voice contact with the subjects who were stranded. The subjects could hear the team members well, but the direction the wind was blowing kept their voices from being received by the unit members, therefore, we could not determine the exact nature of the injuries nor their exact location. We continued to climb. Another group of unit members came in some time later and as the forward team would make voice contact with the climbers, though they could not hear the climber returning the call, the lower team could. They relayed, via radio, to the upper team what the climbers had said. At that point we learned it was not a broken leg at all, it was a broken wrist. We felt some better having learned this because a person who still has use of both feet can be tied in and assisted up the rock much easier than having to put a totally immobile person into a litter and raise him.

We knew then our work would not take us long. We were confident, however, with the late start that we got it would be an all night job.

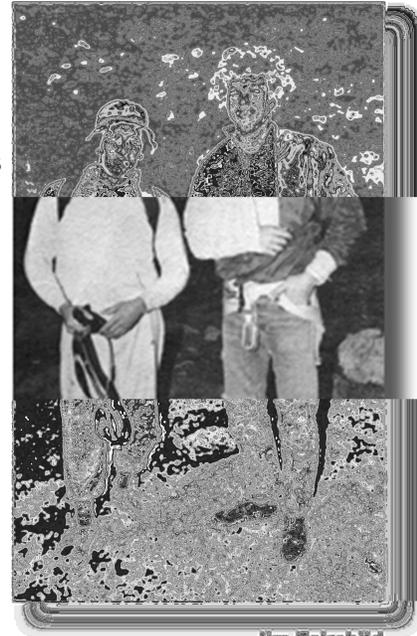
Having reached the top hiking, we determined approximately where the climbers were below us. We sent one man over the side. Walt Walker was that man. He went down to the climbers and did first aid on the injured man. By that time Bernie McIlvoy, who had arrived in the second group immediately went over the side to assist Walt.

After the rigging had been set up for raising these men, the really hard work began, that of lifting the injured subject and Walt, who was climbing with him. Then, again, lifting the other individual who had been stranded. Bernie climbed back to the top by use of his Jumars.

We packed all the gear and put a belay on the injured man to assist him to climb back to the road head, and we all started down.

These men were both good climbers. They had climbed routes on the rock numerous times but when darkness started to overtake them, they started trying to hurry. Climbing after dark and trying to hurry caused them to miss the route and they climbed straight up to an overhang rather than going a bit to the right where they would have easily been able to climb out. In trying to negotiate the overhang after dark and in a hurry, one of them slipped, an accident that can happen to anyone.

We all hiked back to the road head together very grateful that this young man was not injured more seriously than he was. Another mission brought to an end, another sleepless night for RMRU, and yet a grateful group of men, that they had been able to help someone else. After going to breakfast in Idyllwild we departed for our homes and back to the work we had planned for the day.



Jim Fairchild

Happy to be off the rock and back at Humber Park, David Albriton and Robert Szarowski posed for the photographer, before heading for the emergency room.

RMRU is a volunteer search and rescue team that covers Riverside County and assists other teams with search and rescue efforts in other counties. Each member purchases their own equipment and takes time off work, without compensation, to participate in search and rescue missions. Team equipment is purchased from contributions from the community. We are a non-profit organization and are funded by [donations](#) from people like you.