

Man slid 250, fractured ankle

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By Hal Fulkman

As Lloyd Allen stopped his ascent just short of Powder Box Spring the disappointing fact was all too clear, "This snow just isn't going to get any better." Disappointing because all the way up the Devil's Slide Lloyd was hoping that once on top the snow might be good enough for some cross country skiing.

Earlier that morning as Lloyd started out he mentioned to his wife his plans to ski over Saddle Junction and around Skunk Cabbage Meadow and be back home by dusk. The weather outlook was not good, and he was going alone, but the fact that he was experienced and was not going too far seemed to outweigh any problems that might come up.

And now as Lloyd is standing just a few switch backs from the saddle, he decides that the snow is just too hard to ski safely. At this point that uncalculated thing happens that causes a chain of events that will bring Lloyd to the brink of his very survival. As Lloyd was turning around he lost his footing and slipped off the trail. In seconds his body is building up incredible speed over the hard snow. After about 250 feet, Lloyd crashed into a partially buried tree limb and came to a sudden halt. The feeling of "glad to be alive" was short lived by the intense pain coming from his badly fractured ankle.

Many problems faced Lloyd at this time. Problems that very easily could seem insurmountable. A fractured ankle, lying on a narrow ledge with several hundred more feet to fall, no way back up, at least nine hours before his wife would even begin to worry, and bad weather on the way. Enough problems to have caused a deep depression and hopelessness that has brought a tragic end to many victims of mountaineering accidents. Lloyd had an immediate choice to make, a choice I feel is a key note in survival, and that choice is attitude. A choice of succumbing to the hopelessness or a choice of confidence in ability, experience, intestinal fortitude, and spiritual fortitude, a survivalist." A choice of positive mountaineering attitude.

Lloyd, after putting together everything that had happened to him, made all his decisions in the next five minutes. Every one was positive and aimed at surviving. He made his ledge wider and secured himself. He positioned his body so he could look back in the directions of the trail, put as much gear between him and the snow as he

could, and made a make-shift splint for his ankle. He knew that after his wife reported him overdue that RMRU would be activated and out searching for him and for that reason trying to move was out of the question. Lloyd also realized that hypothermia would soon render him unable to make rational decisions so he programmed himself not to change his mind on those things he had already decided to do. The next thing was to wait.

2015 hours Wednesday evening at our regular rescue meeting, members of RMRU were discussing the many rescues we had from the San Jacinto flood earlier that week. Our discussion was interrupted by the Sheriff dispatcher's voice over our pagers. It was a search for an overdue cross country skier. A type of operation that was becoming more and more frequent with the popularity the sport was generating mixed with a season of hard snow and ice our mountains were experiencing. The rendezvous was the Sheriff's office in Idyllwild and by 2215 most of the team had assembled, and were receiving assignments while the operations leader was questioning the missing person's wife, Mrs. Lloyd Allen, as to the itinerary of Lloyd's outing. She informed us that Lloyd was supposed to hike up the Devil's Slide Trail and ski the back country. She said he was supposed to ski the Skunk Cabbage area but he might get as far as Tahquitz Valley. She also said that he sometimes liked to do the scenic trail because it was closer. This description of where Lloyd might have gone was a little disturbing because from the trail head at Humber Park the two routes were in opposite directions. The rescue van was moved to Humber Park and by 2300 two teams were moving up the Devil's Slide while one team was sent down the scenic trail. The first team up the Devil's Slide was a two man team and was about 15 minutes ahead of the second four man team. The weather had closed in to the high country earlier that evening and it had been raining already for about three hours. The conditions couldn't have been worse. An icy cold rain with gusty winds made the going miserable and caused great concern for Lloyd's safety. At 0145 Pete Carlson and Dave Ezell, the men in the first team, radioed back to base that they had made voice contact with Lloyd and were trying to locate his position. Ten minutes later they were with him. Pete reported Lloyd was about 250 feet off the trail and was injured. I was team leader of the second group; and as soon as we heard the message, I sent Chris Noon and Joe Erickson back down the trail to assist in bringing up the litter and the technical gear. Craig Beasley and myself proceeded to Lloyd's position.



Jim Fairchild

VOLUNTEERS AT WORK - RMRU members and volunteers from Idylwild, guide the wheeled litter containing Lloyd Allen back to Humber Park, after RMRU members spent the entire night out in the rain and snow rescuing Lloyd.

When we got to them Pete had gotten Lloyd into a sleeping bag and had some soup on the stove. After several cups, Lloyd told us about his almost getting to the top and then deciding to turn around and in the process losing his footing and falling. The tree limb that finally stopped him formed an arch as it protruded out of the snow.

The rain had turned to icy snow and everything was soaking wet. The wind was still blowing hard and all of us were beginning to suffer from the cold.

After what always seems a lifetime the men above had gotten the haul line ready and with Lloyd in the litter, we started the 250 foot raise to the trail. Even with four men on the litter and several on the haul line, the raise was very strenuous, but steady. By the time we reached the trail it was light enough to see well, and even though it was still storming the fact that the long cold night was over brought a degree of renewal to all of us.

It was now a matter of bringing Lloyd down the mountain as comfortably as possible when we met by fire department personnel about a mile down the mountain with fresh man power. We were able to move faster to the waiting ambulance at Humber Park. Altogether, Lloyd had been from the time of his accident, 26 hours in the back country with serious injuries and in bad weather. A tribute to Lloyd's attitude about survival and RMRU's rescue expertise.

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.