

## **Hiker with injured ankle**

**April 18, 1981**  
**Willow Creek Crossing**  
**1981-014**

By Jim Fairchild

Early this particular morning hardly any of us scheduled for a day's work in the garden and around the house expected to be saved by the bell! Nevertheless, about 0630 the telephone rang just as I was walking out the door to run. The ring did sort have the "rescue" tone to it, and sure enough, Walt Walker told of a hiker with an injured knee.

After too many minutes in the throes of trying to contact a lot of members by phone, I rolled to Humber Park (6400'el.) above Idyllwild. The two vans were there, John Dew and Walt were putting the wheel and frame on a Stokes litter, Mary and Jack Bowman were working base, and Kevin Walker and Hal Fulkman had already left twenty minutes before as a "bash" team. We had heard that the subject was in a tent near the trail and up from it along the first drainage past Saddle Junction (8100' el.). Joe Erickson and John were ready to go, so I grabbed the litter and we started off with light packs. A few clouds were around, but Joe and I hiked in shorts, with long trousers in packs - how smart! The fresh air and coolness inspired us to really move along as we traded pushing the litter and its marvelous wheel. We kept hearing reports on our radio that maybe the subject was a bit farther, maybe as far as Skunk Cabbage Meadow (3 mile hike). Great, we'll be there shortly. Soon Steve Vaughn, Jim Snodgrass, and Jim Caldwell of Hemet Search and Rescue were hiking up behind a mile or so. As we neared the saddle we met folks who had been with the subject, saying he was above Willow Creek Crossing (5 mile hike). Fine, we'll be there shortly. Some snow patches encroached the trail, increasing as we neared the saddle, and nearly covered the ground once there. Past the saddle is nearly level ground, and we cruised quickly through the magnificent pines and past the meadow now awakening to spring. Clouds were sort of closing in, visibility down to a quarter mile. We rounded the last corner and heard Willow Creek almost roaring in its dash for the desert. Upon crossing the crossing we turned uphill and soon requested a yell from Kevin and Hal. OK, they were about two hundred yards or so above and away. Also OK, and spectacularly, it started to snow - big flakes and lots of them. Kevin helped with the litter the last fifty feet, and we were there. Hal wrapped an ace bandage around the injured knee as I took pictures. That knee belongs to Charles R. (Chuck) Imbrecht, an attorney and California State Assemblyman from the 36th. District, Ventura County. Very interesting! A backpacking politician whom we soon learned is a very nice fellow. He was appreciative of our efforts on his behalf and

was soon doing well in RMRU's repartee and humor.

Chuck and his partner, Richard Lehman, also an assemblyman, from Fresno, were hiking down Willow Creek the day before (Friday). They were a bit off-route and slightly "confused" as to location. Repeated falls onto his knee resulted in the said knee telling Chuck, "that's it, no more." So, unable to move further, Chuck had to stay while his partner hiked out to get help. Lehman arrived in Idyllwild at 9:30 PM and notified the Sheriff's Office. Meanwhile, some other hikers came along, saw Chuck, and helped him get downstream a quarter mile to a good tent-site where he spent the night. Of course, RMRU could not begin to gather for the evacuation until we were notified Saturday morning.



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**WILLOW CREEK CROSSING - RMRU members Hal Fulkman, John Dow, Joe Erickson (obscured) and Kevin Walker, guide the wheeled litter containing Charles Imbrecht across Willow Creek. Just minutes earlier mild spring conditions were experienced. Now though, a wet snow was falling.**

Following getting Chuck ready for transport, we put him in the litter amid heavy snowfall, and started down. The HSAR men arrived and were assigned to break the camp and carry out the gear. Despite "post-holing" in the snow we made good time on the roll-out. Before long, over near Skunk Cabbage Meadow, Rick Pohlers, Bob Attride, and Jim Garvey arrived and we made better time with less effort per person. Dr. Jerry Niswonger and Karen Rutledge met us a bit down from the saddle, and before long we were out of the snow and storm and back to base.

Funny thing happened at the Alpine Pantry in Idyllwild during breakfast. A waitress asked what the occasion was for all of us being there, and we said we rescued him .... meaning Chuck. She asked, amazed, "Did it take all of you to rescue him?"

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.