



Three boys hiking alone

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Near Saddle Junction
1982-002

By Walt Walker

Saturday evening at seven o'clock is one of the all time miserable moments to receive a rescue call. Wives and girlfriends of RMRU members, become unhappy, in a matter of micro seconds. You guessed it, that's exactly what happened for the second mission of the new year.

Kevin Walker and I arrived at Humber Park in the No. 1 Van, with John Dew and his son Roy right behind us in their, car. We were met by Mary Bowman and Deputy Fogel of the Riverside County Sheriff's Department. They explained the details of the situation. Four older boys had gone for a hike towards Tahquitz Rock. One of the boys, due to poor foot-wear, turned back at about 1:30 p.m. The other three continued upward and had not returned. None of them were carrying any equipment and it was believed that they did not have any matches with them. There was patchy snow at Humber Park and it was estimated that there was about two to three feet of snow in the high country.

Shortly Joe Erickson arrived and it was decided that Mary would be the radio and base operator and Kevin the Operations Leader. John, Joe and I would start out as quickly as possible. just as we were putting on our packs we heard a faint call from way above us. It sounded like it was coming from northeast of Tahquitz Rock. We immediately started up the ridge just south of the Devil's Slide Trail. About 20 minutes after the three of us had started searching, Bernie McIlvoy and Mark Rhoads showed up at base. They became the second field team.

Near Humber Park there were literally thousands of tracks in the snow and it was impossible to start tracking from there. About 30 minutes into the search, the team I was leading, came upon three sets of tracks that seemed to fit the description given us. We started following them up the ridge. The tracks, in the beginning, more or less went upwards with very little variance left to right. As we went along, about every 10 minutes we would shout and occasionally we would get a reply. However, we were having a very hard time trying to determine in which direction the reply was coming from.

After consultation with the 'Ops. Ldr.' it was decided that we would continue up the ridge and that Bernie and Mark would head into the drainage east and north of

Tahquitz Rock. Now and then we would lose the tracks and we would have to stop and circle about until we found them again. About 1000 feet above Humber Park we left the intermittent snow coverage and were hiking entirely on the snow.

The tracks now began to wander from one side of the ridge to the other and we were no longer receiving any replies to our shouting. Bernie and I communicated back and forth via the radio and agreed that the last we had heard of the voices was east and considerably higher than our present elevation. Bernie and Mark began a traverse towards Saddle Junction as we continued following the tracks up the ridge. I radioed to Bernie and asked him what their progress was and received a classic reply, "We are in 5.9 brush!"

Earlier it had been decided to call the associate members for some extra help. Don Ricker, Mike Daughtery and Tom Aldrich responded to the call. They were joined by regular member Craig Britton to form a team to hike up the Devil's Slide Trail, to try and establish a perimeter to the north.

Before I knew it my team was on a very steep slope of very hard snow which required a good deal of effort to kick steps into it. About 50 or 60 feet up, the slope turned right into a chute, that had a large area of ice that required me to start chopping steps with my ice axe. When we finally reached the top of the chute and looked around, we could now only find two sets of tracks. Some scrambling over and around boulders brought us to a very large hunk of granite that we had to circle around. As I came around the corner I could see the glow of a campfire shining into the trees. I shouted and received a reply from above.

As I started to continue a cramp struck my right thigh and Joe 'sped' by me to grab the bacon. Before I knew it John had passed me by and I could hear them both chuckling as I struggled to release the cramp. When I finally covered the hundred or so feet to the fire, Joe was doing a great job of passing out clothing to the three boys. With that completed, Joe fired up a mountaineering stove to prepare some hot liquids and food for the weary trio of boys.

When we arrived at the campfire we were surprised to find a tent and two extra people. As the stove was heating the water we learned that the couple had snowshoed up the ridge and had not made the top before dark. They had heard the boys shouting and called back to them. We also found out that most of the shouting had been back and forth between the boys and not in response to our shouting. One of the boys had slipped on a steep slope and slid better than 200 feet downward. Luckily his trip down was stopped by a large snowbanks He lost one boot in the process and was also separated from the other two. All the shouting had been done to try and get back together again. Fortunately for them the man had been able to start a fire for them to huddle around.

it was decided that the best thing to do was wait the two and a half hours to first light and then head up to Saddle Junction and then down the Devil's Slide Trail. The four

man crew who had hiked up the trail bivouacked at the Saddle. John, Joe and I collected more firewood and took turns keeping the fire going during the rest of the night.

The next morning we fabricated a boot, out of John's insolate pad and some tape, for the young fellow who was missing a boot. We were met by the four man crew and then hiked up the short distance to the Saddle. It was then down the trail towards Humber Park. The boy with the handmade boot was having a very hard time staying on his feet so we radioed down to base to see if they could try and locate a boot. In a very short time Mary radioed back to us that a boot had been located and that Kevin would start up the trail with it.

About half way down we met up with Kevin and stopped to have the boy put on the boot. With the boot laced up we started down once again. As we neared Humber Park we could hear voices and soon realized it was coming from people who were playing in the snow. When we made the final turn and headed to the parking lot we had to dodge kids on sleds and snow saucers. When we arrived back at base team doctor Norm Mellor was there waiting to examine the boy's foot to check for frostbite. The good news was that the boy's foot was cold but not frostbitten.

With the mission completed we drove down to Idyllwild for a hot breakfast. After consuming many hot cups of coffee, milk, juice, eggs, potatoes, bacon, ham, sausage, pancakes and French toast we headed for home and some sleep.

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.