

Man slid down ice chute

**December 28, 1982
Palm Springs Tram
1982-043**

By Mark Hebert

Team members were called to a rescue concerning a victim who had fallen down an ice chute. Apparently the victim had stepped over the edge to get a better view of the desert. In response to this call RMRU members had voice contact with the supposed victim. The voice wasn't coming from the ice chute where the fallen victim was supposed to be, a trivial matter since we were to respond to the victim and not necessarily a specific geographic location. This is where the above mentioned mission really begins.

Upon arrival at the Palm Springs Aerial Tram, RMRU was advised as to the location of the fall victim by his brother. They had been skiing together when the brother removed his skis to get a better look at the desert. In a flash he was gone. The job of RMRU was to search the ice chute and render assistance to the victim. Survival of such a fall is not likely, but possible.

Approaching the problem with optimism, it was only proper to assume he survived the fall. Thus the search began. The first men on the scene repelled down the ice chute in search of the victim when voice contact was established with the injured victim. The circumstances didn't add up. The voice calling for help was not coming from the chute the team was supposed to search. Regardless of the lack of logic in the situation there was indeed a victim in need of help and was alive. It was decided to go in search of the voice calling for help. Two team members, Walt



SUPPORT GROUP - This is what it takes to support the few who go down a chute in a winter technical mission. Assisting RMRU members in the combination search/rescue/evacuation missions (1982-042 & 1982-043) are Sierra Madre Search & Rescue Team members and personnel from the ML San Jacinto State Park.

Walker (team leader) and Mark Hebert roped together to traverse three rather severe ice chutes in order to locate the victim.

Upon locating the victim Walt began to descend the ice chute where our supposed victim had come to rest at a large tree stump. Mark stayed behind to tend the rope in the case of a fall by Walt. "Oh-censored-!, was all Mark heard as he was pulled off his feet by the impact of Walt at the end of his rope. There was little or no time for thought only reflex action. Mark had his eye on a small fir tree just about 10 feet in front of him. It was essential that his body end up on the proper side of the tree in order to save both himself and his partner from what would be a long slide to probable death. The collision with the tree was fierce but Mark's body did end up on the proper side of the tree analyzing the rope to arrest Walt's fall.

Injuries to both team members were slight, but both were badly shaken. After recovering from the fall it was ascertained that the victim found was not the victim being looked for. This person turned out to be Robert Lear, age 33. This man had started from Palm Springs and had hiked up the Skyline Trail heading for the Tram. Because of deep snow he got off route and was hiking along the edge to the ridge. In doing so, at one point, lost his footing on the icy slope and fell an indeterminate amount of feet. This fall left the victim with head injuries, fractured ribs, and a fracture to the lower leg that was open and still bleeding.

Walt and Mark pooled their skill and equipment. First cutting a shelf in the slope next to Robert, then maintaining traction on the injured leg moved him onto it. Walt had an airsplint and that was applied. Then extra clothing carried, was put on the victim. With Robert as comfortable as possible, Walt and Mark spent a cold and long night. The search for the original victim continued on (see Mission No. [1982-042](#)). Bernie McIlvoy took charge of the other mission, and Kevin Walker coordinated down to base to have Don Landells for the morning.

At 6:00 a.m. Don Landells arrived at the lower tram station. There a helicopter sling was readied and attached along with a Stokes litter. The helicopter then flew up to Walt and Mark's location, hovered over and Walt disconnected the litter from the sling. Robert was then loaded into the litter (with great care due to the steepness), and secured in. Don then came back into the extremely tight spot for the re-hook up. Once hooked on Don backed out and flew the victim down to the lower tram station and a waiting ambulance.

With Don's own invention for flying Elk under the helicopter secured to the sling, he returned to fly out human cargo that being Walt and Mark. Mark with his injured knee went first followed by Walt, for both it was definitely an "E" ticket ride down to the Skyline Ridge, where both could then get in the chopper and be flown down to base and a waiting doctor.

Truely a richly rewarding experience for all RMRU members involved, though tragedy had occurred on the previous mission.

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.