

Solo female hiker 24 hours overdue

March 28, 1985
Pacific Crest Trail
1985-015

By Kevin Walker

In the pre-dawn hours we were contacted by the S.O. to respond to a search for a missing woman. We met at Snow Creek at first light. The mountain was not a pretty sight for one who was going to have to go out. A large storm had blown in two days earlier and had stalled over the San Jacinto's. Somewhere out there was Lisa Carlson, 24, from Waterbury, Vermont out here doing the Pacific Crest Trail solo from the Mexican border to Canada. Lisa left Idyllwild on Saturday the 23rd, and was to meet a friend, Fred Bingham at the Whitewater post office on Tuesday the 26th. Fred waited until Wednesday and then called the authorities. So, somewhere between Saddle Junction and Snow Creek, in deep snow with more falling, was Lisa, if she was on the trail. If not there would be a lot of mountain to look over. The winds were of gale force, but there was some thought that we might get a peak under the clouds, so Bernie McIlvoy and Rob Gardner went down to Landells Aviation. They joined pilot Brian Novak in one of the jet Ranger III's. They flew for about one hour trying to get in close for a look, but the storm proved to be too strong for the helicopter. Plan B was put into effect. We moved around to the Western side of the mountain where the storm was coming in from. As we drove up the mountain it was raining heavily and as we reached the timber country, it turned to snow. Base was set up at the Allandale Fire Station. First into the field was a team made up of Bud White, Randy Iwasiuk and Curtis Pontynen. They were taken in by snow cat (courtesy of the Southern California Edison Company) to the Fuller Ridge Trail head. They were to follow the route as close as possible to Deer Springs. Another large team that would split into two teams on Friday would go in the

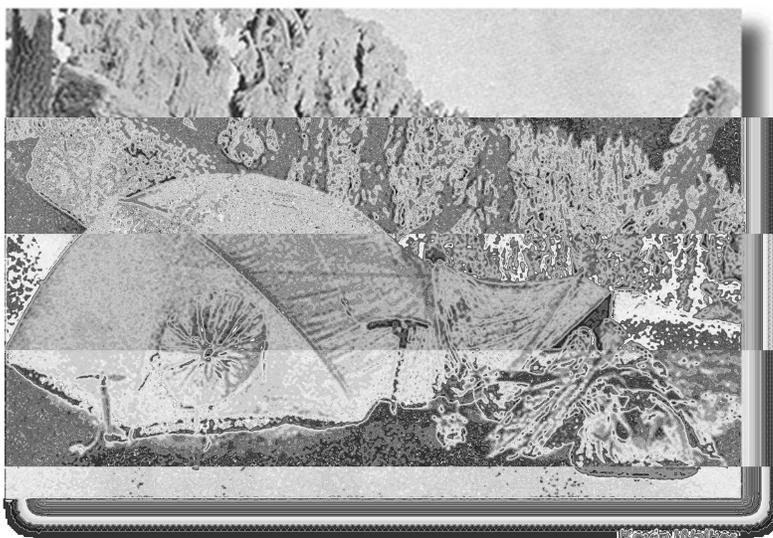


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CARING ENOUGH TO CONTINUE - RMRU members are seen here pushing on up the Marion Mountain trail in snowfall that soon became so heavy, one could see only several feet ahead. Knowing that Lisa Carlson was up above somewhere, was enough to continue.

Marion Mountain Trail to Deer Springs. That was my group. With me would be Mel Krug and Rob Gardner. Under Rick Pohlers' leadership was Mark Rhoads and Bill George. As we headed up the trail it was snowing lightly. After we were into the trip for about an hour the snowfall rate increased dramatically. Soon we could only see 20 feet out, which made route finding nearly impossible. We pressed on for some time, but as the light began to fail, snowfall still increasing, and our own people getting cold, we decided to stop. Rick and I know the mountain pretty well, but in white-out conditions, it is easy to trip up, and we had done just that. The two of us felt that we were still a little below Deer Springs, but we were unsure of the ridge that we were on. Randy's team had stopped somewhere on the Fuller Ridge for the same reasons as our group. As the last of the light faded into darkness, we finished setting up my North Face VE-24 tent and Jim Fairchild's old Alpsport. Everyone climbed into my tent (spacious for three, but for six?) for hot soup and food. As the snow slowly built up on our tents we talked of previous epic type missions, and what Lisa must have been thinking about also if she was still able to. It was a somber time for all. At about 9:00 pm the snow stopped and then not long after, it cleared. The mountain was calm. And fortunately it stayed that way.

First light we started to move around a little, my fellow team mates and I putting on the many layers of clothing; Patagonia polypro underwear already on, wool or Patagonia Pile Pants, shirts, pile jackets, Gore-Tex Parkas. Mark and I were first out. As Mark started his MSR stove, I checked out the condition of our camp. Gear was all where it should be, my tent was fine. The only casualty of the storm was Jim's tent which Rick and Bill had used. Some of the seams had ripped in the snow and wind. At any rate, we all got going and started to break camp. At about 6:30 we heard the comforting sound of a Bell Jet Ranger approaching. On board was Walt Walker with Brian. They over flew our location. I asked them to hover over the Marion Meadow, they did and to Rick's and my satisfaction we were only about a half mile down ridge, which meant we were within several hundred feet of the trail. We finished breaking camp and headed on up. As we moved up the ridge Bernie McIlvoy came on the air, (a team I forgot to mention earlier) that he and Colin Chambers had spent the night in the Mt. San Jacinto shelter after hiking from the tram. They were now approaching Little Round Valley on our side. Randy's team was up and going also. During the night Ops Leader Walt had called in Sierra Madre. They had responded in the night to help us at first light. It was good to have fellow MRA members as the mountain had been covered with a thick blanket of snow, and if Lisa was not up and about, it would be nearly impossible to find her. The helicopter put more teams out at Skunk Cabbage meadow (near where Lisa was last seen), and then another on the large Fuller Ridge. Our plan was to close off all sections of the PCT from the Saddle to the

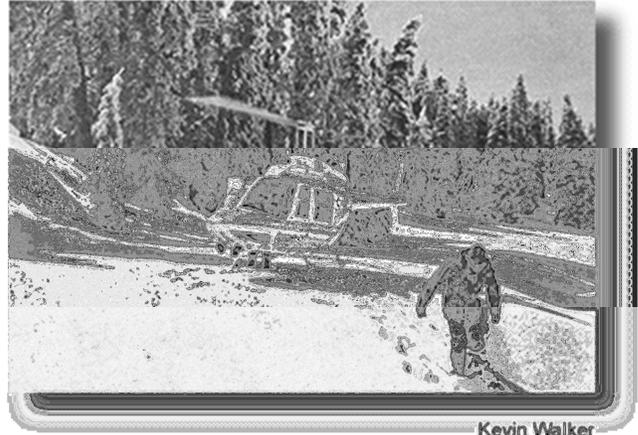


SOMETHING FROM A FAIRY TALE - RMRU members awoke to a strange and beautiful world, after spending a long night of being concerned over missing Lisa Carlson. Darkness and heavy snow forced searchers to stop.

Fuller Ridge. At about 9:00 while returning from letting out the last of the teams, Walt and Brian spotted a small figure waving in a little clearing and a quarter of a mile below the PCT trail, between the Fuller Ridge and Deer Springs. Brian carefully maneuvered the powerful machine down into the little clearing, and soon Lisa Carlson was on board with Walt's help, and with Brian's skill they were out of there, on their way back to base. As Brian flew us out in loads of two or three, Lisa told of how she had taken a fall early Tuesday and banged up her knee. Later in the day the storm hit, and hit hard. She set up her tent and climbed in. There she stayed. She was in pretty good shape, as she had rationed food and melted snow. Never the less, we fell she was glad to see us.

Publisher's Note: Some missions stand out more than others, this one was the second (see Mission No. [1985-002](#) for the first one) time in my opinion. Lisa was fortunate. She did take care of herself, but she was also fortunate to have a group of volunteers looking for her. Fortunate to have a skilled pilot in the air. Fortunate to have the Riverside County Sheriff's Department handling financial aspects of a search. Fortunate indeed.

The following may sound like a commercial. Well, it is, and for good reason. To companies like Patagonia, Gregory, North Face, etc., all the way down to the Mini-Mag Lights that we carry, and to the distributors in our area; Mountain High Recreation, Sports Country LTD, Riverside Ski and Sport and The Sports Chalet, it is because of your quality equipment and support in the way of discounts that in it's own way helped to bring Lisa home safe. Thank you, we do indeed need you also.



Kevin Walker
TIME TO GO HOME - RMRU members Mel Krug heads away from the helicopter to get gear to be flown out along with members after pilot Brian Novak and Walt Walker Located Lisa between the Fuller Ridge and Deer Springs.

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.