

Climbers on North Face separated

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Snowcreek, San Jacinto Mountains
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By Joe Erickson

I have Mondays off from work because I work Saturdays. Filling Monday afternoons with something meaningful, (like a nap), is always challenging. I was actually pleased when my pager went off at around 1:30 pm for a North Face search.

Marvin Organ and his buddies were attempting to climb the North Face of Mt. San Jacinto over the weekend and became separated on Sunday. Marvin had the food, a small pack, and 120' long rope.

As I have some limitations on my ascent into higher altitudes due to a brain injury (Ed. note: High Altitude Cerebral Edema - HACE) incurred on another mission, I expected to sit in base camp all afternoon. However...

The Isthmus is where Falls Creek and Snowcreek come very close together, at 4000'elevation, and is a favorite campsite for those going up the mountain. It is low enough altitude for my brain and an excellent place to look for tracks going up or down the North Face.

The "however" is that Jim Fairchild and I were flown by helicopter a few hours before dark to the Isthmus with the intention of establishing a direction of travel for Marvin. We were standing on the rocks above the campsite where we were helitacked from the bird, settling into our assignment by yelling and listening, looking and tracking, when we thought we might have heard a voice answer from above. Remember, the streams either side and below us were noisy, and it was difficult to hear any sound besides rushing water. We continued to look, yell, and listen, when sure enough, there was a person up there. (Ed. note: Joe did a fine job of spotting Marvin in tall shrubs 400 yds. away).

He was escorted back to the Isthmus as Jim photographed. (After Kevin Walker had flown by and handed Jim a camera and extra film just like passing a baton during a relay race). The helicopter returned for Marvin, Jim, and me after dropping off Kevin and Rob Gardner at base camp. Mike Donovan piloted the Jet Ranger III into a fine rock outcropping smoothly and confidently, while Jim took more photos . Marvin was carefully loaded in and buckled up.

Following a pleasant flight back to base camp we had a meal generously provided by the Riverside County Sheriff's Office, and I was home by 8:00 pm.

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