

Missing man found

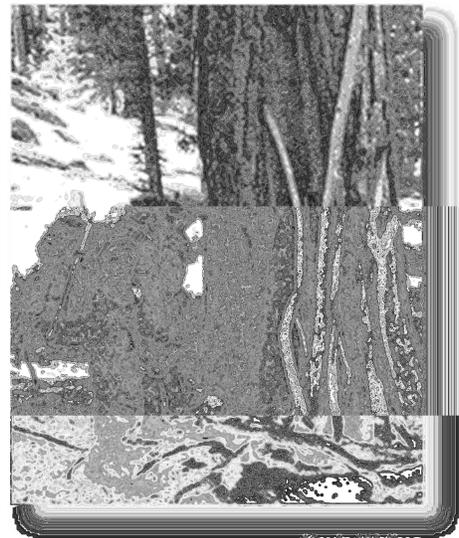
December 10, 1985
Laws Camp
1985-055

By Bill Blaschko, M.D.

Sometimes in life you don't feel happy when you find what you have been looking for. I felt a strange mixture of awe, fear and satisfaction when I set eyes on the body of John Kivlen curled up in a hollowed out tree just off the trail between Laws Camp and Caramba. Mr. Kivlen had last been seen a month before when he set out on a day hike from the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway. He was lightly dressed and had obtained a permit to go to Wellman's Divide on Sunday, Nov. 10. That night a surprise snowstorm dropped three to five feet of snow on the area.

When Mr. Kivlen's failure to return was reported ([1985-050](#)), RMRU was already in the process of searching for five other hikers caught in the same storm ([1985-048](#) & [1985-049](#)). We were being assisted by several Mountain Rescue Association teams as well as two US Marine Corps helicopters and Landells Aviation. During this period of time temperatures dipped to five degrees Fahrenheit and the snow level was down to 3000 feet. Mr. Kivlen was reported to be wearing only tennis shoes and a light jacket and he had no overnight sleeping gear. With the combination of adverse weather conditions and lack of equipment it seemed very unlikely that Mr. Kivlen could have survived more than 24 hours. The initial search for Mr. Kivlen stretched over four days including both air and ground searching. At the end of this time the hard decision was made to discontinue searching until some further information was available.

On Monday, December 9, I set out on a day hike to Caramba with a close friend, Bruce Morlan. Bruce had never been to Caramba and I was hoping to find some nice ice formations at the falls. We were both aware that John Kivlen had not been found and we agreed that we would keep our eyes open for any clues. Two cloud-bursts had dropped a lot of rain on the high country and washed away much of the snow from the surprise storm



Kevin Walker

A FINAL CAMPSITE - RMRU members Rob Gardner and Mel Krug look over the partially burned out pine tree that lost hiker John Kivlen fashioned a makeshift shelter in and then perished during the major storm from the month before.

of the month before. The few inches of snow left was quite icy and Bruce and I had to use crampons to keep our footing. I happened to be in the lead just after we crossed a creek east of Laws Camp when I noticed a red paperback book barely visible through the snow and ice. With a little effort I was able to pry it loose. The pages were frozen together, making it impossible to check inside for a name. We then searched the general area for anything else that looked unusual. Bruce noted some branches stacked against a tree about twenty yards off.

When we went over to investigate we found John Kivlen's body resting inside of a



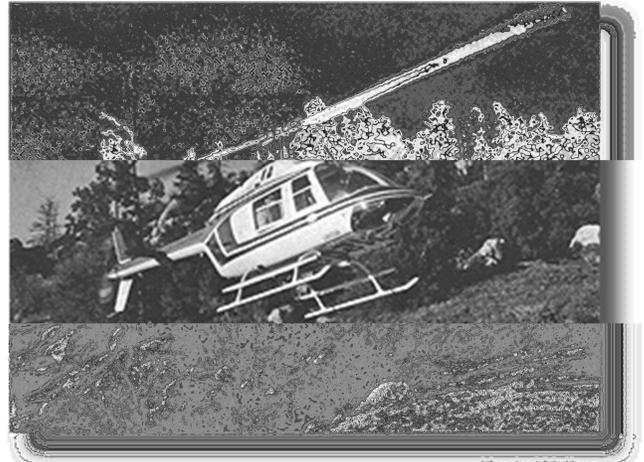
Mel Krug

A SOMBER MOMENT - RMRU members carry the body of John Kivlen to a small clearing where Don Landells would be able to get low enough with the helicopter to finish the evacuation.

hollowed

tree. The body was in the sitting position, with the head slumped forward. His back was resting against the inside of a three by four foot space inside the tree. The skin had a brownish black discoloration but otherwise he was well preserved. The branches that had initially attracted Bruce's attention apparently had been placed to cover the opening in the tree and provide more shelter. Bruce and I hiked out to Idyllwild to report our find to the Sheriff.

The following morning Kevin Walker, Mel Krug, Rob Gardner, Gil Carr and I were flown into Caramba to retrieve the body. After hiking to the scene we loaded the body into a body bag and cargo net. Don Landells flew over and lowered a line from his helicopter which was attached to the cargo net. Don flew the body to the waiting coroner. We team members were flown out just as a new snow storm began to dump another foot of snow on the high country. This mission was concluded. It was a sad ending, but not so sad as no ending at all.



Kevin Walker

CARAMBA NORTH - RMRU members arrive at the Caramba North helispot in helicopter 16U piloted by Don Landells. Team members then hiked to Laws Camp to effect the evacuation of John Kivlen.

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.