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Search and Rescue

SEARCH

Mission No. 8401M

1 January, Sun.
Southeast of Tahquitz Canyon,
San Jacinto Mountains

By Walt Walker



Since I had not attended any New Year's Eve parties, it was with no pain, that I answered the telephone at 6:30 a.m. I wasn't behind in paying my bills, or anything like that — you guessed it, the team was being called out for a mission. It had been several years since we had had an almost traditional New Years holiday mission.

It had been reported to the Palm Springs Police Department that a flashing light could be seen high up into the mountains above the city. They dispatched a patrol car to the south end of the city. The officers soon saw the light and it was flashing a Morse code "S.O.S." The police department contacted the Indio station of the Riverside County Sheriff's Department since the light was well out of the city limits.

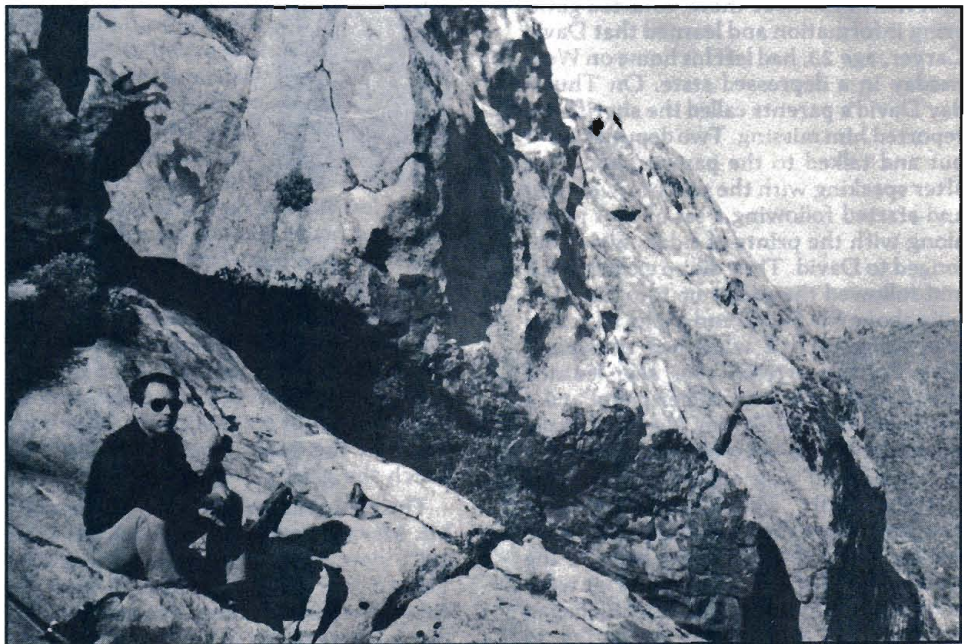
Shortly before 8:00 a.m. RMRU members arrived at the corner where the officers had observed the light from. They had carefully lined up their car and the ridge top, creating a line of sight. After listening to all the information and looking at the ridges along the line of sight, we decided that the best thing to do was to deploy members on the different ridges by helicopter.

Don Landells had been previously called by the S.O. and was already in the air. We set up a base at the corner in front of



RMRU PHOTO BY JIM FAIRCHILD

REPORTED SOS — It was at this location that a signal of distress was reported to the Palm Springs Police Department, who in turn called for RMRU's assistance. The arrow points to the approximate location.



RMRU PHOTO BY JIM FAIRCHILD

ON THE SPOT — RMRU member Joel Rothschild takes a break where the previous photo points to. Prints were found in the vicinity, but no clues as to what was used to signal the desert were located.

Ann Dolley's house. In a very short time the teams of two members were being airlifted to the ridge tops. One of the teams reported finding some tracks left by running shoes. They began tracking and the helicopter searched the area from the air.

Everyone of the canyons leading downward were carefully searched from the air by the helicopter. We even searched the famous Tahquitz Canyon from the air. Field teams were picked up by the bird and moved to other areas to search again. Since there are very few trees in the area, searching from the air is very effective. However, everything was fruitless, we could not find anyone, and nobody was reported missing. At 3:30 p.m. we called off the search. • RMRU

SEARCH

Mission No. 8402M

**27 January, Fri.
Ortega Mountains,
near Lake Elsinore**

By Kevin Walker



Fridays are typically hectic at Arrow Printing, and this was not unlike any other. The sheriff called with news of a missing man from Lake Elsinore. After making my calls to fellow members, I picked

up the No. 1 van and proceeded to the Elsinore station. Surprisingly, I was the first RMRU member there. I started gathering information and learned that David Carver, age 23, had left his home on Wednesday in a depressed state. On Thursday David's parents called the sheriff and reported him missing. Two deputies went out and talked to the parents, and then after speaking with the parents, went out and started following a set of foot prints along with the prints of a dog, which belonged to David. They did an excellent job and followed the prints up into the foothills above the South end of the lake. As I was being told of what had transpired Rick Pohlers arrived. We also learned that David took a 22 caliber pistol and a bottle of Vodka with him. Needless to say the situation did not look good. We drove to a roadhead near where the deputies lost the prints. There they showed us how and where they had followed David's tracks. After that we went back to the vans and loaded our packs up. As we were doing so, Rob Gardner and Bruce Gahagan arrived. Just as we were preparing to start hiking a couple walked by and asked what we were doing. After telling them we were searching for a missing man, they said they had seen a man and a dog

sitting on a small ridge just up a dirt road from where they were the day before. The sheriff drove the couple up the road to where the person was last seen. Soon the sad news came back, that the body of David Carter had been located. We put the wheel on the litter, pulled out a body bag and walked up the road, down and across a small ravine and then up to where the body was. There we found the sheriff's personnel, the apparent suicide victim of a shot gun blast to the head, and a very confused Shepherd pup. Not much else needs to be said. Joe Erickson arrived soon behind us and then the coroner. After the needed info was gathered, the body was placed in the bag and we wheeled the litter back to base. • RMRU



Familiarization

**6-8 January, Fri.-Sun.
Pinyon Flats to Avenue 66,
Santa Rosa Mountains**

By Rob Gardner



At 8:00 P.M., Friday, January 6, 1984 ten members of the RMRU assembled at Sugarloaf Cafe and then departed on foot into the Santa Rosa Mountain range for monthly training. The group hiked beyond Horsethief Creek, into Little Pinyon Flat, and made bivouac on a high knoll. The night was quite cool, and very damp.

On Saturday morning, after a quick breakfast, the group proceeded on, hiking towards Agua Alta Spring via the Cactus Spring Trail. The highlight for Saturday was the afternoon detour to the peak of Mt. Martinez at 6,548' altitude. Nine men went to the peak. (Joe stayed back to watch the gear.)

The view was magnificent. The peak of Mt. Martinez sets such that one can see a 360° view of distant peaks and valleys. The air was crisp and clear, as was the view. The good feeling was accented by the cool breeze and the sensation the men held from sitting on a very small natural platform atop the highest boulder at the peak of Mt. Martinez. A cistern in a boulder about ten feet from the peak con-

tained about one gallon of cold, potable, water. This was the only quick water source between Horsethief Creek and Agua Alta Spring. Thanks to Jim Fairchild's scouting trip a few days prior we were sure of water at Agua Alta Spring, which ordinarily does not offer water year around.

On Saturday night we camped very close to Agua Alta Spring, on Pinyon Alta Flat. The final event for Saturday was gourmet-cuisine dinners that the men prepared so many miles from civilization. The steak dinners included soup, fresh salad, and baked potatoes! Camping stoves, cooking utilities, and cooking abilities were all well tested.

On Sunday morning there was excitement over the amount of chards of old Indian pottery that were found in the area. Also of interest were the types of plant life of the area, as the team proceeded into Martinez Canyon.

The hike out was quite long as the men continued towards Thermal, California, eventually hiking down to one hundred feet below sea-level. There was a pleasurable lunch break at a small pool of water, in which many of the RMRU men took a refreshing, but quick, swim. The end of the hike was down a natural wash bed and out onto an alluvial fan.

The trip offered opportunity to test back packs, hiking boots, and other equipment. Also, the team gained familiarity with the terrain and water sites, as well as existing breaks in the trail which may be trouble points to future hikers trying to find their way. It was noted that if a helicopter ever became needed in a rescue that there would be little trouble in locating landing sites. Although rescues in this area are relatively infrequent, Bud White recollected and related a case of a hiker in this area needing help when the hiker suffered from a heart attack.

Upon reaching Avenue 66 and Jackson Street, in Thermal, California, Kevin Walker and John Dew awaited the hiking members of the team with some refreshments and prepared to provide transportation back to the cars at the point of entry. The hike was approximately twenty-five miles. The drive back to the cars was about forty miles.

Thanks go to Ruth and Allen Applegarth for allowing storage of one vehicle on their ranch near the point of exit.

The hike was very scenic. It was fun, perhaps even exciting to some of the men to think of the days the Indians lived in these flats and canyons and to see the physical evidence of that history. It was beneficial to become more familiar with the South/Southeast portion of the Santa Rosa Mountain Range, the Cactus Springs Trail route, and to practice working as the RMRU team. • RMRU