



THE TRACKER

Monthly Newsletter of the Inland Empire Search and Rescue Council

March 2004

Volume 13 Number 3

Searching San G.

Bill Loenhorst, San Gorgonio SAR



The body of 25 year old Eugene Kumm of Seal Beach, was successfully recovered this past February 1st, 2004. The search ended at noon Saturday January 31st, when a family from Redlands discovered the body in a drainage 300 feet below the Vivian Creek Trail. Both my wife Ellyn (also of San Gorgonio SAR) and I had been assigned to this drainage the same morning by S&R Coordinator Shannon Kovich, after a careful review of the search

history and agreed this was indeed an important area to double check.

The Harris family, sharing the same suspicions, met us as they exited the bottom of the Vivian Creek Drainage just west of the Halfway Camp sign. They lead us back to the body, on the old part of the trail that cuts north just up from Halfway Camp. This trail also offered access to the bottom of three ice chutes that extend down from the “new” trail, and leads to the same area where another hiker had fallen two weeks earlier.

Kumm’s body was found about 30 ft. above the creek bed lodged around a pine tree. A large rock shielded his body from being seen from the trail, 300 feet above. We thanked the Harris family and requested that they return to the Satellite Station at Forest Falls, and make contact with Deputy Kovich.

At the direction of the Coroner and our command post we photographed the

accident scene. The victim’s extensive head trauma and large blood stains in the snow several yards above, indicated he hit one of the large rock outcroppings in the chute. There was no indication of his movement after being lodged around the tree. We moved the body into the bottom of the drainage with assistance from Rich Inmann, also of San Gorgonio S&R who was in the area. Plans for the hoisting in the morning were made with aviation as we were now socked in with freezing fog. The next morning Pilot Bryan Miller, Crew Chief Steve Miller and the Medics of Air Rescue 7 were able to perform a 185 ft. hoist out of the drainage. We were particularly grateful that they had enough clearance to allow the hoist work.

The victim was wearing plastic boots and new crampons that appeared to be strapped on correctly. No ice axe or evidence of a leash was found in the area, however one broken trekking pole and a pair of snow shoes were found below in the creek bottom. We found no evidence of a helmet being used. A few words also about safety: The trail above this chute passes through steep rock outcroppings with fall exposure. Combine this with the previous week’s ice storms and we have one of those places in the trail that can only be safely negotiated with the right helmet, ice axe, crampons, and training with experience. Our search plans and strategies continue to include only the use of trained personnel in these conditions. Phil Calvert, one of our

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What's New in Volunteer Forces?

Lt. Virgil Merret, Volunteer Forces Unit

February and March 2004 has brought several sworn personnel changes to the San Bernardino Sheriff's Department Volunteer Forces Unit.

In February Corporal Bill Fertig retired from the Sheriff's Department after 31 years of service. Bill was deeply involved in the Sheriff's Dive Team and our SAR Coordinator for many years. We would like to thank Bill again for his contributions to the Volunteer Forces units.

Corporal Mike Schlax has been reassigned back to Volunteer Forces from the Morongo Basin Station and will be the coordinator of the Reserves, ASU and the Command Post units. His prior experience in the division will be put to immediate use.

On March 6, 2004 Lieutenant Mike Tuttle retired from the Sheriff's Department after 29 years of service. Mike spent the past several years as the commander of our department's Volunteer Forces unit. As you are all aware his contributions to the different Volunteer Forces units over several years are countless. His expertise and experience will be missed by all. We

all wish him well in his life after retirement in Oklahoma.

Lieutenant Virgil Merrett was assigned on March 6, 2004 to be the new Volunteer Forces commander. I have spent the last four years in the department's Emergency Operation Division and the Criminal Intelligence Division. I look forward to meeting most of you at the upcoming scheduled events.

The overall state budget is having a direct affect on the Sheriff's Department operating funds. This is projected to last for the next several months. The mission of the volunteer units will continue as always and we will continue to respond to the calls of citizens who need our help. These budget cuts should not directly affect the functions of the individual volunteer units.

The Annual Volunteer Forces Picnic is in the planning stages and I hope to see all of you at Glen Helen Park that day.

Take Care,

Virgil Merrett

Bobbin Style Rappel Devices

Anmar Mirza

This article was originally published in the "NSS News", January 2004 Volume 62 Number 1. It is reprinted here with permission. Anmar Mirza is the regional coordinator for the NCRC, Central Region, and has taught cave rescue since 1989. Anmar is the cave rescue coordinator for the Lawrence County EMA, and an emergency medical technician since 1988. He started caving in 1983 and to date has over 9000 hours underground and has climbed 30 miles of rope.



With the unfortunate death of Dick Graham a few months ago, lots of questions about the bobbin style descent devices have arisen. Dick was an experienced and competent vertical caver and the mystery surrounding his death bothers us all deeply. Bill Putnam e-mailed me after he'd been playing with the Simple and the Stop and been doing some poking around. It seems that these devices have failure modes that seem to be well known in Europe but little known in the US. After the message from Bill, I started playing with a Stop to see what its failure modes were and made some surprising discoveries. I could, in the course of what might be normal caving activities, get the device to unlock and allow the rope to come off of it. We hope to have an article on these modes coming up soon either in the ACA or here, but I want to talk about it and some thoughts on training philosophies now (the disadvantage of a couple of months lag time for publication). First and

"I could...get the device to unlock and allow the rope to come off of it."

foremost, I want to strongly emphasize that I am not trying to say that anything I discuss here was the problem that killed Dick. I do not know what events led to his death, whether it was equipment failure, operator error, just plain bad luck or some combination thereof. We may never know, and speculation does not serve

the community well. What does serve the community is trying to learn from problems encountered and the stimulation of thinking that follows the question of "why" is what I want to pass on here. One discovery I made was that it was possible to twist the Stop in such a way that the latched gate could open. I was able to do this while simulating dealing with the lip of a drop. This problem was made much worse by using small diameter carabiners or small diameter quick links (which the manufacturer recommends against) to attach the device to the seat harness. Then, when the side plate was open, the rope easily came off the device very quickly. This was made worse by using larger diameter ropes or stiff ropes. Smaller diameter ropes seemed to stay in the device better. This was not some far-fetched scenario; I asked a couple of novices to see if they could reproduce the failure mode and they were able to do so easily. There is also a failure mode that can happen while the device is loaded during a rappel due to rope movement. This was a little more difficult to reproduce, but it could also be done during normal operation.

Simply by being aware of the problem, I can see how it could be avoided, but many people I've talked to were not aware of the possibility. It is common in the vertical community for the reaction to such problems to be to shun use of a device or technique without trying to fully understand the scope of the problem. I see this, and most problems like it, as a training

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Kumm

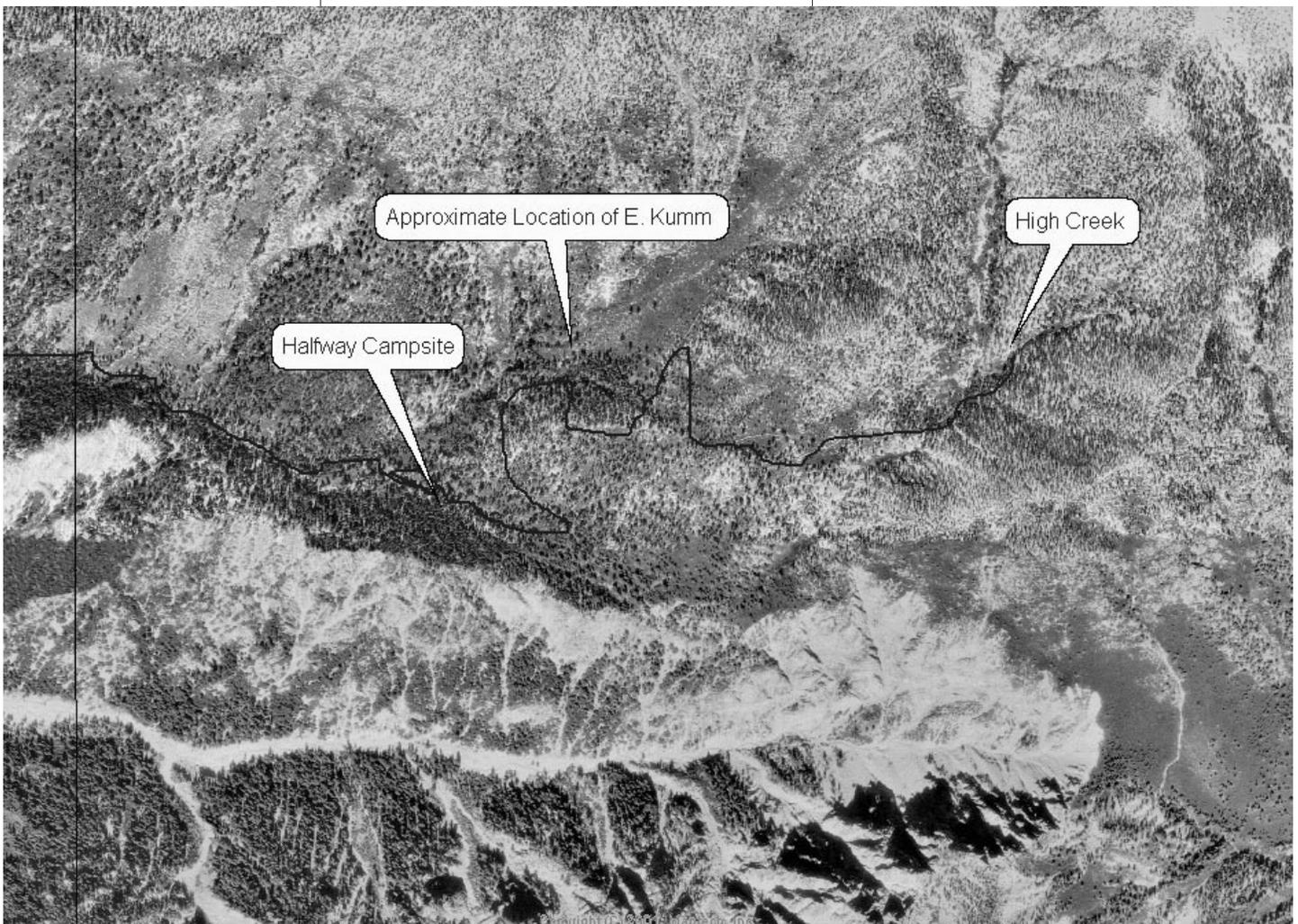
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Rope Rescue and Winter Training officers reminded us recently to use our belay training when crossing such areas that any team member is uncomfortable with. Those uncomfortable with such a crossing will be belayed properly.

Eugene Kumm was apparently hiking alone. His point last seen was with campers at High Creek Camp and communicated he was headed for San Geronio Peak. The trail up out of High Creek was covered with snow. Some hikers actually turn around and go back when they lose the trail here, as there are no well defined or consistent tracks for a trail. During his return on Vivian Creek Trail, he would have hiked across bare dirt in several places. This

can result in a false sense that the danger is past and one's ice axe may be stowed. Phil Calvert also reminds us that as we approach fall exposures the first tool out (after our helmets) should be the ice axe and then the crampons. A crampon point catching a pant leg could easily result in fall, so quick action to self arrest becomes a big priority.

On behalf of both the Valley of the Falls and San Geronio Teams along with the Yucaipa Stations, we want to thank all of you and the out-of county teams that helped. We are particularly grateful also for great job done by Air Rescue 7 and it's crew getting Mark Rowland out after his trouble on the morning of January 24th. ☺



Rolling with Rowland

Mark Rowland, Bear Valley SAR

I was a member of a four-person, volunteer, alpine, composite SAR team (two members from Santa Barbara County, one from West Valley SAR, and another from Bear Valley SAR) that was helicopter-inserted on Red Ridge (.86 mi, 235° true from The San Gorgonio summit) at approximately 16:43 UTC. We began working down the ridge toward the Vivian Creek Trail where our assignment was to

search the ridge between that drainage and the Mill Creek drainage to the south. Each member of the team had winter alpine packs/equipment/supplies, with helmet, ice axe, and crampons. The team had just stopped to regroup and talk, and was starting again. All of a sudden I slipped and slid approximately 400 ft. down the SW facing slope.

I suspect I'll never know what caused and how I accomplished my slip, mis-step, or whatever precipitated the fall. I just don't remember slipping, only that I was beginning to slide. My recollection is that one minute I was beginning to take my first step (from a stop) and the next I was sliding. I had not slipped, mis-stepped, slid, or had *any* trouble whatsoever with my footing prior to that.

As I turned to arrest, my crampon(s) caught and I inverted, head downhill. I spun back around both to arrest position and so that my legs would hit fixed objects instead of my head. But I was bouncing off trees and stumps and going slightly airborne, so I was unable to arrest. My disorientation was surprisingly com-

plete. The following are possible causes for the fall.

- A weak or "soft" spot in the snow that collapsed under my weight. I'm skeptical of this theory.
- Being the first day this season on this type of slope, and starting up again from a stop, it's plausible that I "edged" my boot as you would without crampons (but *not* with them!). I'm receptive to this suggestion, but have no data to support or contradict it.
- Though I wasn't aware of it, it's possible that complacency contributed to the accident. We had had no trouble on the terrain, no equipment problems, and the slope was neither steep or icy enough to be intimidating, and should have been much easier to arrest on than some slopes I'd been above the previous week. I don't think there was any carelessness, but perhaps I wasn't "scared" enough, either. Just speculation.
- On inspection, there was no evidence to support equipment failure as a cause. On post-fall inspection, one tine on one crampon and two on the other were markedly bent, but these more likely occurred during the slide, not at its inception. (Coincidentally and ominously, that inspection also discovered two dents, a scrape, and crack in the helmet!) The crampons and ice axe pick had been sharpened the prior evening.

I believe that my training, certification, experience, amount of practice, equipment, and companions were more than adequate for the circumstances. It is plausible that currency of practice could have been less than optimal.

It's hard to imagine, without it happening to you, the complete disorientation that occurred, so I'm not at all sure of

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"It's hard to imagine...the complete disorientation that occurred."

Rowland

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the order or chronology of the following, but I know that these, at least, occurred:

- I attempted to arrest and the pick hit a rock instead of snow, causing the axe to bounce back up against me,
- I caught a crampon and (of course) immediately (and violently) inverted,
- My ice axe was ripped from my hand,
- I hit several trees, some boulders, and was airborne at least twice,
- Once, I landed on my back, so, with my heavy alpine pack, I “turtled,” and it took another second or so to get back to a prone position,
- I saw imminent collision with at least one tree and leaned away to impact with my legs instead of head/torso,
- Team member, witness Mervin Tapsfield, reported, “I remember yelling for you to plant which you were trying to do. I am not sure why you couldn’t get a plant! James and John said that they saw you hit several trees on your way down.”

When I landed on the snow again after one of my airborne “episodes,” I realized that my hip had broken through the crust on top of the snow and I was “plowing” an inch or so through the snow. Surprised at reaching softer snow, I jammed my elbow through, as well. The combined increase in friction and possibly a slight decrease in slope gradient were enough to slow me down enough to risk planting my crampons. When I did, they held and I stopped.

I was hoisted aboard San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Air Rescue 7, flown to a nearby helispot, transferred to AMR ambulance, and transported to Loma Linda University Medical Center trauma center, from whence I was released shortly thereafter.

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Bobbin

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issue. As there is little uniformity of vertical training in the United States, people doing vertical are trained in a hit or miss fashion and the teacher’s own prejudices and misunderstanding is perpetuated. One project the Safety and Techniques Committee is working on is vertical training guidelines and recommendations, in the hopes of providing tools for people teaching vertical techniques. A good vertical technician will take the opportunity to try to understand their equipment, both in operation and theory. They will look to the leaders in the field for knowledge and guidance and will check with them before passing on potential misinformation. In this way we all can work to become better and safer while doing what we enjoy. I have no issue with using the bobbin style devices, but you can be sure that I will now be training people in the ways that it can fail, just as I train them in the ways any of their equipment can fail. Look for more information on failure modes in the near future. In the meantime, if you own one, experiment with it and see if you can reproduce these problems (in a safe environment, of course).

Editor’s Note

After discussing this article with a colleague, Paul Stovall, he sent me the following.

Little John (John Woods) and I were looking at the problem with the Petzl “classic” and “stop” descenders coming off the rope. It looks like the main no-no is do NOT use a quick link, use a carabiner. That’s all that needs to be done with the newer models but the older models with the metal gate need a little extra. After tossing around a few ideas I think John came up with the best suggestion, clip your short cow’s-tail into the remaining space just above the biner and that puts a stop to the thing coming off involuntary. 

Calendar

For information or to submit an event, contact the editor at editor@thetracker.info. Appearance of items in this section does not necessarily imply endorsement by the SAR Council or the County of San Bernardino. Call if you have any questions about a particular listing. To save space, persons to contact and numbers for multiple listings of *Department-approved training providers* are consolidated in one place at the bottom of this page.

March

1st and 3rd Weekends in March—BSAR

Contact VFU for more information.

Mar 17—Inland Empire SAR Council

19:00 in the Main Conference Room at SBSB HQ

Mar 27—Katz Search

Meet at 06:00 at the staging area at Sierra Ave. & Lytle Creek Rd.
Contact Darren Goodman in VFU for more information.

April

April 3—Volunteer Forces Picnic at Glen Helen Park.

Contact Darren Goodman in VFU for more information.

May

May 15–16—National Cave Rescue Commission (NCRC) Basic Cave Rescue Orientation Course

Contact Mark Kinsey (mkinsey@caverescue.net) for details.

May 15–16—West Valley SAR Rope Training

At Hole-in-the-Wall. Contact Bob Gattas at rgattas@earthlink.net for more information.

May 19—Inland Empire SAR Council

19:00 in the Main Conference Room at SBSB HQ

June

TBA—Technical Rescue Basics Course (TRBC)

Contact Don Welch (760-244-7340) for more information.

June 2–5—NASAR '04 Conference & Expo

"Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Lost People", Lansdowne, VA. Visit www.nasar.org for more information.

June 5—West Valley SAR ELT Training

Night operation. Contact Bob Gattas (rgattas@earthlink.net) for more information.

June 19—West Valley SAR Rope Training

Contact Bob Gattas (rgattas@earthlink.net) for more information.

July

July 21—Inland Empire SAR Council

19:00 in the Main Conference Room at SBSB HQ

August

Aug. 21—Rope Training

Contact Bob Gattas (rgattas@earthlink.net) for more information.

September

Sep. 15—Inland Empire SAR Council

19:00 in the main conference room at SBSB HQ.

Sep. 18—West Valley SAR Search Scenario

Contact Bob Gattas (rgattas@earthlink.net) for more information.

October

Oct. 16–23—National Cave Rescue Commission (NCRC) Level I and Level II Cave Rescue Seminar

Week-long NCRC seminar at California Caverns, CA. Contact Mark Kinsey (mkinsey@caverescue.net) for more information.

Oct. 16–17—West Valley SAR Map & Compass Training

Contact Bob Gattas (rgattas@earthlink.net) for more information.

November

Nov. 17—Inland Empire SAR Council

19:00 in the main conference room at SBSB HQ.

Nov. 20—West Valley SAR Night Scenario

Contact Bob Gattas (rgattas@earthlink.net) for more information.

*Course / Provider

BSAR / Vol Forces
CMC Rescue School
On Rope1
Rigging For Rescue
Ropes That Rescue
TRBC, PVSC, NCRC / Vol Forces
Mountaineering / Vol Forces
West Valley SAR Training

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Diagnosis was a shoulder sprain/impingement, neck strain, and multiple contusions, abrasions, and minor joint sprains. I was released to full duty immediately, but had minor medical follow-up and physical therapy for the shoulder injury.

Lessons Reinforced

- Practice, practice, practice. Self-arrest HAS to be instinctive and immediate. Momentary delay can be fatal. Who REALLY knows exactly what level of skills (or instinct) atrophy develops between the last trip of last season and the first one of this year?
- Similarly, the disorientation from inverting, tumbling, going airborne, and collisions with fixed objects prevents a calm, steady focus on self-arrest. You HAVE to stop before that starts.
- Make sure you practice arrest in realistic conditions (with appropriate safety precautions): full pack, extremely short stopping distance, really steep, really hard, etc. These long expanses of snow that give you plenty of time to think, plan, set up, and then arrest aren't realistic and don't cut it!
- Mental discipline is crucial (again!), persistence is important (as always), and resisting what seems to be inevitable can work.
- As Winston Churchill said: "Never, ever, ever, ever, ever give up! Continuing to look for ways and opportunity to arrest, even without the axe, eventually (though far from inevitably) paid off.
- Acknowledging that there is controversy and disagreement among the experts of the two schools of thought, I'm going to clip my axe to my harness on ALL slopes from now on. While this experience leaves me skeptical of your chance to regain your axe once it's ripped out of your grasp, At LEAST you can get it back again IF you get stopped without it while you still have function/cognition.
- Thinly covered slopes (also windblown) can have their own challenges, in this case hitting rock instead of ice/snow when trying to arrest.
- The difference between intellectually knowing these lessons and the complete incorporation of them into your subconscious and "instinct" can be the difference between life and death.
- There is absolutely NO substitute for dumb blind luck and the grace of God.

Classified Section

Contact the Editor to place or remove any item.

SBSD Commuter cups with star and motto. \$16. Features generous 16 oz. capacity, stainless steel construction, double-walled insulation and fits virtually all auto cup or mug holders.



SAR Tech patches. NASAR-approved, straight version of the standard SAR Tech I/II/III patches. Send check made out to IESARC for \$3 each and a SASE to: IESARC, PO Box 108, Barstow, CA 92311.

SBSD Search and Rescue decals. \$5. The decals are 3.5" X 3.5" and can be stuck on the outside of just about anything or on the inside of a window. The price is \$5.00 each and can be purchased by contacting SanDesertRun@aol.com or calling 760-369-9999.



Earrings (1/2") \$10 and **Lapel Pin/Tie Tacks (5/8")** \$8.

Fund-raiser for Morongo Mounted SAR Team. For ordering info contact Kim Miller at millerkm@29palms.usmc.mil or call Kim at (760) 367-1148 or (760) 367-1148 evenings.

SBSD Coffee cups \$5. High-gloss ivory coffee cups with gold-colored SBSD star on the side is microwavable. Available at Volunteer Forces.



SBSD SAR Pens \$10. High-quality, refillable ink pens with SBSD star and "Search & Rescue" on side. Great gift idea! Available at Volunteer Forces.

Custom SAR/Expedition Topo maps. \$14.95. See the web site for full details!

Granite Gear Nimbus Ozone Backpack. Size regular. Highly adjustable, and brand new. Comes with large shoulder straps, but Granite Gear will swap them for one your size is they don't fit. \$105. Contact Jeff Lehman at jlehman@caverescue.net.

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