

*Source:* Robert C. Gardner, Altadena Mountain Rescue Squad.

*Analysis:* Inadequately equipped and inexperienced climbers slipped on icy snow and fell in an uncontrolled glissade approximately 1,200 feet into a steep canyon. Victims impacted at great speed into rocks at the bottom of the canyon and were killed instantly.

*California, San Gabriel Mountains (3), Thunder Mountain*—On November 24, at approximately 10:30 a.m., Geza Bene (34), accompanied by his wife and daughter and friends boarded the Mt. Baldy Ski Lift for Baldy Notch. The party totalled seven persons. The group planned to spend the day in the vicinity of the warming hut and restaurant at the notch and have their Thanksgiving dinner there. After their meal the party started to hike toward Thunder Mountain a short distance to the south. The group was in no way prepared for hiking inasmuch as they had inadequate footgear for the icy snow conditions present and were poorly clothed for anything but a casual outing. Apparently the closer they got to Thunder Mountain, the more interested in climbing it they became. They entered a closed area, established by the Forest Service, to keep casual hikers off precipitous slopes and ridges that were covered with icy snow. Once into the restricted area, the party, with Bene in the lead, proceeded to the steepest section of one of the ridges. Without warning Bene slipped and fell approximately 800 feet down a steep snow slope. His body hit numerous rocks and trees on the way down and he was no doubt killed instantly. The accident happened at approximately 3:00 p.m. As soon as the remainder of the party could return to the Notch, San Bernardino County Mountain Rescue was called and the body was removed some five hours later using standard mountaineering techniques.

*Source:* Robert C. Gardiner, Altadena Mountain Rescue Squad.

*Analysis:* The party was neither equipped nor experienced for such an area. This was not a planned climb, but a spur of the moment decision that showed very poor judgment by all members of the party.

(On December 18, a party of four persons apparently out of curiosity decided to walk to the scene of this accident, where a member of the party repeated the previous accident and fell to his death. They had ignored signs warning about the dangers in this area.—ed.)

*California, San Gabriel Mountains (4), Echo Mountain*—Early in the afternoon of December 3, Mr. and Mrs. Bowers (27) another adult and six children (two of their own) ages 5 to 9, set out to climb Echo Mountain (3,207). The ascent was accomplished without incident via the easy and popular Sam Merrill Trail. The party arrived on the summit around 4:00 p.m., and after investigating the old cable railway terminal on the summit, decided to descend to their car via the old railway incline. The incline approaches 45° in slope in one place and terminates in a vertical drop off at the bottom.

Near the bottom of the incline the party found themselves on very steep terrain composed of very unstable rock. Daylight was fast running out. The party thought it best to stay where it was and wait for help. It was at this time that Mrs. Bowers slipped and fell a short

distance. Her injuries were minor but painful; however, this incident complicated an otherwise simple rescue situation. The party called to other hikers in the area, who in turn notified Altadena Mountain Rescue.

The rescue effort was organized at approximately 5:40 p.m. and completed by 11:30 p.m. Mrs. Bowers was evacuated in a Stokes litter and removed to a local hospital where it was determined that she had no broken bones but severe bruises and contusions. She has since recovered completely. The rescue team of thirteen men used standard mountaineering procedures in effecting the operation. The rescue effort was complicated by very unstable and falling rock. During the operation, rescue-man Dr. Robert McCulloch slipped and fell a short distance, breaking his left ankle. He was able to administer first aid to himself and walk out. Rescue-man Vance Yost was hit in the left leg and right ankle by falling rock while rappelling with a victim. Although his injuries were moderate (bruises and contusions), and he was able to continue the descent, the incident complicated the rescue effort.

The weather was fair during the entire incident and aside from the poor rock, conditions were generally good. The party was dressed for an afternoon hike, and in the event they had been forced to remain stranded all night, they no doubt would have suffered from exposure.

*Source:* R. C. Gardner—Altadena Mountain Rescue Squad.

*Analysis:* This is another instance of an unorganized and inexperienced group of hikers attempting terrain that was unfamiliar and beyond their capabilities.

*California, Death Valley National Monument, Telescope Peak*—At 9:00 a.m. on November 26, Richard Lee Hill (17) left his parents at Mahogany Flat Campground (elev. 8,000 feet) in the Panamint Mountains, to make a solo ascent of Telescope Peak (11,049). Although it had snowed recently and the seven mile trail to the summit was partially covered by drifts, the weather at the time of Hill's departure was clear and warm. Hill planned a routine ascent, returning to Mahogany Flat by dusk. He was wearing smooth-soled hiking boots, levi trousers and a quilted parka; he carried no ice axe or survival gear except some matches in a waterproof case. He had neither a map or a compass. Hill was a moderately experienced hiker.

By 12:30 p.m. on the day of departure observers in the valley noted that the peak was covered by storm clouds. By 4:00 p.m. blizzard conditions prevailed on the peak and snow was falling down to 7,000 feet.

When their son had not returned by dark, Mr. and Mrs. Roland Hill became worried and advised the National Park Service of the situation. The time was 6:20 p.m. Immediately one man was dispatched to make a reconnaissance of the trail, but he was forced to return because of weather conditions (snow, wind, and sub-freezing temperatures). The search was postponed until 6:30 a.m. the following morning.

On the following day (November 27) the skies were clear, but 60 m.p.h. winds at 10,000 feet hampered aircraft that were requested during the night. Ground parties encountered blowing snow and temperatures of 8 to 14 degrees. One search party succeeded in reaching the