

Four Missing Girls

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Desert Hot Springs
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On April 24, 1976 the RMRU received a call from the Riverside Sheriff's Office that four girls were missing in the rugged terrain on the outskirts of the resort town of Desert Hot Springs. The meeting place was to be at Long Canyon. After arriving with the van, Jim Fairchild and Larry Roland went to question the parents and gather any additional information that might be beneficial.

Upon returning, Jim briefed us on what information he had obtained; specifically that the four girls had left at about 1700 hours to go for a hike to the nearby foothills. The girls ranged in age from 13 to 9 years and all were sisters. The girls were dressed in light summer clothing and foot gear consisted of deck shoes.

By this time 8 RMRU members had responded and it was decided that the search should not be delayed any longer by waiting for more of the team to show up. The men were broken up into two main teams with Rick Quackenbush and myself on one team. Our assignment was to parallel the paved part of Long Canyon Dr. looking for prints until we reached the dirt road that leads into the canyon itself. The shoulder of the paved section of the road proved to be fruitless, and when we reached the turn off, we cut cross country toward the foothills that had been the girls destination.

Our trail was soon crossed by a large wash that came out of Long Canyon. We proceeded to check for tracks for approximately 1/ mile in each direction, up and down the wash. It was at this time, 0030, we received word through our radio that one of the other teams, made up of Bernie McIlvoy and John Dew, had discovered the girls tracks.

John and Bernie's assignment was to cut cross country diagonally between the girls home and the foothills. A trailer park was directly in their path and it was on the outskirts of the park that the prints were found. The prints were a good set and looked like they might be easy to follow. Also, an arrow was found drawn in the sand pointing in the direction in which they went.

Because the tracks were close to a dirt road, the van was brought to their location. From the advantage of a small knoll, Rich and I could see the lights of the van

approximately two miles away, "line of sight." We had an advantage whereby the ground due west of the van had already been covered, and by heading straight for the van we would cross the girls tracks if they went northwest or north.

As we moved southeast toward the van, we overheard John say that the tracks had disappeared at the edge of another dirt road. Each man knew what the dismal possibility of this discovery could mean. But as a search and rescue unit, our job is not to speculate on possible foul play; this is left in the hands of the sheriff's office. Our job is to assume that the victim is lost, and in need of our help.

As Rich and I moved toward the van we noticed that the area was criss-crossed with many dirt roads. One of the roads headed in the direction we wanted to go and so we took advantage of it hoping to see tracks in the soft berms on either side of the road.

One thing we weren't expecting was the 18" sidewinder that popped into the beam of my flashlight some 3 - 4 feet ahead of me. The snake was moving in the same direction we were and seemed unaffected by our presence. Rich and I agreed that our new found friend was not a compatible traveling companion; so with a side-step, a fast pace, and a fond farewell, we moved on down the road reassuring ourselves that there was absolutely no truth to that old wives tale about snakes traveling in pairs.

Upon reaching the van, Rich and I took a food and water break. Jim, who along with Larry Roland was running base, told us that one more foot print had been discovered. The time was about 0400 and the sky was getting grey. Jim said he would like us to get to the top of a nearby hill before dawn to look for any movement at first light. The hill we selected turned out to be considerably more difficult to climb than it had first appeared.

After reaching the summit, we continued shouting the girls names as we had been doing all through the night. It was at this time we heard a loud whistle. I returned with a shout and asked them to identify themselves. One of them called out her name and they were indeed the ones we were looking for. After dropping down into a deep canyon and back up the other side, we were able to reach the girls in about 30 minutes.

After discovering that the girls were in good shape, we descended to the bottom of the hill and waited for the rest of the teams to join us. While we were waiting, the girls told us that darkness had caught them at the top of the hill, and they were unable to get down. After the teams grouped up, we all hiked out to the van and the girls were returned safely to their home.

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.