

Missing Mentally Unstable Man

August 15, 1976
Toolbox Springs, Thomas Mountain
1976-037

Larry Brown

Sunday, August 15th started out as a Benefit Pancake Breakfast sponsored by the Isaac Walton League in Idyllwild. Just as we got things cleaned up and gear stowed back in the van, we were put on standby for a possible search in Garner Valley. The team was taking the Bi-Centennial tour of Mike Daugherty's new cabin when the call came to search for a 22 year old schizophrenic man who walked away from Toolbox Springs above the Thomas Mountain community.

Maggie Mellor instantly ran across the road to the Sky Yacht and whipped up a "quick" lunch of cheese, meat, bread, fruits and drinks (milk), which was gone in seconds, and we were off to Garner Valley. (After a few minutes finding the road head up 6 miles of dirt roads,) and a couple more to wait for the dust to clear enough to see. RMRU had probably the fastest call out all year!

We then talked to the informant about the missing man, James. The informant, (James psychologist, John) said they were on an outing when his patient had walked away from the camp the night before. He had on light clothing and size 10 "Earthshoes" and was believed to hide from Authoritative types (and us in our nice Orange Uniforms)! We all did a perimeter search of the area to find his tracks and found plenty ... going everywhere. So we expanded our perimeter (being on top of the ridge he could go downhill 359 degrees). John Dew went up the ridge, Walt and Kevin Walker and John (informant) went over to Toolbox Springs. Art Bridge, Mike Daugherty and myself went down the drainage from Toolbox, staying off the trail. This practice preserves the disturbances we were following. (Not actual footprints). This off trail walking has it's pitfalls or should it be pit vipers! Mike and I woke up a 12 ft. x 8" diameter Pacifica, subspecies Thomas Big-Fang! Walt, and Kevin heard it buzzing 50 yds. away. 10 minutes later Walt had found positive prints going down the trail towards Lucky Deer Mine, not very lucky as a Mine but we did see Deer, and Highway 74. We followed them farther down noticing two sets of Vibram Lug sole prints over the earthshoes!

Mike got to a lookout rock and spotted two people down the ridge that looked like hunters with guns. So Art and I ran cross-country over rocks, burnt brush and stick-ya bushes all the time hoping we wouldn't surprise two "Poachers" and get ourselves shot. We called down to ask them if they had tracks in front of them. They

replied "No", we asked them to wait, and ran down to them. The two "Poachers" turned out to be trail crew members with shovels, brush hooks and wearing the two sets of Vibram sole boots. Most important, right in front of them were the subjects fresh, solo footprints we were looking for. Good class, 1 & 2 tracking on a trail! Beautiful, until he came to a wide spot in the narrow trail, in the dark, the night before, became disoriented and went down a side canyon towards the car lights of Highway 74. As Art ran and talked our location on the Radio to Jim & Hank at Base, I ran the class 1 tracking (sand, good prints) and crawled the class 4 & 5 tracks. (Overturned rocks, broken twigs and such). I was able to follow his tracks 3/a of a mile down to where Walt and Crew had leap frogged ahead. We then followed them another 800 yds. down a road to a cabin where John Muratet, Don Ricker and Hal Fulkman had backtracked from the bottom. Meanwhile ... Norm Mellor had driven the streets of Thomas Mt. Community asking people if they had seen our man. A local resident had seen him at about 9:30 a.m. that Sunday morning at the intersection of Barbara Lee and Courtesy. After a short discussion with Base and the Sheriff we terminated the mission as a "missing person" safely out of "our backyard". Art, Walt & Crew then fixed Norm's E1 Camino that bent a flywheel cover shield coming down the Corduroy road. We then went for dinner at the "Dew Drop Inn".

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.