



Missing Backpacker

August 16, 1976
Skyline Trail, Palm Springs
1976-038

Larry Brown

Monday night August 16th was to be our third Monday night of training on Tracking, it seemed only natural to have a mission on Tracking instead.

That afternoon we were called to search for Mike Blotter, 1 day overdue up the Skyline Trail from Palm Springs to the Upper Tram. He had two army canteens, (in that heat about three hours worth) plus food and gear for an overnight stay. As RMRU team members assembled at the lower Tram station we assigned into teams with radios and search areas. Jim Fairchild, Rich Quackenbush and myself were to go up the Tram then down the Skyline Trail looking for tracks. John Dew was to be Radio Relay at the top. With other members in Long Valley, Hidden Lake and Desert View. We met the Palm Springs Mounted Police at the lower station on their way down. They told us that they had gotten the subjects footprints at his car and then were flown to the 5,000' level of the Trail and then disbursed one team down and one team up, after seeing the same tracks. The "Up" team followed tracks up and into Long Valley only to lose them in the weekend crowds from the Tram. They did circle 3 of the tracks for RMRU to see and go from there.

New Strategy ... Rich, Jim and I would go to the top of the Skyline and draw out the footprints, carefully measuring the length, width, sole pattern and stride between steps for future reference. (Animals, wind and Bigfoot can destroy tracks overnight).

We walked on the side of the trail up to where the first track was marked. I got my pencil, paper and tape measure to draw it, when Jim yelled up that he had the second. A good size 10, with lateral ridges about 1/2" apart and staggered . . . wait . . . I was drawing a size 8 with lateral ridges 1/4" apart with 1/2" circles in the instep area! All threedown to the third circled print to find a size 11 1/2 with ridges 1/2" apart but no staggering and no circles in the instep. We now had three different tracks to follow! So on down the trail we went until #3 was solo and we agreed that this was the one that best describes his hiking boot. (His wife described it as a size 11 work boot).

I drew it while Rich and Jim tracked it back up to the top. The three of us then went track-to-track back towards Long Valley when John relayed over Radio that the subject had just walked out the bottom of Tahquitz Canyon ... What?! ... How can he

do that?!! We have his tracks up here! Palm Springs-to-the-Tram and back down Tahquitz Canyon in only 3 days! Superman! Sign him up with RMRU! Well it turned out otherwise. The subject got up to about the 3,800 ft. level of the trail, ran out of water, and headed down a side canyon leading to Tahquitz and water. He saw none of the Canyon residents and spent the next 2 1/2 days route finding his way out to Palm Springs. He was all right and drove home.

We made two big mistakes; we did not inspect first hand the footprints by the car and after finding 3 different "tracks" circled, one team should have continued on down the Skyline Trail, and another team should have started at the subjects car coming up the trail. This was a very good learning experience for all of us.

We can be grateful, however that Mike was able to get out before any serious complications occurred and another mission was successfully completed.

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.