



Missing Child

September 4, 1977
Fern Basic Campground
1977-023

by Jim Fairchild

A group of families was camped at Fern Basin Campground, at about 6000' el. on the west side of the San Jacinto Mountains. At about 0900 Sandy Durbin, 3 years, was seen playing with other children near a camp/picnic table about 100' below the families' camp. An hour later the parents realized she was gone. A hasty search was conducted, the Sheriff's Office called, Deputy McWilliams rolled to the scene, a close search of the various campsites conducted, then RMRU was called.

My wife and I were spending the weekend at Mellors' Sky Yacht, and got word of the mission and got over to the campground. Manpower was critically low, most of our members were off climbing. By 1400 two teams, John Dew and Hal Fulkman and Kevin and Walt Walker were deployed to cut for tracks in a large perimeter around the campground.

Earlier I had been made aware of a United States Forest Service "Hot Shot" fire fighting crew of 17 men who were available for search. They are stationed at the Vista Grande area. By radio from campground to station I asked Kirby More, the foreman, to deploy his men in two groups, one to proceed southerly from the Dark Canyon C.G. toward Fern Basin C.G., the other from a point about 2000' east and uphill from Fern Basin northerly. This would take them over steep, rugged terrain where the child could have gotten stranded or fallen. Within a few minutes the uphill crew found Sandy. She was sitting in a nice "sand pile" sort of place tossing sand in the air. Soon she was reunited with family amid great elation from all concerned. Walt and Kevin Walker, Hal Fulkman and John Dew returned from their assignments, and we all went down to the Alandale Ranger Station to meet RMRU's late arrivals, thence back to whatever remained of our holiday plans.

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.