

## Father and son split up while lost

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**Los Alamos Canyon, Santa Ana Mtns**

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By Jim Fairchild

The spring semester at Riverside City College is about over. This evening my Backpacking Class took its final exam. One of the questions I asked the students is, "What are the major factors in causing problems to backpackers in the wilderness?" The answer I looked for, and got, was "splitting the party." This is the primary cause, among others.

About 1015 I was relaxing in bed, cramming for my own exam to be taken for a Photography class. Apertures, speeds, ASA's ... the phone rings and Jerry Muratet tells of a potential search in the Elsinore area. Yes, I'll drive the van. Get dressed, drive to the fire station, transfer gear to van, drive. Meet at the Elsinore Sheriffs Station, await arrival of nine RMRU men and six HSAR men.

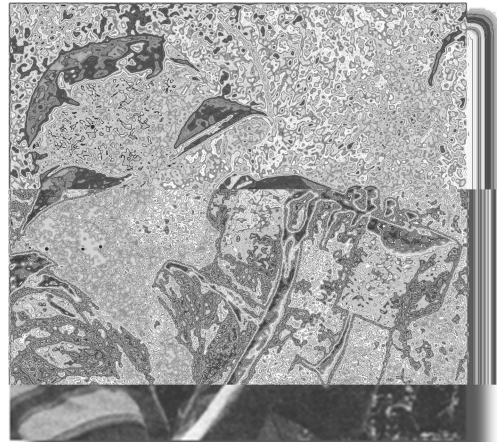
It seemed that Tony Brown, 14, was last seen by his father at about 1500 on a ridge across a gully. Tony said he thought he saw a road and was going to head for it. Well, they had started their hike at 0630, carried no gear, food, or water. They had split up in order to find a way back to their car, having become lost. The terrain was moderately steep hill-sides sloping southward. The complicating factor there is the very high, thick brush (chaparral). The daytime temperature had reached 105 deg. F. Tony's father made it out to the Main Divide Truck Trail, went to El Cariso Ranger Station, reported Tony lost. Hence our callout.

With our manpower present, we rolled up the Ortega Highway to El Cariso R.S., thence along the truck trail to Wildomar Station where me made base. With more information from the father, we deployed five RMRU men to start a search from where the Browns had started their hike. Two 4WD vehicles driven by HSAR men were to patrol the surrounding roads, calling and looking for tracks in the sand and loose dirt along the berm and center. I asked Sgt. Prado of the Sheriff's Office to put a helicopter on standby, to arrive at 0700 if we did not find Tony.

Since the hours had slipped by 'til it was about an hour before dawn, we dozed off, those of us at base and in the field, until dawn. John Dew with the HSAR jeep covering the lower portion of the dirt road reports they kept moving and calling full time. During the quiet time I mulled over plans for the coming day. Hmm, let's see if the time between dawn and the helicopter's arrival sees discovery of any evidence

of Tony. If not, I'll make a ten to fifteen minute reconnoiter of the four-by-six-mile-square area Tony's in, in the bird, of course. Then we'll put two observers in and they will conduct a close search along prescribed routes. The Jensen, Zappe, Garvey, Barry, Hanson group will cut for tracks where the hike began, and be deployed by bird to likely spots to yell and look for tracks. The 4WD vehicles will continue their patrols.

Just before the bird was to arrive Jensen reported hearing an answer to their calls, but nearly ten minutes after a call. Then the bird was heard and then seen, but went zooming easterly along the divide and out of sight! We stood dejectedly at the helispot near the station for forty minutes, then heard by radio that he had landed at Skylark Field, had a deputy aboard to show the location. Soon all was back to plan. I directed Bill Barrett, the pilot of the Hughes 500C from Western Helicopters, to fly over Jensen's group. They pointed where they heard the voice. We circled, high and low, found nothing. We then completed the reconnoiter and were on the way back to let me off and take on two good observers. Suddenly Bill said, "I think we got him." He banked the ship hard left ninety degrees and headed into the face of the steep, brush-choked hill. I did not see Tony, just brush rushing by fast. Then we popped over the top of a knoll and faced a boulder covered peaklet. There I saw a head between two 12 foot high boulders, and a jacket swinging overhead. Tony, obviously. We flew near, the frantic waving continued. At about twenty feet I used my hands to indicate "take it easy, we'll get you." Bill popped the bird straight up 200 feet, we looked for a spot to land - none. I suggested the flatish boulders about twenty feet from Tony, and in a few moments I slid out of the bird, canteen in hand. Tony reached vigorously and was soon thankfully swallowing. I gleefully recorded the scene on film. Bill came back around to the flatish boulder and Tony was carefully placed in the front seat. I clambered aboard the back deck where seats and doors had been removed, and hung on to a strap for the three mile flight back to base.



**Jim Fairchild**  
Tony Brown eagerly drank the water given to him by RMRU member Jim Fairchild shortly after he had been located.

We were jubilant to have Tony safe, his father happy and relieved, the inexorable onslaught and consequences of dehydration thwarted.

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.