

95-year-old man wandered off 6 days earlier

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Lower Palm Canyon
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By Kevin Walker

After having spent a delightful Saturday with my girlfriend and hoping to catch a movie in the evening, I was notified by my dad that we had a search, and that we were to meet at the lower end of Palm Canyon, Sunday morning at 0430.

Upon arriving at the road head we were met by the relatives of the person we were to search for. The subject was a 95 year old Indian man who had been missing since the previous Monday. We were told by his relatives that he took frequent walks up to the base of the hills. Also once before he was missing, but luckily he was found by his relatives. The other elderly gentleman that lived with him, told the relatives that he seemed quite restless on the evening that he disappeared. So with that, we started out on our assignments. Hank Schmel and I were assigned to try and cut tracks to the northwest while the rest of the team would search in a sweep to the southwest. After searching for nearly two hours to no avail, the team regrouped. It was decided to call for a helicopter to assist in the search operation. Hal Fulkman had arrived late, so he was assigned to stay in base and wait for the chopper. Hank and I were also told to return to base and await it's arrival.

At approximately 0830 Don Landells arrived with his Bell Jet Ranger. After placing the radio in the front, Hank, Hal and I climbed in and started a very slow and tedious search pattern, flying up to the base of the mountain and then back to the other side of the canyon. This went on for nearly two hours with no results.

After completing our search assignment, Don radioed operations leader Walt Walker for further instructions. He told us to expand our search into the surrounding areas while the rest of the ground units would continue to make sweeps of the prime search area. So with that we started working our way towards the Palm Springs city limit. Since the area we were now searching had little vegetation, we could fly at about 35 mph and still cover the area well. We had made about four passes over a plot of land about a mile square, when I was just about to ask Don to fly back to base and get a relief crew for us, because the fast flying was beginning to take its toll on our eyes, when Hal yelled, "There, Don!" With a quick move of the stick, Don maneuvered the chopper back around to where Hal had spotted the man. Don sat the bird down, and we climbed out and went over to the small bush where the man lay. Apparently the elderly gentleman had walked away from home and had just wanted to be by himself.

From the looks of things he had probably passed away the same night he had disappeared. Death is always a sad thing to encounter. But when someone has lived a rich and full life, especially that of 95, one can only look back to the happy times spent together. Our job was complete.

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.