

## **10-year-old girl missing**

**March 10, 1979**

**Cottonwood Springs, Joshua Tree**

**1979-005**

By Ed Hill

After failing to contact either of the team coordinators, the Indio Station of the Riverside County Sheriff's Department, contacted John Dew with news of a search for a ten year old girl missing since 9:00 A.M. from the Cottonwood Springs Campground in Joshua Tree National Monument.

The team was on training at Cactus Springs in the Piñon Flats area of the Santa Rosa Mountains. Being that this month's training was tracking, we had just finished the night (Saturday) tracking exercise at about midnight and were turning in for the night when John's voice was heard over the radio with news of a search in Joshua Tree. It took some effort from yours truly to get everyone up and going, but we finally got packed up, and started the six mile hike back to the roadhead. While we were hiking out, Walt Walker and John went on ahead and drove the van to Cactus Springs Campground. Once there, they met with the grandparents, and then with the parents gathering information on Judith Ann Trimm, the ten year old girl, who we were to search for. After doing that Walt and John then met with the Park Ranger to formulate a search plan. It was not long after that when the rest of us showed up to catch at least a couple of hours of sleep. While we were still trying to catch a little sleep, Walt was in the ranger station going over the final plans with the head ranger, and John was preparing radios needed for the coming mornings search.

At about 6:00 A.M. we were awakened by the high pitched whine of Don Landells jet Ranger. Well, some of us anyway. Once up, everyone gathered around the office for a briefing. Walt then told us of the events that led up to Judith Ann's disappearance. On Saturday morning Judith Ann, and her parents drove from the campground to Cottonwood Springs where the road ends. The family was going to take a short hike up the canyon and enjoy the beauty of the desert morning. Judith Ann, complaining of a sore ankle, asked if she could stay at the car and wait for her family's return. Upon her family's return, at 9:00 A.M., they found that Judith Ann was not in the car, and that all the doors had been locked. After searching the immediate area for some time, her parents notified the park officials. After conducting a small search of their own with no results, the park rangers called in their own SAR team. At the end of Saturday, still with no results, the park officials called the Indio Sheriff's office and asked for the services of the Riverside Mountain Rescue Unit. Walt then explained that the park rangers had searched the immediate area around the campground and two small canyons that end

up on the road leading into the campground.

It was decided to keep the same search teams that we had used on training. Don then informed us that he would only be able to stay and search from the air until 10:00. He would then have to leave and fly equipment for CBS. Walt assigned Pete Carlson's team to fly with Don and make a quick check of the area. While they were flying, the rest of us prepared our gear for desert searching. After Pete's team was let off to establish a northern perimeter, my team consisting of Brian Hixson and Bob Savage, who by the way is an employee of Judith Ann's father, drew one of the canyons that ran south towards the highway.

In the canyon we soon found that our biggest problem was Catclaw. This is a scraggly bush with sharp thorns. We descended the entire canyon since there were many places where Judith could have dropped into it. All we saw were the tracks of a coyote who descended that night. At the canyon's mouth we hiked westward to the paved road leading up to the ranger station establishing that Judith had not traveled that far south. We were slowly establishing a perimeter around the Campground that we could be reasonably sure that was still inside.



Larry Roland

**RESCUED GIRL** - After having been found by a RMRU tracking team, flown to the base of operations by a Marine helicopter, Judith Ann was assisted by a Marine crewman and RMRU member Kevin Walker.

Once on the road, a Park Ranger drove us back to the station. Once back at the station we found a CBS film truck on the scene filming some of the goings on. The film crew had been working with Don and were on their way back when they spotted the rescue van and stopped to investigate. Well anyway, back to the rescue, and not being hams. While new assignments were being made, we had a skimpy lunch. While we were searching in the morning arrangements had been made for a Marine 212 Helicopter from El Toro Marine Base to work with us in the afternoon. Upon its arrival my team was assigned to search Lost Palm Canyon. After over flying the area we were dropped off at the head of the canyon. Along with searching the main canyon, we were to pay close attention to the chutes and gullies at the upper part of the canyon. While we were still in the air I spotted a circle and an arrow in a sandy spot in one of the side canyons. We started down the main canyon and searched the side canyons by sending one man up each. We found a large arrow in the sand but were not able to find the arrow and the circle. We requested that the helicopter come back and search for it but they had no luck either. Finally we decided to continue down canyon continuing to check out the side canyons.

While we continued on down the canyon, the rest of the team concentrated on the immediate area around Cottonwood Springs. The Marine chopper had to land at 29 Palms Marine Base because it was due for a 50 hour check. We now had to search for the rest of the day totally on foot. As we dropped further down canyon we slowly went out of radio contact.

It was now after 4:00 and no tracks or even a trace of the arrow in the sand. We were nearing the bottom of the canyon, and had checked all of the side canyons but ONE. Brian was sent up that canyon to check for any signs of Judith. He went part way up it and yelled. Bob and I thought that he had found something and went up the canyon after him. We found him, and he told us that he had been yelling. Then we heard something but were not sure what we had heard. We yelled again and got another answer. Finally Brian spotted a small figure on the very rim of the canyon. We yelled for her to stay put, and that we would climb up. She was standing on a large boulder on the north rim of the canyon. Brian reached her first and started giving her small sips of water. We learned that she had gone looking for her parents, had taken the wrong trail and had lost the trail at the top of the canyon. She had hiked east and north looking for the campground but couldn't find it. The canyon was seven miles west of where we had found her. We asked her if she had seen the helicopters. She said that she had but they had not seen her. After further questions, we were told by Judith that she had indeed seen the chopper, but was sitting under a boulder. Other than a very sore ankle and being very scared, she was in good shape considering that she had spent two days without food or water.

Our next problem was to let base know that she had been found. We had been out of radio communication since early afternoon. We tried calling any RMRU unit but had no luck. We then called for anybody who was listening, and a lady with the De Anza Search and Rescue Unit in El Centro responded. Through her we sent a message to Cottonwood Ranger Station saying that we had found Judith and were requesting a helicopter evacuation.

It took some work, but the General at 29 Palms Marine Base got an OK to release the chopper from its 50 hour check and return to Joshua Tree. The Marine bird arrived just before dark and picked up Judith from a small helispot on the ridge. With Judith on her way out, our task was complete. We then hiked down the canyon to the roadhead where we were met by two park rangers and a ride back to the ranger station. We had a large and excellent dinner in Indio courtesy of the Riverside County Sheriff's Department before starting the long drive home. I



Kevin Walker

**Judith Ann, lost for over 30 hours with no food or water, was reunited with her joyful parents!**

would like to thank the De Anza Search and Rescue Team for their excellent relay work and our members for working so hard for a common cause, the safe return of 10 year old Judith Ann.

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.