



## Mother and daughter missing from tent

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**San Juan Campground**  
**1979-024**

By Hal Fulkman

At 10:00 Sunday morning I received a phone call from Al Andrews informing me that there was a search on the Ortega Highway above Lake Elsinore. Putting my gear in the car, I soon began the better than an hours drive to the rendezvous. The day was slightly overcast and by the time I reached the summit overlooking Lake Elsinore, it had begun to drizzle.

Upon arriving at the upper San Juan Campground, I noticed there was an unusual amount of Riverside County Sheriff's vehicles which gave me a suspicious undertone to this mission. After signing in, I discussed the details of the search with Jim Fairchild who had arrived about 20 minutes before I had. Jim told me that a 35 year old mother, Peggy Hunter, and her 12 year old daughter, Jennifer Hunter had vanished sometime between 9:30 Saturday night and early Sunday morning when the rest of the 14 people they were camped with awoke.

After Mr. Hunter and the other members of the group had searched the campground, they decided to call for help. Jim went on to say that the tent in which Peggy and Jennifer were sleeping had been ripped open in the back. Upon examining the ripped portion of the tent, it seemed a rather small hole. When we talked to Mr. Hunter about the hole, he couldn't remember if it had been torn before Saturday night or not.

Further questioning of Mr. Hunter revealed that his wife and daughter could only be wearing the clothes they went to bed in, which were only night gowns. Mr. Hunter said every other article of clothing and personal possession was accounted for. Close examination of the campsite turned up only one set of footprints that were quickly obscured under a multitude of other footprints. Obviously, the rest of the party did not at first consider the disappearance serious because they had broken camp and cleaned up the site thoroughly.

So, individual teams were formed with the assignment to cut wider and wider perimeters around the campsite in hopes of discovering tracks. John Dew and his son Richard's assignment was to search through the surrounding campsite checking for tracks and inquiring of other campers. Steve Zappe and I made up one team and our assignment ultimately brought us around to shouting distance of John and

Richard.

When John spotted us, he yelled for me to come over, for he'd found something. As I got to him, John said that Richard had discovered a track and he wanted me to look at it to see what I thought. Richard had definitely turned up a print of a bare foot that looked just the right size for the mother. The ground was very hard and even our lugged sole boots were not leaving prints. The footprints soon disappeared.

So, we once again started in the same direction as the last clear track we found hoping to turn up another print. Within 30 minutes John discovered a night gown that looked to be that of a young girl's discarded in a bush. We immediately radioed base camp for the sheriff. After the sheriff had examined the article he returned with it to base camp where Mr. Hunter identified it as being his daughter's. We intensified our search in that area and put in a call to Sierra Madre Search & Rescue and Hemet Search & Rescue for assistance. Also, Don Landells' helicopter was summoned.

The brush soon became so thick that it was almost impenetrable. So Don Landells and a RMRU observation team flew the area in the helicopter very slowly, searching every possible place they could. In some cases the helicopter was hovering on top of the brush. The ground crews and the helicopter, after many hours of intense searching, turned up no tracks or clues as to the two females whereabouts. So, the helicopter was sent away and the ground crews were sent back into base camp.

At this time Sierra Madre's Bloodhounds were given scent articles and directed to find the two females. The dogs picked up their trail and in a short time arrived at the place where we had found the night gown. The dogs went from there through some heavy brush, down a steep hill, and up to a turnout along the highway. The dogs were brought back several times and restarted and each time the story was the same.



Jim Fairchild

**POSSIBLE CLUE - RMRU member John Dew and a Sheriff's Deputy look at a nightgown found by John that appeared to be tucked under a bush.**

The search continued through Sunday night with some of the members and the dogs searching the highway both above and below the campground.

Monday morning the search and rescue teams were given the task of searching the more remote canyons in the neighboring area. At the same time about 25 U.S. Forestry fire fighters were brought into the campground to do a bush to bush type search. Both groups turned up no new clues except to eliminate one more aspect of the search.

Monday afternoon the teams were divided up and the edge of the highway and the river that parallels the highway were searched simultaneously for 8 miles below the campground and 5 miles above. This also proved fruitless. We were summoned back to base camp, and together with the Sheriff's Department, the entire operation was critiqued step by step. It was the consensus of the Sheriff's Department and all the search and rescue teams involved that the area had been searched thoroughly and we could be of no further use. The Sheriff's Department thanked us for our help and they proceeded with the possibility that the mother and daughter had met with foul play.

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.