

Girl Scout leaders missing

June 19, 1980
San Jacinto Mtns
1980-029

By Ed Hill

Thursday afternoon, Greta Elliot and Jackie Kovak, leader and member of a Girl Scout Troop from Huntington Beach left the Mountain Station of the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway to take the mile and a half loop trail through Long Valley. When they failed to return, the other Scout Leaders notified the sheriff who in turn called us.

I was just getting ready to shower after three sets of tennis when Walt called me. I called my people and got my gear together and drove out to the Valley Station of the Tram.

We had a quick conference and decided what we would do first. We decided to send three teams into the field. Bernie McIlvoy and his son, Eugene, would hike towards Round Valley. Jim Fairchild, his dog Cody and I would look around Hidden Lake. Kevin Walker and Brian Hixson would search in Long Valley. Hank Schmel would act as relay, and Mary Bowman would hold down base. We were given a description of the two women and were told what kind of tracks they would leave. In a search like this we would spend most of our time attempting to cut tracks.

Jim and I went up the trail toward Hidden Lake and in the soft dust we could see tracks that might have been theirs. These tracks were heading toward Hidden Lake. At the junction of the trail to Round Valley we carefully checked to make sure that they did not go to Round Valley. We ran into a hiker who was coming back from Willow Creek crossing. He told us that he had not seen the two women or had talked to anyone who had.

Kevin and Brian reported that they had seen plenty of tracks in Long Valley that might have been the right ones. They had followed them over the escarpment toward the desert but each time they had followed the tracks back up to Long Valley. When they had reached the creek in Long Valley, they searched back up the creek to the ranger station and then bedded down for the night.

Jim and I looked around Hidden Lake and then went over to Desert View so to see the lights of Palm Springs. We hoped that the two women had not descended into Long Canyon attempting to walk out that way. We went down a draw that leads down to Long Valley and started to follow the creek into "the Narrows" where it drops down into Long

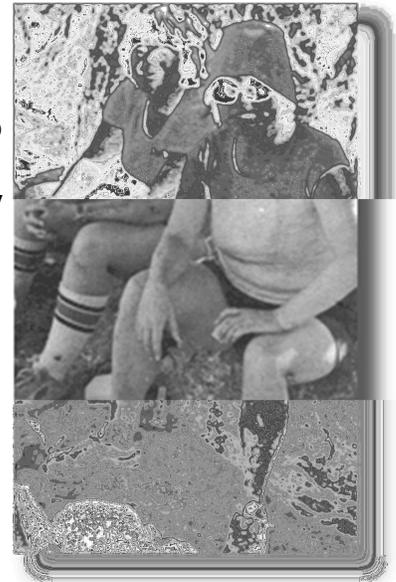
Canyon. We found once again tracks similar to the ones that we had been following. We were entering very steep rocky country, and were forced to climb out of the gully we were in and into the next one to the north. We found a good track going down this gully to the creek. We decided to bivouac for the night and search down canyon in the morning.

At five thirty, we woke up and were hiking by six. The canyon was less forbidding in the daylight than it had been the night before. We dropped about three hundred feet down the slope and soon ran out of tracks. We climbed back up and continued along the escarpment.

When we reached the saddle that the old Skyline Trail used to go through we spread out to check the adjacent slopes. Jim yelled and from far down the slope we heard an answer. Jim sent Cody on ahead, and we started down the trail. The trail has not been maintained for thirty years and is badly eroded in places. We found the women sitting on a ridge overlooking Chino Canyon. They were hungry, thirsty and scratched from the chaparral down below.

They had started out on the trail in Long Valley and somehow ended up on the Skyline Trail. They had followed it down to the 3800 foot level where they had lost it in the thick brush. That evening they had decided to climb back up rather than try to force their way down to Palm Springs. They had gotten part way up when it became dark, and they spent the night behind a log. At four in the morning, the cold had woken them up, and they had continued climbing.

We fed them and gave them canteens of water from our packs. When they were ready we started back up to Long Valley and the tram station. Jim and I took a good look at their soles. Both were wearing running shoes, and their sole patterns were different from what we had been following. However, we had looked in the right places.



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.