

Two 10-year-old boys missing from camp

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Willow Creek Area
1981-021

By Jim Fairchild

Nigori Malmquist of Anaheim, and Jay Byrum of Escondido, both age ten, were following a compass bearing of 220 degrees, magnetic or true, I don't know. They proceeded far beyond their intended, destination, a flag, and on up into the timber, rocks and brush to a point near the trail that goes to San Jacinto Peak from Humber Park (6400' el.) and Saddle Junction (8100' el.). Dusk stopped them finally, and they put up their tube tent on a rocky ridge formation and waited, occasionally calling out and looking around.

Meanwhile, back at their camp at about 8000'el., 400' above Willow Creek Crossing, they were missed earlier in the afternoon. A search by leaders was undertaken, unsuccessfully, and an informant hiked out to alert the Banning Sheriff Office a bit after 8:00 pm. RMRU was called at about 9:00 pm and we headed for Idyllwild to start the search.

The group from which the boys disappeared were from Pine Springs Ranch, a youth camp in the Apple Canyon area north of Hurkey Creek. Two groups had undertaken a three day hike from Humber Park to the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway, with practice in orienteering and wilderness living. Obviously, the two missing boys were in the former group.



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POW-WOW - RMRU members John Dew, Craig Brittain, Joe Erickson and Kevin Walker discuss their assignments at Saddle Junction before continuing on.

By 11:30 pm we were hiking, having had some delays in waiting for information. We

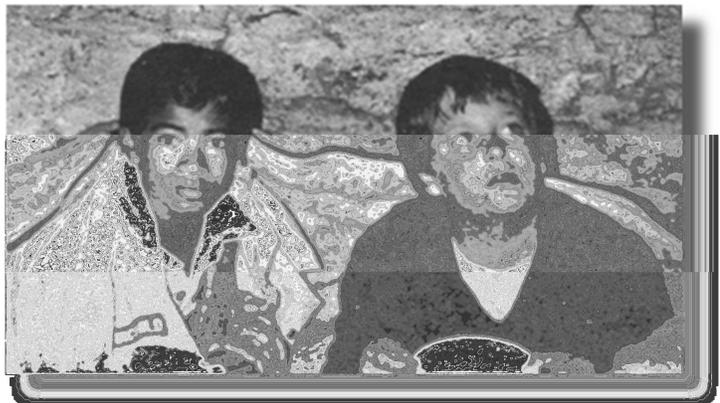
knew the boys were clothed, had a pack with water, lunch, whistles, and compass, but no word on footgear/ footprint - the most crucial piece of knowledge we could obtain. Kevin Walker and Joe Erickson started up the trail first, John Dew (to function as relay from a point above Saddle Junction), Craig Britton and the writer, then Pete Carlson and Mark Rhoads, Walt Walker was at base as Operations Leader, with Mary Bowman as Base Camp Operator. Rick Pohlers arrived later, but had no partner to hike in with.

Following a brisk hike to Saddle Junction, we re-grouped for our assignments. Kevin and Joe to get more information from leaders at the camp; Pete and Mark to search the nearby meadows and camps, then head for Law's Camp (2 miles distant), and even Caramba (4 miles distant); John to his relay position; Craig and the writer up the northward trail toward Wellman's Cienega (9000' el.).

Pete had just returned from a rather fast ascent of Mt. Williamson (14,284'el.) in the High Sierra, the writer from a rather warm ascent of Mt. Whitney (14,496' el.). Joe's easily dislocated little toe was still quite loose, but he promised to keep his boots on. But, like Walter Mitty's imaginary heroes, we managed to hobble along quickly, into the cooling breezes.

Craig and I immediately found numerous footprints, going both up and down the trail, and about the size a ten year old should wear. We yelled, the other teams yelled, and we all asked, by radio, if the other had yelled. Well, our ears were working. We then agreed to radio to the other teams when we planned to yell. We yelled again, and Craig thought he heard a faint reply. So, we tried again at the next switchback, with no response. A few more switchbacks and two hundred feet elevation above the saddle, about two thirds of a mile along, we yelled again, loudly. Two young voices answered and we elatedly radioed all units the good news. Craig took off up through the shoulder-high thorny deer-brush, and I followed, clad in shorts. After 150 yards of this we saw the boys on a rocky place. Soon we had them warming in garments, insolate, and bivvy cover. Craig fired up his stove, and after M & M's and dried fruit, they ate Top Ramen soup. Along with eating they explained their activities that led to their getting lost. Seems they had a compass and no map. I asked them to point where they "knew" camp should be, and the pointed exactly 180 degrees from the proper direction. Hmm, it never fails. Anyway, they were just cold and anxious, certain they could find their way back after sunup.

After warming and eating, Craig and I got them started down the trail (it was found a hundred yards away, reached by a brushless approach - the boys had no idea they were near a trail), and we whizzed down to the saddle. There, Craig sped off



to Humber Park and his mornings work, Pete and John waited, and Mark and I hustled Nigori and Jay back to their camp. Once there I had "forceful" words for the leader about sending youngsters off into the forest alone, tempered by saying the boys performed well once they discovered their plight. We then, with Kevin and Joe, got a couple hours sleep, then hiked out in the coolness of morning, commenting that the mountains are still beautiful. One of the boys, Jay, said, "I think that next year I'll sign up for 'Wilderness Living' instead of orienteering."

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.