



## Three children missing

**April 17, 1983**  
**Deer Springs Trail**  
**1983-011**

By Jim Fairchild

The pager activated at 1805, just as I was pondering future training sessions for the unit. I called Walt and learned that three children were missing and to meet at the County Park, nothing more. As a Call Captain I attempted to reach the four men I'm responsible for, then drove to the fire station on Riverside Ave., transferred gear to the No. 2 van, and was rolling along the freeway by 1825. Darkness fell as Kody, my dog, and I proceeded easterly along Highway 60. Contacts by radio with No. 1 van (Kevin driving) obtained no additional information. Our base was to be at the Riverside County Park's Visitor Center, about a mile up the road from Idyllwild toward Pine Cove. Actually, both vans arrived at base together, and we immediately were faced with trying to gather pertinent information and putting together assignments so as to enter the field as quickly and intelligently as we could.

It turns out that Bob Muir, a long-time resident of Pine Cove and a volunteer fireman with whom we've worked numerous times in the past, is the grandfather of two of the missing children. The children's father, Rob Muir, is in contracting business with his father. I encountered Bob early on at the Visitor Center parking lot and we gathered information. Kevin sort of wanted to escape base and go into the field, but I was Mr. Bad and said he must stay there to get a handle on things and keep it.

Other RMRU members arrived and we formed teams, loaded our packs with necessary gear, and took off on assignments. Cameron Robbins, Kody, and I were to be driven to the house from which the children disappeared, the place last seen (PLS). This accomplished, we looked for the tracks supposedly nearby, they were just disturbances. A couple hundred yards uphill and along a snow run-off stream a small track was marked, but it had no print. Our chauffeur went back to base, and we three snooped around the hillside. On a dirt road we found little tracks, big tracks, and dog tracks. All along I wanted to ascend the Deer Springs Trail to well above any recent tracks of those who looked for the children prior to calling RMRU. It seemed logical that if they went east or west cabins would be encountered, if they went south the highway would probably stop them, so north remained - a steepening hillside leading to all sorts of adventures. This they chose. But they had, by now, at least six hours head start, and they weren't leaving any notes, trail tape, or stacked rocks with arrows.

Anyway, we clambered up a steep hillside of dirt, Kody got a scent, and soon led us to

Joe Erickson and Mark Hebert, who were puzzling over various prints that had been recently circled by the local searchers. Soon, we continued upward to look along some ancient logging roads I knew would have their tracks if they went west of the trail. Sure enough, small tracks were about a hundred yards west of the trail, but they confusedly went west, then back east, then south. Searcher tracks of lug-soled boots covered them quite a bit. Hal Fulkman, Mel Krug, Joe and Mark came up to help unscramble. As we headed down one old road southerly, Bernie McIlvoy showed up, and it was time to get the dog into less frequented areas. Cameron found tracks of quite identifiable nature heading north-easterly, and we radioed our conviction that the tracks belonged to Jeff Muir, 6, sister Lauren Muir, 4, and Christopher Rain Murray, 5. Print characteristics finally had been observed in good soil, and we began the chase. Two firemen from the Pine Cove Fire Station showed up. So did big clumps of manzanita and golden oak. Many times we had to split up to "cut" for tracks. This means we make a big half-circle either side of and ahead of what appeared to be the direction taken by the children. Kody's nose helped a great deal during this early phase of tracking by following the scent over ground where we would have had to go "print-to-print," probably using my large magnifying glass. After a half-mile and onto much steeper terrain, always on a bee-line. But where? just up and northerly. while we were warm from the exertion, the temperature was lowering, we knew little kiddies' bodies could cool rapidly when they stopped or fell. We carefully tracked so as to catch any place where they could have made radical turns, they made none. Small snow patches were reached as we got to about 7200' el. and before long we found little tracks at their edges. We got together for group yells frequently, but the many runoff streams would make it improbable that we could hear them answer from as far away as a hundred yards. well, the snow patches got larger and their tramping on them was more frequent. It was certainly a relief to know that we would catch them soon if they persisted uphill, which they did. But really, the stuff they went over! Steep, lichen-covered boulders, slippery slopes of pine needles, and under shrubbery that repelled adults. Even Kody went around some of the obstacles. His master (?) lumbered along with fifty pounds of gear. The other RMRU men had lighter packs, the firemen none. At one point I stopped to rest Kody, and guess who else. I put down for him to lie on a sleeping bag to be used as a scent article if Kody's nose were our only means of following, and he immediately sniffed diligently, indicating he was familiar with that scent. The bag belonged to Rain.

We continued upward. At about 8300' el. where we could tell the angle eased to a fairly flat area for two hundred yards, we yelled. Squeaky chirps answered immediately, and there they were, standing on the only snow-free spot for quite a ways. Upon reaching them Mel, Hal, and



Jim Patraik

**WARM AND DRY** - An unidentified volunteer fireman keeps Jeffery Muir warm, while RMRU members Mel Krug and Hal Fulkman give Lauren Muir some food

Tom, a fireman and uncle of Jeff, opened their clothing systems and hugged the children close to share warmth. I understand there was a fair amount of elation at base as Cameron radioed the long awaited news. It was 0210, Tues., April 18. The kiddies won't remember, but the parents might. Packs were opened and their contents of sweaters, parkas, and sleeping bags quickly employed to bundle the found and the finders. Insulation pads went under to insulate against the frozen ground covered with pine needles. Cam got a stove going, then Hal handed Rain to me and started his. Warm soups and drinks were greatly appreciated by the children and us. I draped Rain's sleeping bag over both of us, and Kody knows what an insulation pad is as well as warm sleeping bags, and tried to quit shivering. The excitement and happiness over finding the children caused shivering at least as much as the 22 deg. F. temperature. Rain went to sleep in my arms as did Jeff in Tom's and Lauren in Mel's. I shall never cease praising the Lord for that scene! It's my opinion that had we not found them until dawn, tragic results would have made a different ending. Small childrens' bodies can cool fast, and they might not have survived evacuation. We had removed their clothing within minutes of reaching them, their wet socks and shoes, and garments were wicking away warmth. The air was still all night. Had winds blown, the children would have been well into hypothermia when we got to them, not just shivering a lot.

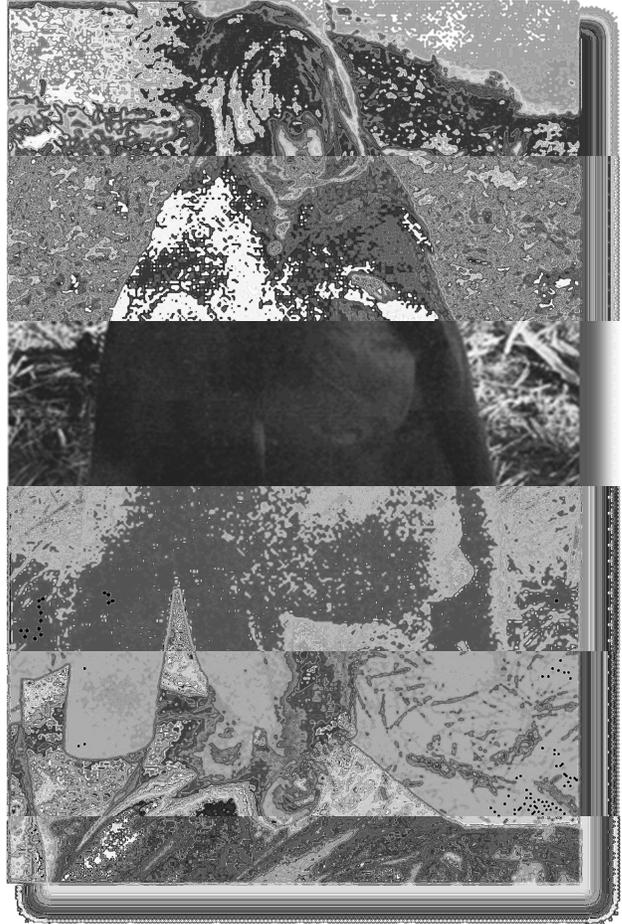
After a while we laid all three of them, looking like cocoons, on pads and let them snore. Kevin at base wanted to know if any helispot was close by, and we looked, nothing but marginal ones. We opted to carry the children out. Good thing too, because after dawn those marginal helispots looked definitely prohibitive.

As the children slept we marveled, "They got all the way up here!" That was real persistence.

Time usually flies where you're having a good time, but not on this particular night. We listened to various teams radio transmissions as they returned to base, then shivered out the silence until the first hint of dawn backlighted Marion Mountain high above. Finally, Tahquitz Peak got a bit rosy, the huge, tall pines and firs around us began to shine in a friendly way. By using shredded incense cedar bark and candle stubs, ignited by hurricane matches, a fire was burning and it sure felt good. Time to think about the descent. Jeff had told us upon finding him that they had gone looking for their fort. I wondered if he dreamed about it. He also innocently asked us if we knew how big an adventure he led Rain and Lauren on? Yes, we did.

Upon emerging from their warm coverings they sleepily contemplated the morning. More food and drink was forthcoming, and we began to pack. Kody was up and trying to decide upon which tree(s) to visit. We redressed the children in their fire-dried clothing.

Bernie arrived suddenly, bringing the Trogsitz, a pack-like device used to carry someone on one's back. I picked up Jeff to put him in it, and he suddenly went limp and weighed two hundred pounds. I put him down and looked at his face, all red. "You really don't want to be carried, do you?" "No." O.K. We put a grateful Rain in the Trogsitz. Tom carried Lauren, Bernie carried Rain, and Mel led Jeff. A super beautiful morning, a wonderful climax to walk them down. In a mile or so Richard, Rain's father, showed up and took Rain in the Trogsitz. He loped down the trail at about five miles per hour, went out of sight, and thus gave cause for concern. Kody and I decided to catch him to forestall any problem. It took a while doing that, then we loped along with them. A short mile from base we met Kevin with quite a delegation ascending to meet the rest of the children and searchers.



**This is what it's all about!**

Back at base there were a lot of smiles on happy people. I thought back to the earliest years of RMRU when most of our missions were for lost children, and the highly emotional circumstances that prevailed during and after finding them. We've had a much lower percentage of child searches in recent years, perhaps because of a greater awareness of how quickly they can disappear.

A lot of us went down to Jan's for breakfast where feelings of thankfulness and satisfaction filled us at least as much as the food. The children ate and talked almost as if nothing extraordinary had occurred. I wonder where that fort is that they were looking for?

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.

