

Man did not return from day hike

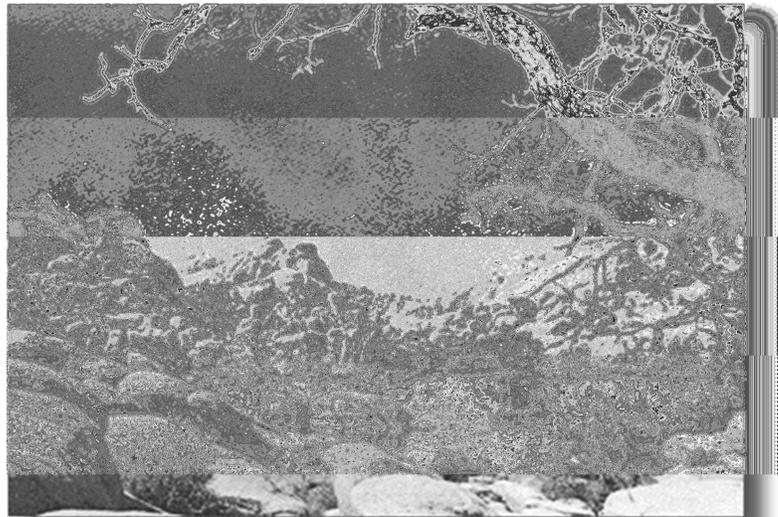
June 10, 1984
Joshua Tree
1984-012

By Rob Gardner

On Sunday afternoon, RMRU was summoned by the National Park Service and Riverside County Sheriff's Office to Joshua Tree National Monument (JTNM) to search for a lost hiker, John Romo. A lengthy and intensive search followed which failed to produce any signs of Mr. Romo.

Mr. Romo reportedly had entered the Wonderland of Rocks area of JTNM about twenty-four hours prior to the call-out. He was on a day hike. He was about eighteen hours overdue for his return. The search efforts were initiated and coordinated by National Park Service Tom Patterson of the Lost Horse Ranger Station in cooperation with the MRA teams. Lost Horse Station was established as the base camp for search operations.

When RMRU arrived at Lost Horse, team members were quickly deployed to initiate a search of the most probable areas that Mr. Romo may have entered or crossed, based on the available information. Mr. Romo reportedly had three quarts of water with him. The temperatures were high, particularly around the rocks and boulders which reflect the sun's heat. SAR radio communication was hampered by the large ridges of boulders that form the Wonderland of Rocks vicinity in a maze-like fashion.



Jim Fairchild

PLACE LAST SEEN – It was very near this location that John Romo was last seen. By the terrain in the background and the high temperatures it was easy to see what MRA and park searchers were up against.

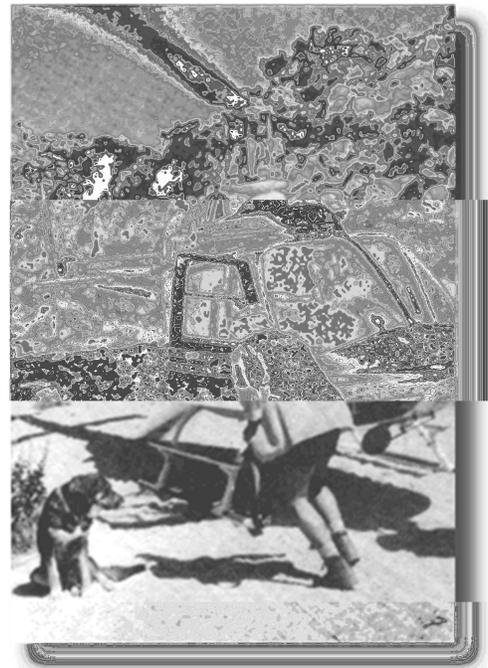
The San Bernardino County Sheriff's office helicopter had been deployed for air search of the area. It was later joined by a Landells Aviation jet Ranger helicopter piloted by Mike Donovan and a

military SAR Huey helicopter from El Toro Marine Corps Base. The helicopters continued to air search, transport SAR personnel to strategic spots, and to keep radio communication open throughout the first four days of the search. Don Landells flew one of his jet Ranger helicopters in the dark of the night for several hours in an effort to see any signs of Mr. Romo, such as a camp fire, signal fire, or flashlight signal.

The reporting party, John Brongo, was Romo's hiking partner. The two men, both twenty-nine years of age and from Pasadena, reportedly rode to JTNM together in Romo's vehicle. They reportedly had planned to enter the Wonderland of Rocks, an area of very rugged terrain, at its South end, each from a separate point, and to proceed with map and compass, across this region, exiting via Rattlesnake Canyon at the North end. The Wonderland of Rocks area covers approximately twenty square miles. Mr. Brongo advised that he entered at the Southeast corner of the described area and that Mr. Romo was then to drive the vehicle back to their Hidden Valley campsite and walk to his point of entry at the Southwest corner of Wonderland of Rocks. Mr. Brongo stated he hiked to the agreed upon destination at the North end in about six hours, then hitched a ride with a park ranger back to the vehicle. He left a message for Mr. Romo at the North end in an agreed upon fashion. Mr. Brongo said he never saw Mr. Romo again after being dropped off to begin the day hike on that Saturday afternoon.

The search was quickly intensified. Sierra Madre SAR personnel arrived Sunday night and two SAR dog handlers entered the area of Monday with Blood Hounds. A scent article had been obtained from Mr. Romo's vehicle. The San Diego SAR team then arrived and joined the search. Radio relay stations were established to overcome the radio transmission difficulties caused by the numerous high ridges of boulders. The Blood Hounds were then brought out of the field and replaced by three German Shepherds in addition to Jim Fairchild's Newfoundland, Kody. These dogs are trained to lead their handler to any human being they sense. The RSO transported volunteers of the Coachella Valley Underwater SAR team from Indio to JTNM. The SCUBA divers did an underwater search in the murky twenty foot deep Barker Dam reservoir, to no avail.

The search reached a point of one-hundred and four SAR personnel in the field on Tuesday and Wednesday, including forty persons from the Yucca Search Team that combed the Northwestern area adjacent to the Wonderland of Rocks. ban Bernardino and Riverside County Deputy Sheriffs



Jim Fairchild

SEARCH COORDINATOR - Even though his back is to the camera as he approaches Don Landells helicopter, we wish to commend Ranger Tom Patterson of Joshua Tree National Monument for doing an excellent job of working with the MRA in directing the search in Joshua Tree.

and National Park Service personnel provided supportive services at Base Camp, including transportation, food provisions, and other logistics. After the fourth day of searching MRA personnel began to be released. A military reconnaissance plane was brought in at dawn on day five and flew over the Wonderland of Rocks area with highly sophisticated heat sensing devices, to no avail. The search was continued thereafter by County Sheriffs and National Park Service Rangers, with particular attention to areas surrounding the Wonderland of Rocks. The search continues without discovery of any signs at all of Mr. Romo.

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.