

Man on overly ambitious hike

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Tahquitz Canyon, San Jacinto Mtns

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By Bill Blaschko

I was just settling down to a late night movie when the call came through that a hiker as overdue. I threw my gear in the car and rushed off to Ann Dolley's house at the base of Tahquitz Canyon. At base camp we learned that the missing person was Richard Perry, better known by his nickname of Elbow. Evidently Elbow had gone for a very ambitious day hike. According to our informant, Elbow's common-law wife, he was planning to hike above the fourth falls, a feat he had accomplished in the past in about eleven hours. Unfortunately for Elbow on this occasion he didn't get started until ten A.M. and it got dark around six P.M. Still, Elbow knew the canyon well as he had lived in it previously for about a year.

At this point I would like to back-track a little to describe how our team came to be called out. It seems that Elbow's wife had no intention of getting help to find Richard. In fact she was in Tahquitz Canyon searching for him when the Palm Springs Police investigated the station wagon that she, Elbow, their two and children and a friend named Wolf had been living in. The police were initially concerned about vagrancy but when they learned that Richard was missing they called for RMRU. Richard's wife was able to give us a very detailed description. Elbow was 23 years old, 5'7, 140 lbs., black hair and beard. He was wearing a "Blitz Beer" T-shirt and blue jeans. He had Camel Filter cigarettes and Ralph's Market matches but no food or other equipment. We were told that he was in a depressed state of mind because he had no money and no job.

By the time the team had assembled and gathered the necessary background information it was about midnight. As a team we felt that either Elbow had gotten stranded in the dark or possibly he had been hurt. On the basis of past experience Jim Fairchild and Kevin Walker decided that the best strategy was a helicopter search at daybreak. Craig Britton and I were dispatched to hike up to the first falls during the night and to be prepared to continue up the canyon by foot at dawn. I actually was glad to get this assignment even though it meant there was less chance I would get a helicopter ride. All too often my schedule keeps me close to civilization and it was a real pleasure to hike by the light of the stars with occasional help from my headlamp. Craig and I took careful note of the many footprints on our way up to the first falls. We came across some very fresh tracks but they led us only to another moonlight hiker. Craig and I bedded down with the roar of the waterfalls

to lull us to sleep.

At daybreak Craig and I packed our sleeping bags and proceeded up the steep rocky trail that skirts around the south side of the lowest falls. Meanwhile the remainder of the team at base camp made final arrangements and preparations for helicopter deployment into the canyon. As is routine Craig and I shouted at intervals to Elbow to see if we could make voice contact. Somewhat to our surprise we heard a voice answer our call after we had been hiking for only about 15 minutes. The voice we heard was extremely faint and we couldn't make out any words. After radioing this information to base we continued up the trail and made visual contact about ten minutes later. Unfortunately our subject was far up on the opposite side of the canyon. Tahquitz Canyon is extremely steep and cannot be crossed in a number of places; we were at one of those areas. We yelled to Elbow to stay put while radioing to base for more help. Several team members hurried up the canyon with light packs while I began to hike back down canyon in search of a place to cross over to the other side. Craig stayed where he was to keep the subject in sight and coordinate activities. just as I was about to cross Tahquitz Creek and start up the other side I was joined by one of Elbow's friends nicknamed "Dennis the Menace." The two of us panted out way up the very steep drainage on the north of the creek toward Elbow. When I got to Elbow he was smoking a Camel Filter. He gratefully accepted some of my food before going any further; he hadn't eaten in 20 hours. Elbow said he had indeed been caught by the dark. He had tried to continue after sundown but after falling twice and sustaining some bruises decided to hole up for the night. He found a small cave and shivered through the night in spite of a large fire. Before the sun was fully up Elbow had continued his trek out of the canyon. With food in our bellies, "Dennis" ate some of mine too, we picked our way through the rock falls to the bottom of the canyon. There we were joined by Craig and the other RMRU members who had hiked up the canyon. The hike to base camp was uneventful; at the base Elbow embraced his wife and children. I couldn't help feeling a' little personal satisfaction at the fact that some old fashioned "Elbow Grease" got the job done and that the newfangled helicopter wasn't need after all.

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.