



Overdue male hiker

March 5, 1986
Skyline Trail
1986-009

By Rob Gardner

At 5:20 a.m. the RMRU was called out to assist the Palm Springs Mounted Police (PSMP) Search and Rescue team. PSMP initiated a search the previous evening for an overdue solo hiker who was trekking on the Skyline Trail. RMRU reported to PSMP base camp at Highway 111 and Tramway Road in Palm Springs.

The overdue hiker was Tommy Craxford, twenty-one years of age. Reportedly, Tommy had hiking experience in the state of Florida but was unfamiliar with the San Jacinto Mountain range.

Tommy had started his trek at the Desert Museum trail head to the Lichen Trail on Tuesday at 9:00 a.m. His destination was Long Valley, where the upper Palm Springs Aerial Tramway Station is located. He planned to ride the Tramway back down to the desert. He reportedly estimated he would be home by 4:00 p.m. (which is not a feasible time estimate). The Lichen Trail does junction with the old Skyline Trail, which leads to Long Valley from the desert floor. This trail has been an area of almost continual problems over the past twenty or more years.

Problems on the Skyline Trail have primarily been related to people underestimating the time and strength needed to reach the end of the trail, lack of water on the trail, and lack of a distinct trail. At certain times of year snow and ice at the top portion of the trail complicate the hike substantially. There have been several tragedies and fatalities on the upper half of this trail and numerous search and rescues over the years. Hikers have become lost and disoriented on this trail, accidentally descending into Chino Canyon or Tahquitz Canyon. Both of these canyons, at higher elevations, are very difficult to hike and are for the experienced mountaineer only.

The PSMP had searched the Lichen Trail and lower Skyline Trail on Tuesday evening. Later they had a Jet Ranger Helicopter from Landells Aviation released to search from the air with flood lights. The helicopter, piloted by Steve DeJesus, flew search throughout the night, without any sign of Tommy. Chris Maxwell was Rescue Coordinator (Operations Leader) for the PSMP.

At about 6:00 a.m. on Wednesday two PSMP searchers were flown to a point about two-thirds of the way up the trail and let out of the helicopter to reinitiate foot search.

The RMRU personnel began to arrive and prepared to go into the field and search areas as asked by the PSMP. The first team, Rob Gardner and Kevin Walker, was to be flown to Long Valley. They would then proceed down the Skyline Trail looking for Tommy and checking for footprints or tracks in the snow and ice at the top of the trail. The second team to be led by Cameron Robbins, was going to search from the "fire ring" area on the trail down into Tahquitz Canyon. A third team was to be led by Major Disaster, alias Rick Pohlers.

As Rob and Kevin were being helio'd to their starting point word came by radio that the two PSMP searchers, Scott Davis and Mike, at the central vicinity of the trail had located Tommy and that he was in satisfactory condition. The two PSMP Search and Rescue men and Tommy were flown to base camp by helicopter. The search and rescue was not dramatic, but everybody was happy to see that the overdue hiker was safe.



COMMAND CENTER - Members of the Palm Springs Mounted Police interview Tommy Craxford after he had been locate by P.S. Mounties on the Skyline Ridge, and then flown out by the Mounties to assist in the search.

While reports were being completed by PSMP, RMRU and PSMP personnel got a chance to swap mission stories and exchange thoughts on Search and Rescue techniques. After a short time all of the volunteer Search and Rescue personnel headed for home to clean up and go on to their regular employment. Although, in the final analysis, it worked out that RMRU wasn't needed we were happy to respond to the PSMP call for a co-effort and look forward to more missions side by side, whenever appropriate.

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.