



Woman missing from campground

June 29, 1986

Black Mtn Campground

1986-024

by Walt Walker

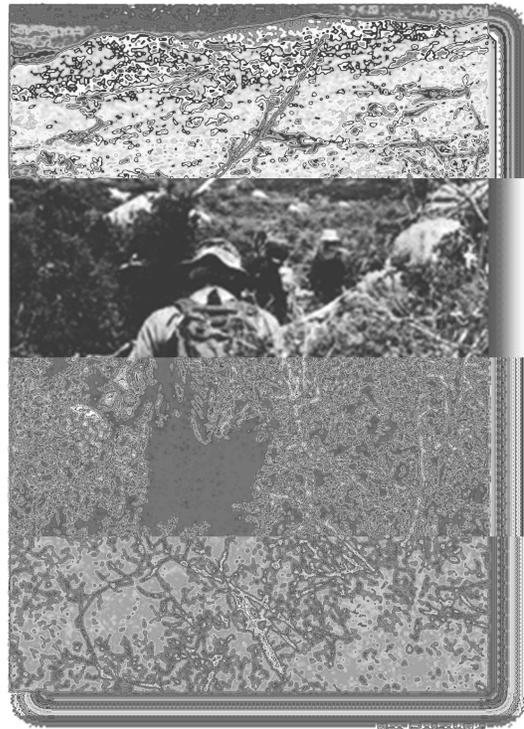
It was very early on a Sunday morning (in fact it was the middle of the night) when my telephone woke me up. Of course, it was a call for a mission. The Riverside County Sheriff's Department had been notified that a 21 year old woman was missing from the Black Mountain Group Campground, which is on the western slope of the San Jacinto Mountains at the 7380 foot level.

A church college career group of young adults were spending the weekend together enjoying the mountains. Saturday morning around 10 a.m. Julie Gang told another camper that she was going for a day hike and would be back in the after-noon. As far as anyone knew she was carrying a small day-pack with possibly two cans of soda and a compass. When she had not returned by early evening the group searched the immediate area and drove up and down the Black Mountain dirt road. Their search was fruitless and two people drove off the mountain to call for help.

RMRU members were contacted via the telephone and our paging system. They were given the basic information and advised to respond to the Black Mountain Campground. Shortly after 7 a.m. RMRU members began arriving at the campground. They were met by Sgt. Dave Duncan from the Banning station. The first RMRU search team into the field was Bud White and Henry Negrete. They headed in the direction that our missing subject was last seen (basically eastward). We requested the sheriff's department to contact Landells Aviation for a helicopter to fly search teams to back country locations. Steve Bryant and Jim Fairchild were assigned the dirt road that heads easterly towards Camp Lackey. Rob Gardner and I were assigned to cut a line west to east below the campground. The next two teams were to be flown in by helicopter. Glenn Henderson and Kevin Walker were assigned to hike down the Fuller Ridge trail from the Linda Stoner helispot which is located at the top of the Fuller Ridge. Rick Pohlens and Ray Hussey were given the assignment of hiking from the Deer Springs junction up towards the Fuller Ridge. They were to be flown in to a small meadow below the junction. Mel Krug and Gil Carr had just arrived when Steve radioed that he and Jim had found tracks cutting across the berg and heading west toward the edge of the mountain that drops off in the direction of the Twin Pines Boys Ranch.

The base of operations that had been set up at the Black Mountain Campground was moved to the Boulder Basin Camp-ground which is right on the edge of the mountain facing west. This was done to improve radio communications to the field teams since it appeared that our missing subject had dropped over the edge and was heading down slope. Since there are some fire roads and jeep trails on the lower slopes below Black Mountain we requested the Hemet Search and Rescue Team to respond with some four wheel drive vehicles. With Bob Sairs manning the radios at base the rest of us drove down to the U.S. Forest Service station at Vista Grande, which has a helispot behind the station. Ray and Rick were assigned to join up with Jim and Steve. Shortly the four of them were following tracks down-hill to the west.

Just before 10 a.m. Don Landells arrived at Vista Grande with one of his Bell Jet Ranger helicopters. Glenn Henderson and Kevin Walker quickly climbed aboard and were on their way to the prime search area. For about 30 minutes the helicopter flew a contour search pattern below where the tracks were located. Don spotted some tracks and Glenn and Kevin were let off on a boulder on the ridge near the tracks. Steve hiked down to Kevin and Glenn and confirmed that the tracks were the same as the ones above. Don returned to Vista Grande and picked up Mel and Gil and flew back to the search area and expanded the aerial search to the west and east. Once again the air search did not find the subject. Mel and Gil were let off on the ridge below where Glenn and Kevin had been put off. Don returned to Vista Grande and picked up another crew consisting of Rob and myself. We again flew contour search in the prime area. We have learned from prior searches that many times a second flight over the same area finds the missing subject. With fuel getting low Rob and I were dropped off on an old road. We hiked cross country to the drainage below where the tracks were heading. We started up the canyon with the usual problems of finding your way through the dense brush and around and over boulders. The teams above us continued to look for more tracks.



Jim Farenia

SLOW GOING - RMRU members move slowly through brush that varied from waste deep to over your head while trying to stay on the tracks.

Four jeeps with two members each responded from the Hemet Search and Rescue Team. They were quickly assigned, by radio, the different dirt roads that we wanted to be covered. With the bird refueled Don returned to the search and picked up Rob and I off of a large boulder. We decided to greatly expand the search area. We then flew the entire trail from the Fuller Ridge trailhead (elev.



Kevin Walker

ONE RUNNER IN A SEA OF BRUSH - RMRU member Jim Fairchild guides helicopter "816" into position on a large boulder that seemed like an island in a sea of brush. Fellow members Gil Carr (left) and Steve Bryant (right) stand ready to help guide the skid into position. Pilot Don Landells did his usual job of flying members in and out of the search area with speed and safety.

approx. 7800 feet) to the top of Mt. San Jacinto (elev. 10,804 feet). On the way back we flew aerial search on both sides of the Fuller Ridge and the area above Jensen Canyon. Returning to the area where tracks had last been seen by a ground party we began another contour search. While flying to the west I spotted Julie amongst the dense brush. Years of flying @s an aerial observer and a little luck helped, as she was wearing a light blue shirt and faded blue jeans, which are not easy to spot from the air. We circled over Julie and we motioned by hand signals for her to stay where she was. Don spotted a large boulder and brought the bird down onto the top of the rock. By putting one foot on the runner I helped Don a little to hold the bird in position as Rob passed me his pack. Rob then slid out of the bird and I gave Don the lift off hand signal. As he flew off to fly other teams of the mountain Rob and I fought our way upward through the brush toward Julie. She was doing the same thing downhill toward us. She was generally in good condition except for some dirt and scratches. However, she was very thirsty and slightly hungry. So we sat her down and gave her some food and water.

Rob and I helped Julie over to and up onto our one runner boulder. We told her what to expect and what to do around the helicopter. Don had flown out one field team while we were getting ready. On his return we radioed that we were ready for a pickup. He brought the bird in for another one runner touchdown with the aid of our hand signals. I climbed into the back seat and slid across. Rob helped Julie into the back and we buckled her in and I gave Don the signal to lift off. In a very short time we were at Vista Grande. Bernie McIlvoy came out to meet us and assisted Julie away from the bird. Julie was reunited with her mother with a big hug. In a series of quick flights the rest of the field teams were flown off the mountain.



We quickly asked Julie about her night out and how she had become lost. We use this information to assist us in future searches. During our own critique we discussed her information and talked about what we had done, both right and wrong.

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.