

Five teenagers overdue

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North Fork, San Jacinto River
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by Mel Krug

Friends and family had just left my home after celebrating my daughter Melinda's 12th birthday when the phone rang. At the other end was Kevin Walker with news of a search for five young people out of Lawler Lodge, and that because there were several members away on vacations the turnout would be slim. After saying yes I loaded my gear and drove to the Riverside County operated camp along highway 243. Since I live in Chino, I was surprised to arrive at the rendezvous point and find the vans still not there. I learned from fellow members present that there might be another mission starting at Tahquitz Rock (see mission no. 8633A), which did not please me at all, but fortunately that resolved itself quickly and Kevin and Bruce arrived with the No. 1 and No. 2 vans shortly after.

Kevin accepted the job of operations leader and began gathering information from the informants present, while we prepared our packs for an overnight search. It seemed like forever for our briefing and assignments to be given, but the wait was necessary since we were limited in man-power, and if Kevin were to give a hasty assignment we might not even find a clue. We gathered around the van and learned that we would be going out for five teenagers: four girls and one boy, ages 15-16, last seen below the camp at 1:30 in the afternoon leaving to go downstream on a short hike. They were dressed lightly and did not have any food or water with them. With Kevin left at base with the dubious job of running the show, Bruce Gahagan, Joe Erickson, Mark Rhoads, Rick Pohlars, Henry Negrete and myself started down slowly from the camp. Not just slow because of trying to follow prints, but also because brush and large boulders made traveling extremely slow. As we searched, Kevin activated the Hemet Search and Rescue team and they responded with five members in two vehicles. Their task would be to drive down the San Jacinto truck trail, a dirt road for fire access that crosses the North Fork below where we were searching.

To make a long night and story short, we worked through the night following prints intermittently, and eventually ran into two people from the Hemet team coming upstream. So, somewhere the kids climbed out of the bottom and we missed where they did that. just as the sun was nearing the almost 11,000 foot summit of Mt. San Jacinto far above us, the Hemet members brought us back to base for some breakfast and new assignments. just then the Sheriff's dispatcher came on the radio

and informed base that the kids had made it back up to highway 243, north of our location. We then were able to relax as we waited for the deputy to bring the group back to our location. Once back the cold and scratched up group of five told us what we thought had happened. They went down stream for quite awhile and then decided to climb out to the ridge. But in doing so, they went into extremely thick brush. They kept going until after dark, and then spent the night huddled together on a large boulder. When there was enough light in the morning, they pushed on, and made it to a fire break on the ridge top, and then went on to the highway. At any rate, the only thing that appeared to be injured was both their and our respective prides. With that we drove to Idyllwild for breakfast and then home for some badly needed sleep.

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.