



7 year old girl missing from park

December 14, 1986
Woodchuck Park, Santa Ana Mountains
1986-046

By Jim Fairchild

Abductions are ever greater, disrupting lives, terrorizing the victims, bringing horror and anguish for the relatives and those responsible for the abducted. In addition, abductions often lead to agonizing search time, for those in mountain rescue. The possible abduction of April Cooper, seven years of age, from Woodchuck Park, Just south of Vail Lake, was almost completely overshadowed in the news media by the Ho girl's kidnap and murder.

The first report of April's disappearance came on Saturday afternoon (13 Dec.). The Riverside County Sheriff's Office (RSO), Hemet Search & Rescue, and the RSO Mounted Posse were on the search through Sunday Afternoon. When RMRU and the Riverside County Underwater Search and Recovery Team arrived, the first order of business was to search several small to medium sized ponds within the camp. While Walt Walker gathered information for us, we observed what was truly a thorough underwater search, as we tended their measuring lines from the water's edge.

Then, RMRU deployed in small teams into the brush – dense, climax chaparral that is the specialty of low, rolling hills, albeit steep! Joe Erickson and I were to seek tracks uphill from April's trailer home at the edge of the park. We found plenty of tracks, none small. Nevertheless, we saw and smashed through hundreds of yards of brush. The other teams did the same. As the sun wend down it became increasingly opined that April was with another family, seen at noon, that was headed for Santa's Village in the San Bernardino Mountains. When all was sufficiently dark, a number of us were assigned to go out to accompany dog handlers. Two of us wet with two Bouvier de Flanders canines from San Diego, that were trained for air-scent and scent article trackers. It appeared that the dogs were competent and enthusiastic. They alerted into a laundry cubicle, and then across a drainage and two hundred yards up a trail, then became un-alert. April may have been seen in that area on Saturday. We persisted in this up and down the brushy trails searching for a couple of hours, then the "She's with the family that went to Santa's Village" opinion won out, and we went home. No traces found, no further information of any help.

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.