

Car, wallet, and keys found, but no driver

March 13, 1989
Death Valley
1989-008

Around 4pm on March 10, 1989, an abandoned blue Ford Tempo with North Dakota plates was found near by Highway 190 near the Beatty cutoff in Death Valley National Monument. The registered owner is Roy J. Hagel from Bismark, ND. A wallet and car keys were found on the seat of the car with identification belonging to Roy Hagel.

Cowboy boot tracks were found leading from the vehicle into the desert. It is not absolutely certain that Mr. Hagel was the person who left the tracks leading from the car into the desert, but that was the working hypothesis. A quick search of the area was made the evening of March 10 by Park Service employees. Other search teams with helicopter support started searching the next day.

Monday, March 13, RMRU received a call to assist in the search. RMRU members Dona Halcrow, Ray Hussey, Victor Caro and Steve Bryant responded that evening and we arrived at the DVNM ranger station at 12:15 am Tuesday morning. After sleeping fitfully because of high winds, we had a briefing at 0600 Tuesday, March 14. Hussey and Caro had Assignment No.8, which was to search from the Beatty cutoff to the base of the mountains due east, then move about 1A mile north and search due west back to the Beatty cutoff. This involved an approximate 10 mile hike across the desert. Bryant and Halcrow had Assignment No.6, and searched from the Keane Wonder Mine due south to Highway 190, about 8 miles across rocky desert. The hiking was a lot of fun the scenery can't be beat (even though it was a very poor year for flowers) and the weather was nice and cool but none of the search teams found any hint of Roy Hagel during the day. Other searchers included Mountain Rescue Association (MRA) teams from Sierra Madre, China Lake, San Diego and Altadena, as well as several non-MRA teams. We do thank Steve DeJesus from Landells Aviation for a great job of flying.

After the daytime assignments were completed, Bryant and Halcrow were assigned a quick job to search for tracks along the berm of the Beatty



AIR SUPPORT - Steve DeJesus of Landells Aviation prepares to land to give water and food to search teams

cutoff (DV route 4). They found tracks of cowboy boots along the berm which apparently matched the boot tracks found near Mr. Hagel's car. Even with the help of a tracking dog from the California Rescue Dog Association (CARDA), we couldn't follow the tracks for more than a mile. Halcrow, Hussey and Caro returned home Tuesday night; Bryant stayed and had another beautiful, though fruitless, hike through 5 miles of desert Wednesday before driving home.

All in all, a lot of time and money was spent doing a very thorough search, but we didn't find Mr. Hagel. There were rumors that he wanted to disappear after breaking up with a girlfriend, and this writer thinks he probably hitchhiked out of the monument and is sitting somewhere in a bar with D. B. Cooper.

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.