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Search and Rescue

SEARCH

Mission No. 8428M

15-16 Nov., Thurs.-Fri.
Tahquitz Canyon,
San Jacinto Mountains

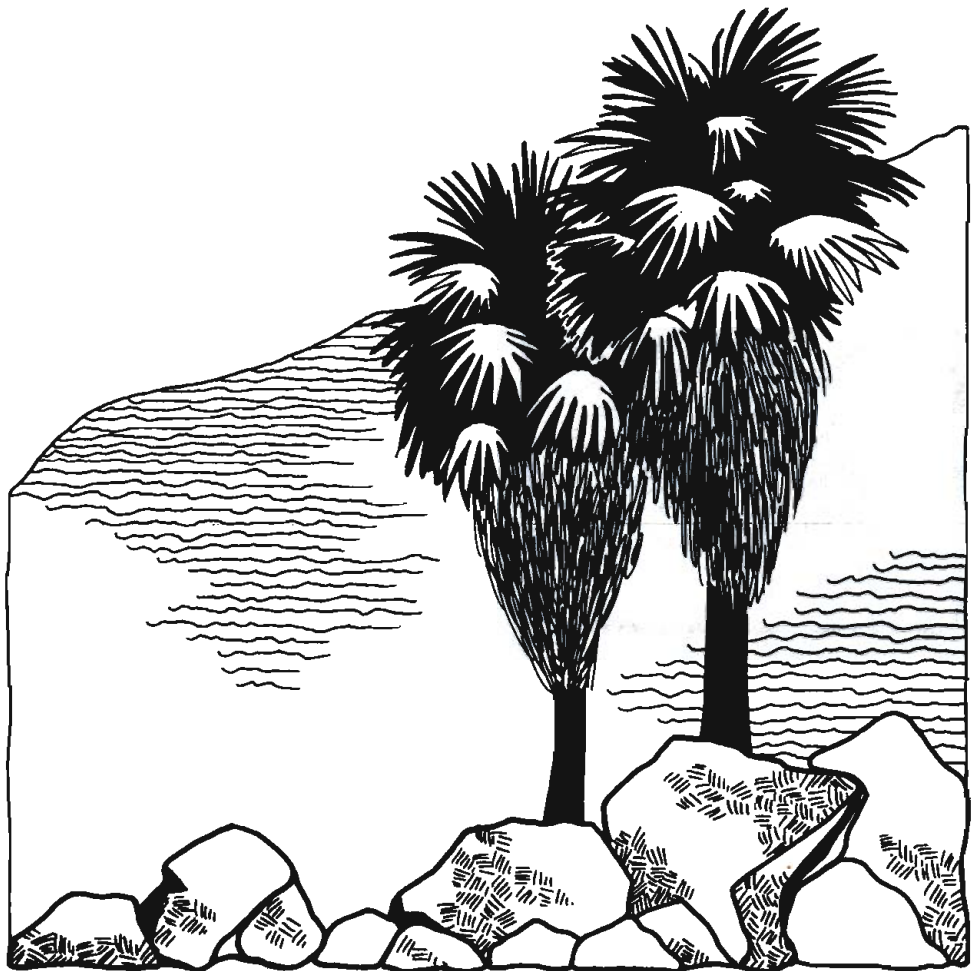
By Bill Blaschko



I was just settling down to a late night movie when the call came through that a hiker was overdue. I threw my gear in the car and rushed off to Ann Dolley's house at the base of Tahquitz Canyon. At base

camp we learned that the missing person was Richard Perry, better known by his nickname of Elbow. Evidently Elbow had gone for a very ambitious day hike. According to our informant, Elbow's common-law wife, he was planning to hike above the fourth falls, a feat he had accomplished in the past in about eleven hours. Unfortunately for Elbow on this occasion he didn't get started until ten A.M. and it got dark around six P.M. Still, Elbow knew the canyon well as he had lived in it previously for about a year.

At this point I would like to back-track a little to describe how our team came to be called out. It seems that Elbow's wife had no intention of getting help to find Richard. In fact she was in Tahquitz Canyon searching for him when the Palm Springs Police investigated the station wagon that she, Elbow, their two and children and a friend named Wolf had been living in. The police were initially concerned about vagrancy but when they learned that Richard was missing they called for RMRU. Richard's wife was able to give us a very detailed description. Elbow was 23 years old, 5'7", 140 lbs., black hair and beard. He was



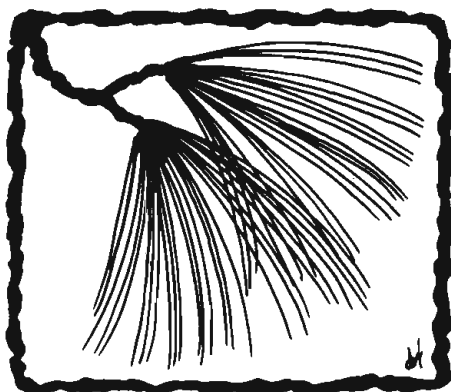
wearing a "Blitz Beer" T-shirt and blue jeans. He had Camel Filter cigarettes and Ralph's Market matches but no food or other equipment. We were told that he was in a depressed state of mind because he had no money and no job.

By the time the team had assembled and gathered the necessary background information it was about midnight. As a team we felt that either Elbow had gotten stranded in the dark or possibly he had been hurt. On the basis of past experience Jim Fairchild and Kevin Walker decided that the best strategy was a helicopter search at daybreak. Craig Britton and I were dispatched to hike up to the first falls during the night and to be prepared to continue up the canyon by foot at dawn. I actually was glad to get this assignment

even though it meant there was less chance I would get a helicopter ride. All too often my schedule keeps me close to civilization and it was a real pleasure to hike by the light of the stars with occasional help from my headlamp. Craig and I took careful note of the many footprints on our way up to the first falls. We came across some very fresh tracks but they led us only to another moonlight hiker. Craig and I bedded down with the roar of the water falls to lull us to sleep.

At daybreak Craig and I packed our sleeping bags and proceeded up the steep rocky trail that skirts around the south side of the lowest falls. Meanwhile the remainder of the team at base camp made final arrangements and preparations for

helicopter deployment into the canyon. As is routine Craig and I shouted at intervals to Elbow to see if we could make voice contact. Somewhat to our surprise we heard a voice answer our call after we had been hiking for only about 15 minutes. The voice we heard was extremely faint and we couldn't make out any words. After radioing this information to base we continued up the trail and made visual contact about ten minutes later. Unfortunately our subject was far up on the opposite side of the canyon. Tahquitz Canyon is extremely steep and cannot be crossed in a number of places; we were at one of those areas. We yelled to Elbow to stay put while radioing to base for more help. Several team members hurried up the canyon with light packs while I began to hike back down canyon in search of a place to cross over to the other side. Craig



stayed where he was to keep the subject in sight and coordinate activities. Just as I was about to cross Tahquitz Creek and start up the other side I was joined by one of Elbow's friends nicknamed "Dennis the Menace." The two of us panted out way up the very steep drainage on the north of the creek toward Elbow. When I got to Elbow he was smoking a Camel Filter. He gratefully accepted some of my food before going any further; he hadn't eaten in 20 hours. Elbow said he had indeed been caught by the dark. He had tried to continue after sundown but after falling twice and sustaining some bruises decided to hole up for the night. He found a small cave and shivered through the night in spite of a large fire. Before the sun was fully up Elbow had continued his trek out of the canyon. With food in our bellies, "Dennis" ate some of mine too, we picked our way through the rock falls to the bottom of the canyon. There we were joined by Craig and the other RMRU members who had hiked up the canyon. The hike to base camp was uneventful; at the base Elbow embraced his wife and children. I couldn't help feeling a little personal satisfaction at the fact that some old fashioned "Elbow Grease" got the job done and that the new-fangled helicopter wasn't need after all. • RMRU



RMRU PHOTO BY JIM FAIRCHILD

WHICH WAY DID HE GO — RMRU members Gordon Lee, Cathy Davis, Craig Britton, and Mel Krug try to follow tracks left by instructor Jim Fairchild during a track identification exercise.



Tracking and Compass

10 Nov., Sat.
Strawberry Canyon,
San Jacinto Mountains

By Rob Gardner



The November 1984 training got underway, almost on time, at the Mellor's Sky Yacht in Fern Valley. The RMRU group hiked from the Mellor's cabin toward Suicide Rock. After a short hike the tracking and compass training session began. Jim Fairchild was the instructor of this nine hour session.

In the morning the training concentrated on tracking. The men discussed and practiced the measurement of prints, description of print patterns, study of impact

depth, angles, and toe push. Also studied was aging of tracks in relation to moistness of the ground, vegetation crush, fill-in, etc. The practice of cutting for tracks and leap-frogging were described and practiced. The RMRU men practiced tracking each other, using tracking sticks, mirrors, rulers, and note pads for detail data. They carried assorted flashlights for night use. Also discussed were clues to tracking, such as, food wrappers, cigarette butts, food scraps, clothing or equipment items dropped, etc.

In the morning and mid-day the team worked on improvement of the use of maps and compass. This portion of the training session included orienting the map, taking bearings, declination, and triangulation. In general, the team people participated in this training quite fully and with a great deal of interest.

The training session was ended by a mock tracking exercise, using guests of Jim Fairchild as volunteer subjects. This tracking problem went right up to dark and was a good way to practice the things reviewed and learned during the day. The November training ended with a great dinner in Idyllwild. • RMRU