

Two teenagers did not return home

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Falls Creek
1980-016

By Kevin Walker

It was about 10 in the morning when the intercom came on and asked for me to report to the front office. It was there that parent, employer and RMRU member Walt Walker informed me that two teenagers were overdue in returning to their homes in the Coachella Valley, and that RMRU's services would be needed in locating the pair. Because of a heavy work load Walt would be unable to respond. So I took the rescue van and headed for Banning. Before responding to the Snow Creek roadhead, we met at the Sheriff's office in Banning. I was the first RMRU member there, so I started the paper work for the mission. After getting a man-power report from Walt over the phone, I decided it would be a good idea to also activate the Hemet Team. With 12 RMRU members at the office and two on the way from Hemet, we headed for Snow Creek. Once there veteran RMRU member Jim Fairchild asked me if I would like to be Operations leader for this mission. As calmly as possible I said YES . . . I may sound excited, but that is to be expected when one is entrusted to direct a rescue mission for the first time.

As I began to organize teams, the familiar voice of pilot Don Landells came over the radio and notified us that he was air borne and would be at our location in 5 minutes. After consulting with Jim I decided to send the two Jim's (Fairchild and Garvey) in to make a recon run up Falls Creek, and then down Snow Creek in the event that the two had gone that route. After Don had arrived and



BACK AT BASE - Mark Maglione and Richard Gonzales walking with his Uncle, walk away from Don Landells' helicopter, after being airlifted from Falls Creek. RMRU member Larry Roland follows to make sure they exit away from the chopper in a safe manner.

then left with J.F. and J.G. I made sure that the other teams of two were ready to hike in the event that the chopper did not turn anything on the first run. After about 20 minutes the chopper returned. They had not found anything, but Don had seen an area that he thought would be a good area to start searching in. Since Jim Garvey was in the bird, and had seen the particular area Don was speaking about, I thought it best to make him the team leader for the first search team. Joe Erickson would join Jim for the first run in. With men and gear loaded, I replaced Jim Fairchild as observer and we were off. We had no sooner reached the area at about the 3,000 foot level, when Jim Garvey shouted up to the front that he had the two in sight on a boulder below us. Sure enough the description matched, so Don landed on a ridge above the canyon and let Jim and Joe off so that they could hike down and make contact.

While they were making their way down the ridge, Don and I flew back to base to pick up a brush hook so that I could clear the helispot and make more clearance for the tail rotor. After Don had let me off, I started clearing the brush away. After about 30 minutes, Jim and Joe returned with the two teenagers. Both were in great shape, and were apparently having a good time. We did convince them though that it would be wise to come out with us to their waiting relatives. With all clear at the helispot, we called Don back in. After two trips, Don had the two hikers and the three of us back to base. Mission No. 1980-016 complete.

One problem though; while we had been working on the mission, Don had spotted a pack at the top of a waterfall in Snow Creek. So Jim Fairchild sent Don Chambers in with the chopper to retrieve it. Bringing the pack out was actually harder than the main mission, because Don had to make a one runner at the waterfall while Don Chambers climbed out and got the pack. We thought we might have another mission, but after the Sheriff ran a check on an I.D. found in the pack we learned that a solo hiker had to leave it to get around the waterfall, and that we could have the pack and contents as a donation. Lucky once again that day - a happy ending.

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.