



Man and two boys missing

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Long Valley Drainage
1982-028

By Walt Walker

It was shortly after 1230 hours that RMRU was notified by the Banning station of the Riverside County Sheriff's Department a man and two boys were overdue from a day hike. In fact, they were 24 hours overdue from a planned short hike out of the upper terminal of the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway.

Shortly before 1400 hours (2 p.m.) RMRU members began arriving at the lower terminal of the tram. We were met by Capt. Ray Canova and Sgt. Dave Weakly of the sheriff's department. After reviewing the information, the veteran members decided that Tahquitz Canyon and the Long Valley drainage were prime areas to be searched. The only way to quickly, and effectively, search this vast area is by helicopter. Capt. Canova contacted Landells Aviation Helicopter Service and requested them to fly that afternoon. We then moved base camp to the intersection in front of Ann Dolley's house, which is near the mouth of Tahquitz Canyon.

The plan of action was to have Bernie McIlvoy and Kevin Walker fly, in the helicopter, as observers. The bird arrived at 1528 piloted by Mike Donovan. Bernie and Kevin climbed in and the powerful machine departed at 1530. The bird reported being at the 4600 foot level in Tahquitz Canyon at 1537. The aerial search continued to the top of the canyon, Caramba Camp. The bird then flew over to the Long Valley Drainage and at 1545 reported finding the missing trio just above the double overhanging waterfalls in the lower end of the Long Valley Drainage.

Mike maneuvered the helicopter into a tight one-runner helispot and Bernie and Kevin climbed out onto the ridge above the canyon. They started down the side of the canyon and shortly found the going very tough, due to the steepness, loose dirt and wet rocks. Bernie stayed where he was and Kevin started climbing back up. Mike picked him up with another one-runner on the steep slope. The helicopter returned to base so that Kevin could better describe what was going to be needed.

Kevin related that we would need to drop Bernie a 150 foot rope so he could rappel down to the located subjects. He also said that it would be close to a 300 foot raise to get the man and the two boys up to the top of the ridge. The canyon bottom was not wide enough for the helicopter to descend into the canyon and land by the subjects. We loaded a number of ropes and hardware into the bird and Kevin and I

climbed in and we were quickly on our way up the canyon.

Mike flew into the area by the falls and hovered over Bernie and Kevin dropped the 150 foot rope to Bernie. We then flew up to the ridge and Kevin and I climbed out while Mike held the bird in a one-runner touchdown. While we started looking the situation over Mike returned to base. In succeeding trips he flew in Joe Erickson, Craig Beasley, Bruce Gahagan and five members of the Palm Springs Mounted Police.

Bernie had by now descended into the canyon and was with the man and the two boys. The group on the top was busy setting up anchors for a mechanical advantage system to haul everyone up with. Joe, Craig and Kevin rappelled down to assist in the evacuation and clear the route of brush and loose rocks. With the M.A. ready for the lift, at 1900 we started hauling the first boy up. The race with darkness was now on! The first boy was quickly followed by the other boy and the man. Each of the three were accompanied up by Bernie. (He rappelled back down each time.)

The light was fading fast as we radioed out to Base camp Operator, Mary Bowman, that we were ready for the trio to be flown out, it was now 1925. Don Landells had now relieved Mike Donovan as pilot for the mission. Don arrived at our helispot, on the slope at 1940, and we quickly loaded the man and the boys into the bird. When Don departed we immediately started hauling Joe up out of the canyon. Don returned and started flying out three of the Palm Springs team members.

It was decided to haul Kevin and Craig up on one raise to speed things up. When they were about half way up the 275 foot lift the main anchor rope slipped off the boulder it was around. With a sickening hissing noise it snapped past the members who were pulling on the M.A. rope. It was a tense micro-second, as we feared the worst, only to have the Gibbs that was securing the bite of our M.A. hold the rope and prevent Kevin and Craig from being dropped. There was also a belay rope that was there for their protection, but it was not needed. We set up another anchor and started hauling again. The delay had cost us all the daylight and it was almost dark. At 2040 Don flew out the rest of the Palm Springs team members. (Many thanks to all the members of the Palm Springs Mounted Police for all their help!) The bird returned for Kevin, Joe and Craig and also a lot of technical gear and ropes. When Don flew away with them Bernie and I briefly talked about flying in a helicopter at night, in canyons and making one-runner landings, it is probably one of the more dangerous things that we get involved in. It seemed especially dark as Don returned to pick us up. Bernie climbed aboard as soon as Don had the tips of the runners touching the steep slope. I quickly handed Bernie the remaining equipment and climbed in and tapped Don on the shoulder. Don lifted the bird off and flew back towards the lights of Palm Springs. We landed at 2058!

(Editor's Note: Due to the race with darkness, there was no time to get a camera out and take any photographs.)

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.