

## Woman caught in flash flood

**July 28, 1984**

**Deep Canyon, Santa Rosa Mtns**

**1984-018**

By Kevin Walker

At 1:00 P.M. we were contacted by the Indio office of the Riverside County Sheriff that a woman had been swept away by a flash flood in Deep Canyon. Members responded to the Piñon Fire station. There we were met by Sgt. John Sabastian of the Sheriff's Department. He told us that on Friday afternoon a couple had been swept away by flash flood waters. The man made it out of the water and by the next day (Saturday) hiked out to the highway. He told authorities of what had happened, and was then transported to a desert hospital for numerous minor injuries. We did not have much to go on as information was sketchy.

Don Landells was contacted and responded with one of his Bell jet Rangers. Fellow RMRU member Brian Hixson and I were assigned to fly with Don, as a foot search was out of the question since flash flood conditions still existed with rain still falling in the area, quite strong at times. We took light packs, loaded up and lifted off for the canyon below. It is always impressive to see what the force of nature is like. We could see that the water level had already gone down, but the level still made it impossible to cross in all but a couple of places. As Don slowly flew down the canyon sometimes getting within a couple of feet of the water, which could now be called a small river, we saw occasional signs of man, clothing, tires, metal objects, etc. but none matching the description of the woman for whom we were looking. We flew for nearly one and one half hours, and during that time made it all the way out to the settling basin near Rancho Mirage. With light fading we returned to base where Walt Walker and Jim Fairchild replaced Brian and I for a short recon of the search area.

The following morning saw clear skies above. The informant had been released the previous evening from the hospital, and had been brought up to show us where they had been washed away from. Don Landells was back bright and early. The informant was placed in the front with Don, and Walt in the back seat. They were gone only a short time and Don radioed that they had found the PLS (place last seen), and that Walt had been let out in a small side canyon approximately one mile above Deep Canyon. Don returned with the subject, and then flew the rest of the team members in to a ridge several hundred feet above the canyon floor. When all members were in Walt told us what the informant had told Don and him while they were flying. In the afternoon on Friday when it started to rain the woman and

he got out of the rain by getting underneath a large overhang by the creek that had been carved out by the water running at flood level. The overhang was just below a 25 to 30 foot waterfall. There they stayed until the water level came up to near where they stood. He told us that they decided to get out of where they were, and that the only out was to try and cross the creek. Holding on to one another they stepped in the fast moving water and were immediately swept away. He managed to get to the side, and with numerous cuts, scrapes and bruises made his way out.

With all members in and briefed, Walt flew out and directed the search from base. Working in two groups we searched down canyon. From the PLS to the confluence with Deep Canyon all that was found was pieces of clothing from the pairs' camp. But with that clothing was the top and shorts that the woman was wearing. With nothing found in the side canyon, it was decided to continue down Deep Canyon. The water in Deep had returned to almost normal level for early spring, but this was July. So with members searching on either side, Rob Gardner, Brian and I waded in warm water checking under large rocks where a body might lodge. We continued down canyon for several hours. As we neared an area in the canyon where it becomes quite narrow, base informed us that they could see it beginning to storm up on Santa Rosa and Toro Peaks. As this is what had happened in days , Don powered up and quickly flew the team out. With all members back at base the sheriff decided to call off the search.

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.