



Missing quail hunters

January 03, 1987
Thomas Mountain
1987-002

By Henry Negrete

The New Year continued with its exciting start for RMRU. Having just completed a very successful rock rescue two days earlier ([Mission 1987-001](#)) we were just starting to settle down and get ready for the first major storm of the season, when our second call came. The call was concerning two overdue hunters, David Mosley of Bakersfield and Lyle Smith of Chino.

They had set off on a quail-hunting trip around the backside of Lake Hemet and when they failed to show up by nightfall, Lyle's wife asked the Lake Hemet Rangers for assistance in locating them. After numerous trips to both ends of the trail, and calls into the darkness with a portable loud speaker, the Rangers decided to contact the Sheriff's Office for a more thorough search.

At 8:00 p.m. we were called out to meet at the entrance of Lake Hemet. Once there, we were greeted by Ranger John Salsbury, who graciously opened his residence for our use while interviewing the reporting party and forming plans of the search.

The information we were given was that David Lyle had intended to return well before dark and had only minimal clothing and water with them.

It is not rare that hunters stay out longer than they plan, but given the circumstances of their preparedness, the forecast for freezing night temperatures, and the impending storm, we thought it more prudent to go in after them as soon as possible.

Initially, we sent out a tracking team consisting of the remarkable Bud White, Joe "the sniffer" Erickson, and myself, to go in Willow Valley Trail, where the subjects had started, and see if we could pick up their tracks. Another team was sent to the trail end to look for signs of exit.

We soon picked up their tracks, and as we followed them down the trail our dilemma increased somewhat by the fact that the area was heavily traversed by range cattle. Good clean tracks became fewer and farther between. Tracking became increasingly painstaking and midway the main trail broke into a complete maze of cattle trails.

Unable to positively determine the subject's direction of travel, we called for reinforcements to assist in finding the tracks in the ever-widening margin.

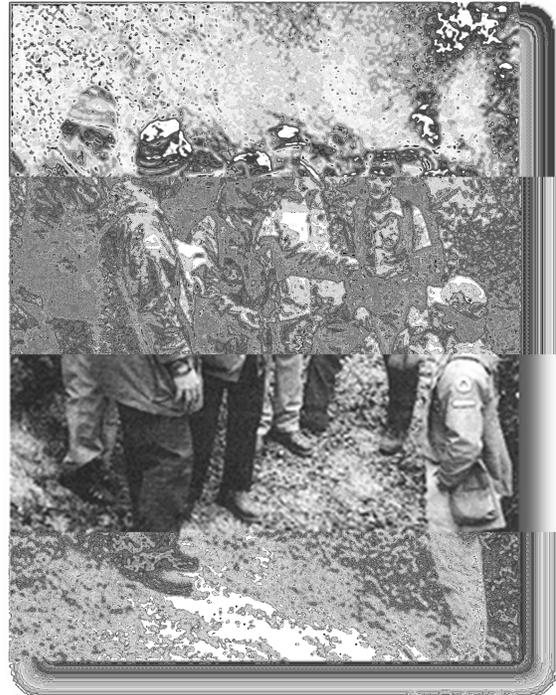
We were soon joined by the infamous Steve Bryant, and the incredible J.R. Muratet. They brought with them renewed vigor and continued to scour the area, to no avail. It was now a couple of hours before dawn, so we chose to bivouac and wait until first light for a fresh start.

When morning broke we headed for high ground for visibility and locate a main drainage, which we thought they have mistakenly gone down. Just as we were about to tackle our new area we were stopped dead in our tracks at the sound of three consecutive shots. We responded with a shout of their names and they answered back from a considerable distance. We told them to stay put and we would work our way to them. Easier said than done.

We fought our way through some of the densest brush any of us could remember and continued to make voice contact for direction.

When we finally broke through the rambling brush I was greeted by a smiling David Mosley, who cordially invited us into their makeshift campsite to enjoy the warmth of their campfire. The fire undoubtedly saved them from the jaws of hypothermia through the night. David and Lyle were in good shape, but graciously accepted our offering of water and warm coats.

On our hike back David and Lyle recounted their story of losing the main trail at the cattle maze and then being lured down the main drainage because it was clear, until they came upon some impassable falls. Back at base we took some time to assess our gains and losses, and we were quite pleased that David and Lyle had weathered their ordeal so well, but never the less we did suffer one loss; that of an old warm friend of Steve Bryant's. It seems that in Steve's vigorous, unselfish, attempt to reach our long lost subjects, the unforgiving, ravenous brush all but devoured his army green wool sweater. It had served him through "thick" and "thin" for over fifteen years and now had to be put to rest. Undoubtedly it had served him well, so I will close with a "Good Luck" to those that survived, and I tip my hat to a good friend worn out.



Jim Fairchild

NOW IF I WERE YOU - RMRU Member Rob Gardner (pointing) seems to be reading the president (Kevin Walker) the proverbial riot act, as fellow members look on.

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.