



Search for 17 yr. Old Male

July 16-19, 2004

Jumbo Rocks, Joshua Tree National Park

2004-014

by Glenn Hendersen

We received a call Friday morning at 0300 on July 16 for a missing 17-year-old camper in Joshua Tree National Park. Team member's responded early Friday morning to search for Eric Sears at the Jumbo Rocks campground in the park. It seems that Eric and friend Ben Fogelstrom, 17, had been hiking and became separated. Ben returned to camp but Eric never showed up. With many days of 100 plus heat, it was really an emergency to find Eric as quickly as possible. The campground was searched thoroughly and the search area was expanded to the rocky areas outside of the campground. Jumbo Rocks is a beautiful area of giant sized boulders strewn about in great jumbles of rocks. There are literally hundreds of places where a person could crawl or fall into and not be seen by anyone walking by. All of these areas had to be searched; taking many people hours to crawl into, rappel into or otherwise get into to be sure Eric was not there trying to get out of the heat. Friday ended with frustration and no clues.

Saturday morning was again going to be another hot day at 107. During the night investigators determined that Eric and Ben had brewed up some Jimson Weed as a tea. Jimson Weed (*Datura*) is a dangerous hallucinogen that has proven fatal in many cases. A region callout was done during the night and many other teams were now on hand to help in the search. These teams included search dogs, mounted searchers, Sheriff's helicopter and other rescue teams.

Base Camp was a very subdued place but the search continued knowing that time was running out for Eric as it would be 107 this Saturday. After searching and researching again, nothing was found. This continued until Wednesday when the search was scaled back but not abandoned. Early in the week a homicide investigation was started in addition to the search. No one has been charged to date. On Saturday friends and family members started their own search and did find Erik 2 1/2 miles from Jumbo Rocks. It was not known how he died or when. Our team found out about finding Eric over the radio as we were driving to services for Scott.

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.