

3 rescued after getting lost in abandoned mine

By JOSEPH S. STROUD

HERALD-LEADER BUSINESS WRITER

Three Pike County men ignored some of the most basic mine safety rules and lost the shirts off their backs in the process. But after 18 frightening hours in the darkness of an underground coal mine, and with the help of a dozen mine inspectors, they emerged unscathed.

Doug Pinion, 19, Greg Howell, 35, and Gathro Layne, 45, all of Kimper, wandered into an abandoned coal mine about 1:30 a.m. Sunday and got lost.

They were rescued early Sunday evening by a team of state and federal mine inspectors.

"They'd been in there about 18 hours when they were found," Burl Scott, commissioner of the state Department of Mines and Minerals, said yesterday.

"They violated all the rules and lived to tell about it," Scott said. "I think they were pretty lucky to come out of it like they did."

The three were found in a

"They violated all the rules and lived to tell about it. I think they were pretty lucky to come out of it like they did."

BURL SCOTT

commissioner, Department of Mines and Minerals

pillared-out area of a pillar-and-retreat coal mine at Hurricane Creek near Kimper. All three were charged with criminal trespassing.

Pillared-out areas are particularly hazardous because roof support pillars have been removed and the roof can collapse or settle at any time.

The situation at Kimper was all the more dangerous because the men had started a fire. It is common for explosive methane gas to accumulate in underground coal mines, and any source of flame can ignite it.

The mine the men entered was the D & E Coal Co. Inc. No. 1 mine. The men were found 700 to 800 feet underground, Scott said, and it took 12 mine safety inspectors to find them.

"They had no idea which way out was," Scott said.

It is illegal and extremely dangerous for anyone to enter an underground coal mine without proper training or supervision, Scott said.

"Obviously, an abandoned coal mine is no place for curiosity seekers or sightseers," he said. "Anybody that enters a coal mine

should be a trained miner who is aware of the hazards involved in coal mining."

The three men had burned their shirts for heat, Scott said, and one of them was barefoot, having lost his shoes in some mud.

"The mud kind of sucked his tennis shoes off," Scott said.

The temperature in an underground coal mine is about 62 degrees, Scott said.

"One of them just had a pair of jogging pants on, and one was bare-footed, and of course they had burned their shirts," Scott said. "They were not a pretty sight when they came out."

Consumers junking new credit card mailings

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Consumers have been inundated with offers for new credit cards, but a new study shows that many of the mailings end up in the trash can. Response rates to credit card mailings fell to their lowest rate

ever in the first half of 1994, according to data from Behavioral Analysis Inc.

Only 1.6 percent of the people who received solicitations actually signed up for the card, according to BAI.

1994 Nov 3 men lost in abandoned mine
KY

Clipped By:
usmra_rob
Nov 16, 2024

Ordeal in abandoned mine prompts warning

The U.S. Department of Labor's Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) is warning explorers around the country of the deadly hazards present in abandoned mines. Three Kentucky men were recently lost for 18 hours after entering an abandoned underground coal mine.

"These men were very fortunate because they were found alive," said J. Davitt McAteer, assistant secretary of labor for mine safety and health. "Abandoned mines typically have very little air to breathe, can have an unsupported roof and no ventilation to dilute the dangerous gases. We warn people to never, ever enter an abandoned mine."

Typical dangers include slippery slopes and icy waters at abandoned quarries, oxygen-deficient air, explosive gases and poor roof conditions in abandoned underground

mines. Like the men lost in the Kentucky mine, victims may also become disoriented in abandoned underground mines, which can spread many miles beneath the earth's surface.

Each year explorers, hikers, adventurers, and other curiosity-seekers who wander into abandoned mines, pits, and quarries are seriously injured or killed. The three Kentucky men — Greg Howell, 35, Gratho Lane, 47, and Lenard Pinion, 19, all of Upper Johns Creek, are the latest, yet lucky, victims of the hazards abandoned mines can pose.

The three men entered the abandoned D&E Coal Co. #1 Mine about 1:30 a.m. on Sunday, Nov. 27, allegedly after drinking undetermined amounts of alcohol. Soon after entering the mine, the men became

disoriented and could not find their way out. The battery-powered flashlight they were using failed. Overcome by complete darkness over 300 feet into the underground mine at night, the men tried to burn their shirts to provide light and warmth.

"Look at the hazards these men faced after entering this abandoned mine," said McAteer. "Once they were inside, setting the fire could have ignited accumulated explosive methane gas that could have killed them all instantly. The mine fan was not operating to provide the ventilation needed to dilute dangerous gases and it's possible that there wouldn't be sufficient oxygen for the men to breathe."

"An abandoned mine is not like a naturally formed cave. Many people think they are the same but they aren't. A cave generally has

enough air flowing through it to sustain life. In many cases, abandoned mines not only have pockets of explosive methane gas, but sometimes have no breathable air at all," he added.

That afternoon, the brother of one of the lost men called the local MSHA office in Pikeville to alert agency officials that the men had entered the mine early that morning and had not been heard from.

MSHA officials quickly responded as four inspectors arrived at the mine site about 5:30 Sunday afternoon to coordinate the rescue effort. MSHA inspector Mike Keene coordinated communications on the surface as inspectors Ron Hughes, Danny Harmon and Jerry Abshire immediately made a partial exploration inside the mine using gas detection instruments to test the air

quality. The missing men were not found but instrument readings indicated the air quality was satisfactory.

The MSHA inspectors then returned to the surface of the mine to join arriving state inspectors and develop a plan to systematically search the entire mine. Federal and state personnel formed five two-man teams and reentered the mine about 7:45 p.m. The three missing men were found about 8 p.m. Sunday evening 800 feet deep into the underground coal mine.

"Shortly before they were rescued, the men saw the cap lamps of the rescue teams in the distance," said Inspector Keene. "But they didn't have the strength to yell loud enough to alert the teams. They were weak, hungry, and rather cold having earlier used their shirts for the fire. But they were quite happy to

see us."

McAteer commended the rescue team members, inspectors from both MSHA and the state of Kentucky, who came out on the weekend to risk their own lives and rescue the men.

Every year MSHA warns residents of mining communities of the dangers posed by abandoned mines. In recent years, three Colorado teenagers exploring an abandoned coal mine were overcome by poisonous gas and died in the mine. A Connecticut boy died of massive injuries after falling into a rock quarry. A Missouri boy broke his back after falling into an abandoned sand mine.

MSHA continues to work closely with mine operators to have abandoned mine openings sealed and fenced off from the public as required by law.

1994 Nov 3 men lost in abandoned mine
KY

Clipped By:
usmra_rob
Nov 15, 2024