

2 cavers die of asphyxiation exploring abandoned mine

The Associated Press

BAYVIEW, Idaho — Two men who disappeared into an abandoned mine at Lake Pend Oreille were found dead several hours later after an intensive search.

Authorities said Chris Homsstad, 22, of Minnesota, and Stephen Novak, 28, of Seattle, entered the U.S. Forest Service mine about 1:30 p.m. Saturday to explore the shaft. A two-county rescue effort was launched 75 minutes later when the men did not return as planned.

The men were found by searchers from Kootenai and Bonner

counties about 7:15 p.m. The victims, who apparently died of asphyxiation, were 300-400 feet inside the shaft entrance.

The mine, at the base of a sheer 1,000-foot mountain, has been abandoned for decades.

Bonner County Sheriff's Deputy John Black said the mine is frequently explored, but this was the first fatal accident at the mine he was aware of.

"It's just a really dangerous place to be," Kootenai County marine division commander Sgt. Dan Soumas said.

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