

Family knew it would have to retrieve body in old mine

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — When Tooele County rescuers called off their search for 18-year-old Jeremiah Etherington, his father looked at his brother-in-law, Keith Fivas, and they knew it was their turn to try.

Daniel Etherington had lost a son 10 years earlier and he couldn't stand the thought of leaving another buried in a mine shaft.

"I felt he might still be alive. He might be down their waiting I couldn't live with him dying in a hole," Dan said of Jeremiah, who had fallen more than 400 feet down an abandoned mine shaft nearly a week before.

"I didn't want some old miner to go down there and find him 10 years later," Fivas said. "I was having dreams. It was driving me crazy."

The pair, along with other family members and friends, mustered \$1,200 for climbing equipment and in cover of darkness Fivas descended into the mine and recovered the broken body of his nephew early Friday.

At a news conference Saturday, an emotional Fivas, surrounded by his brothers and fellow Salt Lake City firefighters, told of the daring retrieval the 10 relatives and friends made after county rescuers declared it was too dangerous a task.

The teen had fallen off a ledge into the shaft last Saturday while he and several others were spelunking in the Honoreme Mine, a silver mine about 32 miles southwest of Salt Lake City and abandoned in 1928.

The sheriff's searcher, Curtis Allen, had rappelled 350 feet into the mine without spotting Etherington's body and decided it would be folly to continue.

Fivas and Etherington both acknowledged the recovery was dangerous, and they don't fault Tooele County officials for calling it off late Monday.

"I believe they did everything they could without risking another death," Dan Etherington said.

The family and friends involved in the effort, made their first trip to the mine Wednesday night and found they needed additional rope and equipment. They also

had to dig their way back in to the horizontal passage that led to the vertical shaft because the opening had been bulldozed closed after the search was called off.

Secured with two ropes that were anchored to a winch and water tank, Fivas descended into the dark shaft with an intercom and backpack full of food and batteries for his lighted miner's helmet.

He maneuvered through large timbers and sections of metal pipe wedged crossways at intervals in the 20-foot-diameter shaft. His shoulders and arms were bruised as baseball-sized rocks dislodged by the ropes pelted him while he slowly made his way down the shaft.

After more than two hours, Fivas reached a large mass of timbers and water mains about 420 feet down. He made his way through the maze of debris and found Jeremiah — his favorite nephew — suspended face down in the fallen mine supports.

"I sat there and said a few words," Fivas said. "I said, 'Jeremiah, wherever you are, we tried.'"

Fivas then folded the broken and battered body at the waist and bound it together with rope.

Exhausted by the effort, the 6-foot-2, 250-pound Fivas napped for an hour and a half in a horizontal shaft of the mine.

It took nine hours to hoist Fivas and the body of Jeremiah to anxious family and friends waiting at the top of the shaft located about three-quarters of a horizontal mile into the side of a mountain.

"I was petrified," Dan Etherington said Friday. "The slightest mistake we made would have sent a shower of rocks down there. It was dangerous. Keith could have been killed at any minute."

Jeremiah's body was taken to the state medical examiner. He will be buried in Lakepoint on Wednesday — next to a 5-year-old brother who was hit by a truck and killed 10 years ago.

Fivas, whose father, brother and uncle are also firefighters, said he considered going down during the county's attempt and never had second thoughts about carrying out the plan.

'I was having dreams. It was driving me crazy.'

— Keith Fivas,
brother-in-law of
Jeremiah Etherington,
who died when he fell
into an old mine

1996 Jan body of Jerimiah Etherington located

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Associated Press photo
"You could never imagine what it was like," said Daniel Etherington, the boy's father.

Man risks life to retrieve boy's body from mine

An Associated Press Report

SALT LAKE CITY — An uncle rappelled hundreds of feet down an abandoned mine shaft, retrieving the body of his 18-year-old nephew on Friday in a mission officials had given up as too dangerous.

Baseball-sized rocks rattled down on Keith Fivas as he pried debris off his sister's son, Jeremiah Etherington, and brought the body to the surface after 11½ torturous hours.

"It sounded like the world was coming to an end down there," the youth's father, Daniel Etherington, said of the sounds from the shaft as he

and other relatives handled the ropes above.

"You could never imagine what it was like." The body was turned over to the state medical examiner. Fivas went home and was sleeping Friday, said his wife, Laurie.

Fivas — who had never done much, if any, rappelling before, his family said — donned a miner's lighted hardhat and an intercom Thursday evening, then maneuvered 420 feet down the mine shaft to the debris where the teenager's body lay.

The young man had fallen off a ledge into the shaft last Saturday while he and several friends were spelunking in the Honorene Mine,

a silver mine opened in the 1860s and abandoned in 1928.

The mine, 32 miles southwest of Salt Lake City, is one of dozens of abandoned lead, silver and zinc mines that dot the area. It had been sealed, but the grate over the opening had been moved some time ago. Family members had to dig their way back in because the opening had been bulldozed closed after the search was called off three days earlier.

"I was petrified," Daniel Etherington said. "The slightest mistake we made would have sent a shower of rocks down there. It was dangerous. Keith could have been killed at any minute."



Jeremiah Etherington is shown in a file photograph.

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