

Ariz. mine shafts a known danger

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CHLORIDE, Ariz. — This is a place where all-terrain vehicles can be as common as cars and where desert hillsides are playgrounds, so residents were stunned but not surprised when two young girls drove an ATV into a mine shaft.

Residents estimate there are dozens of abandoned mines in the hills surrounding this rural northwestern Arizona community, where 13-year-old Rikki Howard was killed and her 10-year-old sister was seriously injured, and they say that anyone who is going riding among them has to respect the terrain.

"They really are dangerous hills out there," said Bill Keller, who has lived in Chloride for 10 years and goes ATV riding in the hills regularly. "I don't go anywhere off a trail here. I am totally amazed that it hasn't happened before."

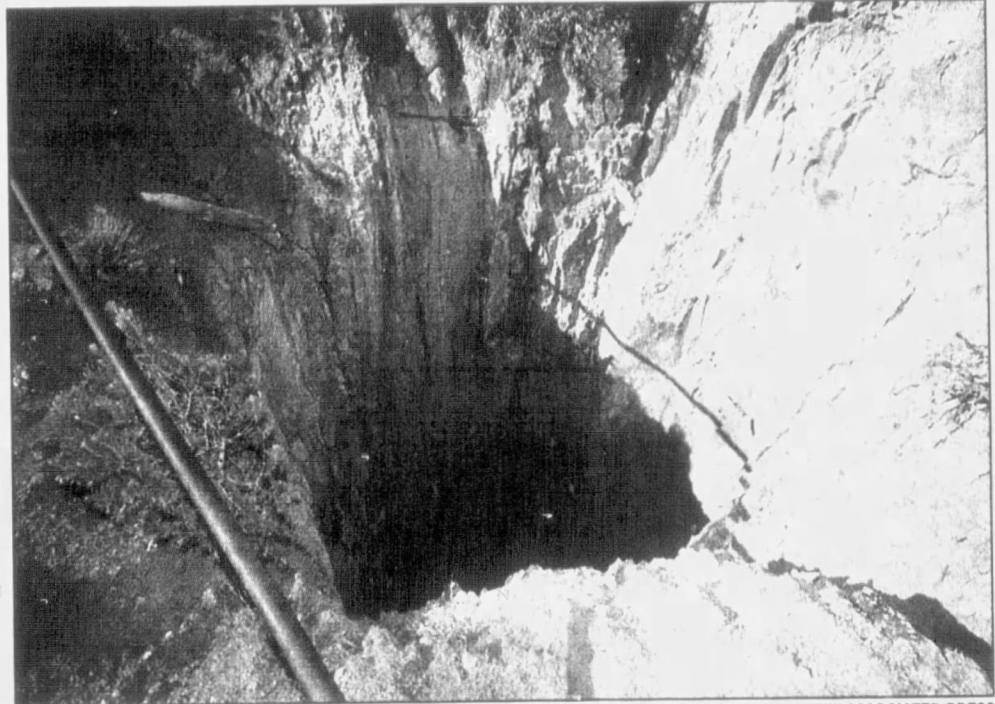
Rikki and sister Casie Hicks were riding an ATV early Saturday evening when their vehicle plunged into the 125-foot-deep shaft. Their father, who had been riding ahead of them, didn't see them fall but called authorities when he noticed they were missing.

Rikki was found dead in the shaft the next morning. Casie was rescued and taken to University Medical Center in Las Vegas, where she was upgraded to serious condition Monday.

The family declined to comment through the hospital, as did several relatives who went late Monday afternoon to the mine site from Chloride, where the family lives in a singlewide trailer.

At the mine, the family members erected a cross that said: "In loving memory: Rikki." They placed yellow daisies on the cross and laid purple and orange tulips and a pink teddy bear at its base.

Brush next to the sheer-



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SISTERS RIKKI HOWARD, 13, and Casie Hicks, 10, fell into this 125-foot-deep mine shaft along the remote Cherum Peak Trail in the Cerbat Mountains while riding an ATV early Saturday evening. Rikki was killed, while Casie was hospitalized with serious injuries.

walled mine blocked any view of the shaft from an adjacent dirt road that was more like a trail.

"It's like a serpent's mouth waiting to swallow you up," said Seth Johnson, a neighbor who accompanied several journalists to the site.

Johnson said earlier Monday that riding ATVs in the countryside was a common activity for the family. The hills, visible from the family's home, also are popular with other ATV riders.

Some residents say it's also not uncommon to see children on ATVs.

"These mountains are everyone's backyard," said Russell Agee, who at least once a week goes up to the hills where the accident happened. "The trails are a lot of fun if you're careful."

He said there are some places where there are mine shafts next to the road. "A lot of them you can't tell they're there until you're right on them," said Agee, who was riding through town Monday on a mud-splattered four-wheel ATV.

The mine where the girls fell is next to a dirt road, obscured by brush and had no signs or barriers. It is believed to be inactive.

The ownership of the shaft had not been determined, according to the Arizona State Mine Inspector's office.

Officials say there are an estimated 100,000 abandoned mines in Arizona, not uncommon in a state with a long history of gold and silver prospecting and other kinds of mining activity. Many date back to the late 1800s and early 1900s, and sometimes

it's not possible to trace ownership.

Many were in remote areas, but sprawling development has brought people closer to them. State Mine Inspector Joe Hart said that ATVs and dirt bikes also now provide access to areas that previously were largely unreachable.

"You can go anywhere and everybody's curiosity is raging when they're on those things," Hart said.

Community members have begun collecting money for the family.

"What a shame for children so young," said Bonnie McNeely, the owner of Chloride's only restaurant, Yesterdays. "How quickly tragedy can happen. My sympathy goes out to the family."

2007 Sep fatal ATV crash into mine shaft

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Nov 18, 2024

Residents not surprised by mine tragedy

By AMANDA LEE MYERS
Associated Press

CHLORIDE, Ariz. — This is a place where all-terrain vehicles can be as common as cars and where desert hillsides are playgrounds, so residents were stunned but not surprised when two young girls drove an ATV into a mine shaft.

Residents estimate there are dozens of abandoned mines in the hills surrounding this rural northwestern Arizona community, where 13-year-old Rikki Howard was killed and her 10-year-old sister was seriously injured, and they say that anyone who is going riding among them has to respect the terrain.

"They really are dangerous hills out there," said Bill Keller, who has lived in Chloride for 10 years and goes ATV riding in the hills regularly. "I don't go anywhere off a trail here. I am totally amazed that it hasn't happened before."

Rikki and sister Casie Hicks were riding an ATV early Saturday evening when their vehicle plunged into the 125-foot-deep shaft. Their father, who had been riding ahead of them, didn't see them fall but called authorities when he noticed they were missing.

Rikki was found dead in the shaft the next morning. Casie was rescued and taken to University Medical Center in Las Vegas, where she was upgraded to serious condition Monday.

The family declined to comment through the hospital. A person who was at family's home, a single-wide trailer on a roughly one-acre lot that also holds another mobile home and about six other small trailers and motor homes, also declined to comment. A motorized pink and purple children's car sat in front of the family's home, along with a dirt bike and some pickup trucks.

A neighbor, Seth Johnson, said Monday that riding ATVs in the countryside was a common activity for the family. The hills, visible from the family's home, also are popular with other ATV riders.

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Isaac Brekken / AP

A 13-year-old girl who went missing while riding an all-terrain vehicle in northwestern Arizona was found dead in a mine shaft, while her 10-year-old companion was rescued and in critical condition at University Medical Center, pictured here, in Las Vegas on Sunday.

Community members have begun collecting money for the family.

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taurant, Yesterdays. "How quickly tragedy can happen. My sympathy goes out to the family."

Associated Press Writer Paul Davenport in Phoenix contributed to this report.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON MINE SHAFT SAFETY IN UTAH

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