

Teens rappel into mine shaft, require rescue

By Sarah Tully
The Arizona Daily Star

Two Tucson teen-agers were rescued yesterday evening after spending about five hours in a Tucson Mountains mine shaft that their friend escaped to call for help.

About 30 rescue workers tugged on a rope that trailed down the sides and middle of Beehive Peak to retrieve Scott Brown and Jay Turcott, both 16, who got stuck after rappelling into the shaft.

Paramedic Dane Crouse, who went down the 60- to 80-foot-deep hole to check on the teens' condi-

tions, was pulled up after them. The three-hour rescue took place near West Bilby and South Palomino roads on Tucson's southwest side.

Turcott had rope burns on his hands and a scrape on his elbow. Brown and Larry George, 15, were not injured, Crouse said.

Brown said the group had inappropriate equipment to get out of the dark cave, but George was successful because of his smaller size.

The youths, who were sent home with their parents, were briefly checked by paramedics while sitting on a rock near the mine shaft and

were able to walk down the rocky and cactus-covered mountain. Turcott was treated in an ambulance at the foot of the hill.

"I'm not hurt, just dirty," Brown said. "I'm glad to get out."

The rope-climbing journey started at about 11 a.m. when the three youths went to the 80-foot-deep cave that leads into the shaft to practice rappelling, said Brown, a Palo Verde High School student.

Brown had climbed in the cave before when he visited his sister, who lives in the neighborhood, and noticed a 3-foot opening, Brown said. He said he told his sister where

they were going before leaving her house.

"It was more or less all of our idea. We saw down the shaft and wondered what was down there," said George, also a Palo Verde student.

The teens have rappelled without formal training for about a year. They had never tried a mine shaft before, Brown said.

Turcott tried to rope up out of the shaft twice, but his hands weakened when he got near the entrance, George said. He bumped his elbow on the side of the cavern when

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Brown tightened the rope from the bottom.

The shaft was littered with dead animals and stank, said Joel Pallette, battalion chief of the Drexel Heights Fire Department. It was dry and dusty and "as dark as you can imagine," he said.

"I was really scared bad," George said.

George was sent up to get help. "I'm the smallest one. I'm more maneuverable than the other ones," he said.

Mark Ochoa, who lives at the base of the mountain, said he was working on his truck when he saw George running down the peak, calling for help. Ochoa called 911.

Rescue workers from the Drexel Heights Fire Department, the Tucson Estates Fire Department and

the Pima County Sheriff's Department responded at about 2 p.m. and had the boys out by 5 p.m.

"Since the kids are not critically injured, we're taking our time," Charles Harding, assistant chief of the Drexel Heights Fire Department, said during the rescue.

The teens were lucky, rescue workers said.

"If one gentleman wasn't able to get out, who knows" how long they would have been there, Pallette said.

"It's fortunate they were not injured. It made it easier to get them out," said Tom Price, head of the sheriff's search and rescue unit.

When asked why there were no warnings around the open shaft, Pallette said, "good question." He said there are many similar shafts in the area.

Price said he would notify the state Mine Inspector's Office about the incident.

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