

## Prospector Survives Fall In Mine Shaft

BY BEN WINSLOW

**SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE**  
CEDAR CITY — An Iyias man prospecting in a remote part of southwestern Utah about 60 miles west of here is in critical condition after falling 100 feet down a mine shaft and spending cold Friday night alone in the dark at the bottom.

Todd Meeks, 36, was checking out mines near the Utah-Nevada line Friday afternoon and apparently found one good prospect, according to Iron County Sheriff Ira Schoppmann. Meeks was trying to climb down the shaft when "he slipped and fell about 100 feet," Schoppmann said.

As colder temperatures and snow moved across Utah on Friday, Meeks lay at the bottom of the mine, Schoppmann said. The sheriff described the area where the mine is located as remote and noted there probably was no one else around for miles when Meeks fell.

Officials are not sure exactly what time on Friday the man tumbled down the shaft, but he could have been at the bottom for as long as 24 hours before rescue workers lifted him out.

When Meeks did not show up on Saturday, his wife called a friend, Steven DeLang.

"I decided to go out looking for him. I ran into a fellow in the area where Meeks' wife thought her husband had gone, who said he told Meeks where some mines were. We went up there and found Meeks' pickup truck," DeLang said.

DeLang climbed down the shaft of a mine near the truck and found Meeks at the bottom. He covered his badly injured friend with a coat and then climbed out to call for help.

Iron County search and rescue teams spent Saturday afternoon pulling Meeks out of the shaft, trying not to further injure him.

Meeks climbed in trying to reach a ladder that was about 10 feet down, but he slipped, Schoppmann said. "He had a broken arm, a broken leg and his insides were probably hurt, too. He was in bad shape." But Meeks was alert.

After his rescue, Meeks was taken by helicopter to the University Medical Center in Las Vegas, arriving early in the evening on Saturday.

Abandoned mine shafts sometimes cause problems in Utah. There are nearly 20,000 of them across the state. Less than 2,000 of these abandoned mines have been closed by the Utah Oil, Gas and Mining Division since the mine reclamation program began 18 years ago.

Utah authorities get six to 10 reports of people trapped in mines each year, but the last person to die in one of these shafts was 18-year-old Jeremiah Elbertson who fell 600 feet down the Honoring Mine in Tooele County in January of 1990. A 24-hour-a-day rescue operation by Tooele County Sheriff's Search and Rescue had to be abandoned when crews determined the shaft was too unstable to allow a safe retrieval. Less than a week after the young man fell to his death, his uncle, Salt Lake City firefighter Keith Fyres, went to the mine secretly with other family members and brought the teen's body up.

# 1998 Prospector survives Fall into abandoned mine shaft

Clipped By:



usmra\_rob  
Wed, Jun 30, 2021