

Mine-shaft rescue

Man saved after spending 20 hours underground



Photos by Jamie Humphrey/The New Mexican

Chris Schaum, a rescue technician with the city fire department, helps a 27-year-old Santa Fe man out of an old mine shaft Monday morning. The man was found at the bottom of the mine shaft, about 115 feet down and had been there almost 20 hours before being rescued.

By JEFF TOLLEFSON
The New Mexican

Rescuers hoisted a 27-year-old Santa Fe man out of an old mineshaft on a hill north of town Monday morning, more than 20 hours after he fell while climbing into the shaft.

The man apparently injured his ankle during the fall but otherwise suffered only minor cuts and bruises. He was taken to St. Vincent Hospital for a routine checkup.

Santa Fe Fire Marshal Ted Bolleter said he could not release the man's name.

The man's family looked on throughout the three-hour rescue operation but declined to answer any questions.

The shaft was on a hill overlooking Hyde Park Road in or just above Sierra del Norte subdivision, although officials were not sure who owned the land.

Bolleter said his crew wasn't aware of the mineshaft before Monday morning, but he believes it might have been closed off by the state Bureau of Mines. A 4-foot tall chain-link fence



Ray Gonzales, right, and Devon Carr, both paramedics with the Santa Fe Fire Department, help the man after he was pulled out of the mine shaft.

surrounded the entrance, essentially a 5-foot-wide hole in the ground. The entrance was also guarded by a metal meshing secured into rock around the edge of the shaft.

"Someone was well aware of this mine and took precautions to keep people out of it," Bolleter said. "But

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he (the 27-year-old man) actually cut that metal mesh in an attempt to go somewhere he really shouldn't have been."

Ten yards from the hole, an old cotton-braid rope was tied off to a small shrub. Bolleter said the rope apparently broke after the man climbed into the shaft. Officials weren't sure how far he fell, but he was found at the bottom, about 115 feet down.

The man apparently entered the shaft sometime Sunday. No one knew why the man climbed into the shaft, although Bolleter said he might have been trying to retrieve glasses that had fallen inside.

Bolleter said family members

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somehow discovered his whereabouts and then called for help around 7:45 a.m. Monday.

Once authorities arrived at the site, they sent a helmet, water and a jacket down to the victim.

The rescue operation involved officials with the city and county fire departments as well as the Atalaya and St. John's search-and-rescue teams.

Chris Schaum, a rescue

technician with the city fire department, roped up and entered the mineshaft around 11 a.m. Schaum found carbon monoxide at elevated — but not life-threatening — levels inside the shaft.

Bolleter said fire officials secured the metal meshing and the fence across the pit as well as they could. He said authorities would contact the Bureau of Mines about permanently securing the shaft.

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