

CA Firefighters Make Tricky 15-Hour Rescue in Remote Mine

San Bernardino County firefighters and multiple Urban Search and Rescue teams braved unsafe terrain and high temperatures to save a man trapped in an abandoned mine in Twentynine Palms.

Gabriel Kelvin
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TWENTYNINE PALMS, CA—San Bernardino County Fire Department search teams staged a daring and complex rescue of a man trapped in a remote mine over the weekend, authorities say.

Early Sunday morning, County Fire officials received a call from an unidentified explorer in a rural, unincorporated area of Twentynine Palms who had recently left a mine and reported that a partner was still inside and unable to get out.

According to a statement from the San Bernardino County Fire Department, multiple Urban Search and Rescue teams were deployed to handle the operation.

Rescuers had to drive off-road for 45 minutes to reach the mine and begin the operation. Three heavy rescue vehicles, three engines and a total of 35 staff were deployed to the scene near Gold Crown Road.

To reach the trapped man, rescuers braved significant hazards within the mine, including unsafe terrain, and high temperatures and humidity, officials said in the statement that described the 15-hour effort.

At the scene, members of the rescue team crawled through an entrance on their stomachs for approximately 50 feet. After this, they navigated a large drop by skirting around a 14-inch ledge.

Secured by safety lines, the firefighters then climbed down a separate, 200-foot drop on a wooden ladder. From there, they encountered another small gap with irregular height, which forced them onto their hands, knees and stomachs for another 150 feet.

Rescuers lowered themselves down another sheer drop with ropes before traversing a horizontal tunnel. They found the man at the bottom of an additional 90-foot drop at the end of that tunnel.

The total distance the team traveled in the mine was estimated at over 900 feet, according to the statement.

A team of six rescuers used a system of ropes and pulleys to hoist the man out of the mine. While exhausted, he suffered only minor injuries and declined transport to a hospital. In total, the man spent roughly 20 hours in the mine, from late Saturday night to 8 p.m. Sunday evening.

County Fire officials warned that mine exploration is considered a dangerous activity and abandoned sites pose many hazards.

Since 1999, nearly 150 individuals have died in recreational accidents on abandoned mine sites, according to the Mine Safety and Health Administration.

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