

2 men die in diving accident in Jamestown mine

Erin Tracy, Modesto Bee, 4-12-11

JAMESTOWN -- Emergency personnel Monday recovered the body of the second man to die in an apparent scuba diving accident at the Jamestown mine in Tuolumne County this weekend.

Four men were diving in the 500-foot-deep, open-pit mine off Harvard Mine Road on Saturday afternoon when one of them, Jamie Pollard, 37, of Stockton, panicked for an unknown reason, said Tuolumne County sheriff's Sgt. Jeff Wilson.

Fellow diver Cameron Wheeler, 41, of Stockton helped Pollard to the surface, where he appeared to be in stable condition.

Wheeler left Pollard on the shore and returned to the water to avoid decompression sickness from surfacing too quickly and to search for the other two divers, Wilson said.

While Wheeler was 135 feet under, an unknown man called 911 to report Pollard as a drowning victim, Wilson said.

Emergency personnel responded to the mine about 3:30 p.m., and Pollard was taken to Sonora Regional Medical Center, where he was pronounced dead.

Wheeler could not locate the other divers in the cold water that has created a lake at the abandoned open-pit mine. Upon resurfacing, Wheeler alerted emergency personnel the two still were missing, Wilson said.

But one of the two divers, who was not identified, believed to still be in the lake Sunday eventually was found at the accident scene alive and safe.

The other missing diver, 34-year-old Dale Allen Dedic of Lodi, never surfaced.

Search-and-rescue volunteers were called to search for Dedic, but a team was not able to be assembled until 8 a.m. Sunday, Wilson said.

Rescue workers used a boat and sonar to attempt to locate Dedic, but their efforts were fruitless. Officials said a lack of equipment for working at the depths where the body was believed to be hampered recovery efforts.

Army engineers help

Officials from the Army Corps of Engineers arrived about 5 p.m. Sunday with a remotely operated vehicle equipped with a camera and control arm. With no sign of Dedic at sunset, rescue workers decided to resume the search at 9:30 a.m. Monday, Wilson said.

Several hours into the search Monday, the craft located Dedic's body. It is not known how Dedic or Pollard died, but autopsies are scheduled for both today.

Dedic and Pollard had Facebook pages that listed "scuba diving" as their favorite activities and used profile pictures of themselves taken while diving.

Dedic's page said he attended Tokay High in Lodi and worked for San Joaquin Drywall as a supervisor. His last status update was Feb. 17 when he posted: "Waiting to go diving!!!."

Pollard has no other personal information listed on his Facebook page.

Wilson said locals frequently use the old mine, which is on private property, as a swimming hole and divers have been known to explore the area. The rising water table from all the precipitation has been filling the pit.

Mine dates from 1980s

The Sonora Mining Corp. dug the mine in the 1980s. It used massive shovels and crushers to squeeze traces of gold from a pair of pits.

The company moved an average of 71 tons of earth to reach each of the 700,000 ounces of gold produced from 1987 to 1994.

Modesto resident Vincent Estell and his partners have since purchased the mine and proposed an ambitious plan to convert the land into a tourist attraction that is to include botanical gardens, a youth baseball complex, and lodging.