



Rescue of Chilean Miners In Progress

Nowadays it seems rare to read a news story with a happy ending, between tales of economic disaster across the world and violent outbursts from jihadists, protestors, and criminals. Fortunately, today (October 13) we celebrate the ongoing rescue of the 33 trapped miners in Chile, of which 14 have already been saved and the 15th rescue is underway. At the rate the miners are being brought up, it seems likely they should all be on safe ground by tomorrow.



On August 5, 33 Chilean miners were trapped deep in a San Jose mine after a rock collapse. For 17 days, the world waited with bated breath to learn whether the men were alive. On the 17th day, a note emerged from the mine which read, "All 33 of us are fine in the shelter."

CBS reports that the news was met with euphoria by authorities and relatives who had been waiting outside the mine for confirmation that the miners were indeed alive. "Authorities and relatives of the miners hugged, climbed a nearby hill, planted 33 flags and sang the national anthem Sunday after a probe sent some 2,257 feet deep into the mine came back with the note."

Over the 69 days that followed the rock collapse, *The Star* reports, "From the depths of a century-old gold and copper mine, the men have since celebrated birthdays, welcomed new babies into their lives, proposed to their lovers."

The miners were initially told that they would be trapped in the mine until Christmas as rescuers estimated the amount of time it would take to carve a tunnel big enough for the men to get out.

At the beginning of October, however, Chile's President Sebastian Pinera indicated in a radio address that the miners could be out as early as mid-October. Rescue workers were hesitant to confirm that timetable. One of the rescue workers remarked:

"I understand that everyone's wish, myself included, is to get them out as soon as possible. However, we cannot afford to run any risks."

The rescue effort is difficult as it involves penetration of 700,000 tons of rock. However, the miners were afforded a great deal of fortune, as they found themselves with plenty of space, air, the availability of underground water, and were provided laundry service and three meals a day, sometimes with ice-cream for dessert, and fresh water, all of which were lowered through a tiny shaft. Likewise, they were able to watch television on a small projector down in the shaft.

As the rescuers began to coordinate rescue efforts, they indicated that their greatest concern was possible panic attacks during the ascent out of the mine. However, they did not wish to sedate the miners, needing them to be alert in the event of an emergency.



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on October 13, 2010

Rescue coordinator Andre Sougarett articulated concerns that a “rock could fall,” jamming the capsule as it ascended the shaft.

However, Mining Minister Laurence Golborne responded, “There is no need to try to start guessing what could go wrong. We have done that job. We have hundreds of different contingencies.”

With that, after two harrowing months under the surface of Chile’s Atacama Desert, the miners began to ascend through the rescue hole, and Chile’s President’s estimate came true. The first miner to surface was Florencio Avalos, who hugged his sobbing 7-year-old son amidst loud cheers from the crowd.

According to Fox News, Chile and the world exploded in celebration as the miners’ rescue began:

In the capital, Santiago, a cacophony of car horns sounded. In the nearby regional capital of Copiapo, from which 24 of the miners hail, the mayor canceled school so parents and children could “watch the rescues in the warmth of the home.”

All-news channels from North America to Europe and the Middle East carried live coverage. Pope Benedict XVI said in Spanish that he “continues with hope to entrust to God’s goodness” the fate of the men. Iran’s state English-language Press TV followed events live until President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad touched down in Lebanon on his first state visit there.

A camera located in the mine allows the world to see images of each miner climbing into the capsule and disappearing upward.

The ninth miner to be rescued, Mario Gomez, is 63 years old and suffers with silicosis, a lung disease common to miners. Upon reaching the surface and exiting the capsule, he immediately dropped to his knees in prayer, even before embracing his wife.

By midmorning of the same day, 12 of the men were pulled from the mine in roughly 10 hours. Fox News explains, “As it traveled down and up the 2,041-foot escape shaft, the capsule was not rotating as much as officials expected, allowing for faster trips. The rescues came as quickly as 39 minutes apart.”

The rescue capsule, named Phoenix for the mythical bird that rises from the ashes, was painted white, blue, and red after the Chilean flag. Rescuers have paused only to lubricate the wheels that give the capsule a smooth ride up and down the shaft.

The miners have thus far emerged from the shaft in surprisingly good health, reports Health Minister Jaime Manalich, without need of medication, not even the diabetic miner.

NASA donated a high-calorie liquid to be fed to the miners prior to the ascent to prevent nausea that may arise from the rotation of the capsule as it moves upward. The miners’ vital signs are monitored as they make their way up the shaft.

Two floors of a local hospital in Copiapo are prepared where the miners will be evaluated. However, experts predict that they will require more than physical treatment.

President Pinera assures the world that the miners will receive care for at least six months.

Pinera initially did not intend the rescue to be broadcast, and hoped to restrict images of the rescue by placing a huge Chilean flag over the hole to obscure the view. However, he later decided to remove the flag, explaining, “This rescue operation has been so marvelous, so clean, so emotional that there was no reason not to allow the eyes of the world — which have been watching this operation so closely — to see it.”



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After much debate, the last miner slated to be rescued is shift foreman Luis Urzua.

Sister of miner Dario Segovia, Janette Marin, explained that the order of rescue did not matter.

“This won’t be a success unless they all get out,” she said.

According to Fox News, the rescue will not be the end of this ordeal for the miners. In some cases, both wives and lovers claimed the same man, leaving them to face the consequences after the rescue.

Likewise, the miners have already been invited to presidential palaces, all-expense-paid vacations, and countless television shows. There have even been talks of book and movie deals.

One miner, Mario Sepulveda, has been told that he has an opportunity to become a TV personality, after his engaging performances in the mine were captured on video. To this, he remarked, “The only thing I’ll ask of you is that you don’t treat me as an artist or a journalist, but as a miner. I was born a miner and I’ll die a miner.”

President Barack Obama has praised the rescuers, which include a team from Center Rock Inc. in Berlin, Pennsylvania, which built the hammers that pounded the rescue hole.

Photo: Capsule with rescued miner above mine: AP Images



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