

everything, no matter what it looked like, just because it had a different name on it. Something we both had in common. I remember one time he told me that he would much rather look at a few really nice lamps instead of a room full of everything.

Kenneth informs me that he also has an interest in mining artifacts and will continue on with his fathers collection.

TB

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

The following letter was received recently regarding underground collecting.

Dear Editor:

I am writing in regard to some photographs which have appeared in the latest issues of MAC. The photographs show men entering mines "to find you the best mining artifacts available." While on the surface this may appear to be an innocent enough advertisement, I think it would be wise if the readers of MAC would all stop for a moment and reflect on the subtle messages that are being conveyed.

Some of the thoughts that come to mind when I view these pictures are those of trespass and theft. While these are powerful images, they are pale in the light of the message that abandoned mine exploration in search of adventure and valuable artifacts is an acceptable behavior and something to be actively pursued. As a geologist partly vested with the responsibility of maintaining security around open holes and non-operating mines, I feel that this message could aggravate the security problems faced by the company I work for and other mine owners. More important, it could greatly endanger the lives of the explorers, perhaps resulting in injury or even death. Non-operating mines represent an extremely hazardous environment to all who enter, even those with the expertise and proper equipment for exploration. Those with no such equipment or credentials are even more vulnerable. This is not a subject to be taken lightly.

It is not my intent to criticize any single person or organization, but rather to ask each reader of MAC to reflect upon the kind of image that we wish to portray. Let us not be so swept up in our enthusiasm for this most intriguing hobby that we inadvertently encourage someone to do something that could endanger their life. I would appreciate it if all MAC readers would

take these thoughts to heart.

William T. Worthington
Silver City, New Mexico

Editor's Response:

Having been involved in the related field of mineral collecting for most of my life, I am very familiar with the unfortunate antipathy that many mine owners have for collectors. I agree that all collectors should avoid illegal trespass and the removal of items of potential use or value to mine owners. However many abandoned mines have long since reverted to state ownership, and in any case most of what collectors remove is just ancient trash and minerals worth only a few cents in ore value...hardly grounds for a serious accusation of stealing.

Proper collecting for antique mining artifacts involves advance research to assure that a site has not been mined at all since at least the 1930's and preferably since before the 1920's. More recent mining has generally swept away all earlier artifacts. Any mine that has stood abandoned continuously for 60-70 years or more cannot possibly contain any equipment still of use to a modern mining company.

As to the physical dangers involved, that is something each person must decide for himself. Personally I don't go in for things like hang-gliding, white-water canoeing, mountain climbing and so on. The danger of those hobbies outweighs the fun for me; but I don't criticize people who elect to accept those risks for the sake of the satisfactions obtained in those or other hazardous pursuits, especially in the case of activities which can make a scientific or historical contribution to knowledge.

That said, I will add my own warning that inexperienced, unprepared collectors have no business going into abandoned mines by themselves. The danger of accidental death or injury escalates far beyond reasonable levels in such cases. The *only* way to gain experience at minimum risk is to go with highly experienced companions, and learn from them as much as possible.

Following is a guest editorial on the dangers involved, which was published originally for mineral collectors (*Mineralogical Record*, vol. 20, no. 3; *Rock & Gem*, September 1988). It holds just as much wisdom for the would-be underground collector of mining artifacts.

WEW