

Chinese Miners Beat the Odds

More than 2,000 Chinese miners have died in work-related incidents this year to date, but a remarkable story of survival has come out of that country.

Brothers Meng Xianchen and Meng Xianyou dug their way out of an illegal coal mine five days after they became trapped in a tunnel collapse. They survived by drinking urine and eating coal.

Rescuers gave up trying to reach the miners on the second day after the collapse because they thought there was no way anyone could have survived and conditions were judged too risky for rescuers to continue. No longer hearing the sound of shovels, the brothers broke down in despair but then began joking about who their wives might marry.

Using a pick and their bare hands, they worked their way through about 78 feet (20 meters) of rock and coal. They dug three horizontal tunnels before getting lucky with a vertical tunnel on their fourth try.

One brother said they became so hungry that they ate coal and actually enjoyed the taste. The same could not be said of what they were forced to drink to survive.

The two experienced some kidney damage from lack of water. They say their mining days are over. The operator of the illegal mine reportedly fled after the collapse.