Mines are not closed — they’re abandoned

Journalist Mark Olade is a young American journalist who first cut his teeth at The Star as an intern from the Medill School of Journalism at Chicago’s Northwestern University. This year, he returned to South Africa, sponsored by the Fund for Investigative Journalism and hosted by Wits University’s Centre for Sustainability in Mining and Industry, to investigate the phenomenon of illegal miners, or zama zamas, for The Star. This is what he found.

BURLINGTON COUNTY: An old mine shaft in Carletonville. The writer says that there are intractable legal problems in closing a mine — one of the main ones being the expense of rehabilitating the area.

ON THE LOOKOUT: Security personnel on a routine check. Illegial mining has escalated in the area as miners who used to work for Byvooruitzicht Gold Mine are unemployed.

UNDERGROUND WATCH: Security personnel investigate a tunnel in the disused Byvooruitzicht Gold Mine. Zama zamas operate in these hard-to-reach tunnels and conduits. It is understated, but a significant number of miners are killed each year for their sins.

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