

15th January 1984

Rachel Wood Mine (Sandbeds Dig)

We set out for Caldbeck in high winds and blizzards knowing full well that we would not get there. The road was blocked at Mungrisdale and there was a Land Rover stuck in the drift so we decided to hold a council of war. Helped push the Land Rover through the drift then watched another one get stuck. This one decided all was hopeless and, with our help, reversed out and admitted defeat.

After a lengthy discussion we decided to visit Rachel Wood Mine, above the shores of Bassenthwaite Lake, as this was within a stone throw of the A66 and should be quite accessible. We arrived there about 12 noon.

Rachel Wood Mine, a lead working of the 19th century, proved to be interesting though not very extensive. We were underground for about two hours.

For the first twenty or thirty feet the entrance tunnel is lined with concrete to where it encounters solid rock. The passage here is mined through Skiddaw slate and is of generous proportions. The main vein is the N/S Rachel Wood Vein and has been stoped away both above and below the main level. Overhand stoping was utilized here for there are colossal piles of deads, stacked on timbers, through which masonry-lined chutes penetrate. Several members attempted to climb up these but to no avail, they were either too unsafe or boarded off at the top.

We discovered a ladderway going up into the stopes at the point where the main level crosses the vein. Martin Maher ascended this (somewhat cautiously) taking with him a rope on which to abseil back down. Unfortunately this ladderway was sealed off at the top.

McFadzean scaled a very unstable bolder-slope and succeeded in getting within twenty feet of the next level up (which does not run to grass). P. Fleming joined him up there and commented that it would be a good ideal place for an alloy ladder as a maypole. The stope here is very unstable!

The stopes beneath the adit level were, of course, flooded there being only one way into the mine. The winding shaft, which served the lower workings, was quite an impressive affair, the sheave-wheel frame and the landing gear for the kibble being still in situ. We were able to gaze down through the crystal clear water for many fathoms. The shaft had been divided into two compartments, one for winding and the other for a ladderway. Small engine beds beyond the shaft top denoted the site of the winch; and also here had been situated a tiny fitting shop for there was a series of wooden shelves on the tunnel wall. I think the winch was powered by an air motor for there are compressed-air pipes in evidence in several place, though alternatively it could have been worked by an electric motor. The passage is rather constricted and there is not enough room for any other type of winding engine.

What the pumping arrangements were is anybody's guess.

Alen McFadzean