

Sunday 19th February 1984
Borrowdale Wad Mines Seathwaite

I had a feeling it was going to be one of those days when my chauffeur arrived with the sherpa van 10 minutes late, as the clutch on the van was failing. Less than a mile along the road the fan belt snapped necessitating a quick pit stop at my local garage to fit a new belt. Arriving 10 minutes late at Seathwaite, we found 12 other CAT members, making a total of 14. After Plodding up Newhouse Gill, entered mine at Gortons Stage at 12pm. Approximately 1 ½ hours were spent exploring the upper reaches of this maze, to give time for a small party from Brathay Hall Centre to clear the first pitch. First pitch approximately 40' long, followed 35' pitch, to an awkward landing above a shaft, with a 12' pitch below to Fareys stage, then a walk along the level to the top of the Grand pipe. As this was the first time some of the members present had abseiled, and the pitches up to now had been fairly short, an opportunity was given to those who didn't have the confidence to tackle a 70'+ pitch, to go out to day, to avoid "bottling out" on a long pitch. No one accepted the offer, so the full party continued with the descent down the 70' pitch to Old Man's Stage, after the tail end of the party had a longish wait in the level at Farley's Stage. Needless to say the rope jammed when trying to pull it down after the last member, and had to be freed off by the hero with the thinning pate, (Mike Mitchell) by prussicking up. Down rubble slope to head of next pitch (45' long). At this point Chris Jones and Mike Maher strode to the fore, and descended to start rigging the next pitch, to try to avoid a long jam of bodies at the head of pitches. On descending, at the tail end of the party, I found 10 bodies jammed in a sub level thigh deep in water, waiting for a chance to tackle the last pitch, which consisted of 2 parts, first 90ft, to where it was necessary to change over the rope, and where Mike Maher cowered, trying to avoid the hail of stones showered on him by heavy – footed members, then 60ft down a wet pitch to land on a cone of rubbish in Gilberts Level, where waited Chris Jones the elder.

Also trying to avoid the shower of missiles descending onto him, whilst at the same time, enjoying the discomfort of members as they discovered the flow of water cascading down onto them!

Due to the slow speed of some members in descending this pitch, over its total length of 150' (some taking in the region of 15-20 mins) some of the members at the tail end of the party spent 2 hours in the sub level, with teeth chattering (Remember it was mid-February). The party finally exited the mine at 9pm on a clear frost bound night, 9 hours after entering. After refreshments in Keswick, I arrived home at 11:15pm to find the village policeman stood on my doorstep, about to call out the Mountain Rescue to search for me, as my wife and children were away from home, and an over anxious neighbour was concerned that I had left the rather mournful looking family dog sitting in the living room window for so long – I did say it was one of those days.

Dave Blundell 16.10.84
Meet report prepared from notes