

27th September 1986
Cumbrians to Tyneside

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Don Jones
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Mike Mitchell
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Peter Holmes

Saturday morning saw 4 CAT members cruising around Low Fell looking for a Porcupine to guide them to a meet leader. Concern showed on their faces when he appeared carrying a rucksack, after explaining that it contained only books and maps the worry that Captain McF had dropped them in, receded.

Thus off to Throckley with a short detour past NCB regional H.Q. and mining machinery manufacturers EIMCO and HUWOODS. Following the south side of the Tyne though Blaydon turning north at the Newburn turning to pay homage at the site of the "Blaydon Races" which now has Stella North power station sitting on the hallowed ground. Then up to Throckley where Mike and Barbara Mitchell were waiting.

It was explained that Throckley was on the edge of the coal field, bounded by a line of colliery sites on an approximate SW-NE line, also that the coal measures dipped toward the sea in the East. Throckley had had two pits, the meeting place being beside the old "Mariah" pit. The brickwork over the road being a backyard since the times of the colliery though now much modernized, (originally the clay that underplayed the coal was used in brickmaking).

The party then set off down to the riverside through Newburn village to the Lemmington Glass Cone, a short explanation of the glass industry was given and some comment about the New Tyne Iron Works that shared the site. Then across the road to Kitty's Drift (an underground wagonway from Kenton colliery) some discussion about the effects of way-leaves then followed.

Moving on the party went along the Scotswood road past Vickers Tank Factory and Michell Bearings, all that is now left of the once mighty Armstrong works on Tyneside. Some comment was made on the Montague Pit disaster (caused by the robbing of the Royalty boundary in the adjacent flooded workings) and a recently exposed drift entrance. The large number of pubs that used to be on Scotswood Rd a maximum of 46 in about 2 miles and their names being indicative of the local industry e.g. The Blast Furnace. Crooked Billet, Hydraulic Crane, The Ordinance, The Shipwright e.t.c. Peter Holmes was picked up at the Redheugh Bridge which the group crossed to the South Side and parked at the end of the old Redheugh Bridge.

The associated Lead Factory on the north bank was pointed out and explained that lead manufacture white and red pigments, sheet and shot had been manufactured on the site for more that 200 years. Some pictures of the now demolished shot tower and shot pouring were shown. The group walked down to and along the riverside, noting

the bridges, remains of the city wall, site of Stephenson railway works and a very early power station site. Then as if to cue a small grab dredger hooted for the swing bridge to open (uncommon these days) and it duly opened for us to see. Progressing to the swing bridge the chronology and a bit of the history of the bridges was related. Various points of interest about the cities frontage onto the river were explained including the effect of the old arch bridges on river transport (keels) and the growth of a soap industry from candle production. Retracing our steps we returned to the car the Dunston coaling staiths (last remaining on the Tyne and probably to be preserved) were pointed out, we then set off for Friars Goose via the Windmill Hills.

At Friars Goose the remains of the Newcomen engine house was inspected and its operation long after the immediately local colliers had closed was explained. The site is also the remains of a large chemical works (largely for soda production by the Leblanc process) and the 'tank heap' (waste from process) clambered over. A little of the history was related and its environmental aspects also with parallels to today discussed.

Then to Heworth Church yard to see the memorial to the victims of Felling colliery disaster in 1812 where 92 men and boys died in an explosion. Some of the history was related e.g. Rev Hodgsons breaking of the 'gentleman's agreement between, the employers, magistrates and the press not to publicise details of mining accidents. The young age of some of the victims, 11 less than 10 years of age of 21 in the range 11-15 commented on by member of the group.

By this time the effects of early breakfast and long passing of midday began to take on an importance therefore the trip to South Shields was speeded up. Short detours were made to look at Walker Naval Yard (remains of), Jarrow Slake, Bede Priory, and the new coaling terminal, Tyne Dock and the river mouth, piers and Tynemouth. A brief look at Westoe colliery (the last that can even loosely claimed to be on Tyneside), then onto Trow Point for re-fuelling, entertained by some surfers.

Off then down the coast past the now being reclaimed site of Whitburn Colliery a detour to have a look at the refurbished Fulwell windmill now re-tendered and secured, but no sails on our visit, on to Wearmouth to look at a once important coaling dock and see an inshore gas drilling rig. Thence to Monkwearmouth colliery (Pemberton Main) where it was explained that this was the first colliery in the concealed coal field, there being much doubt at the time of sinking that coal existed there. Sinking was through the very wet magnesian limestone using new cast iron tubing to resist the ingress of water. Work started in 1826 took 8 years to reach coal at 1578ft (Maudin seam) then in 1835 the rich Hutton seam was won at 1722ft, this was claimed as the deepest mine in the world at that time. Once proved many others followed same like this are still in production but working 5 miles out to sea.

It was then decided it would be nice to visit Ryhope pumping station (public water supply used to be from the Mag Limestone) to see the rather fine preserved beam engines (unfortunately this was not on the leaders tried and tested route). Off the cars went via the A19 (now once on the A19 going south, one has to go rather a long way before going north again) for a trip past Murton, Easington, Seaham and Vane Tempest prts, eventually to Ryhope. Disaster Ryhope closed? Not according to the notice, but the doors were securely locked and perhaps apart from some small curtain

movements in the adjacent house no one was to be raised, Sunderland hospitality for you! Then setting off for Penshaw and Washington – perhaps the less said about that the better a slight detour, no time to stop at Penshaw Monument or discuss the local colliery (shame) but pressing on to the ‘F’ pit museum. This was fortunately still open with a very friendly helpful bloke in charge, showed us the winder operation, told us the history, nothing a trouble even after his finishing time. Quick trip then up to Springwell to have a look at some of the preserved wagonway of the Bowes railway, by then it was getting a little grey and cold, time for departures.