

25th January 1987
Coniston Copper Mines

CONISTON MINES EXPLORATION MEET 25.1.87

Meet Leader P. Fleming Grade Exp-S

This meet proved to be one of the most successful exploratory meets in Coniston Mines for some years and yielded two major discoveries. The work and investigations were based on the Belman Hole Vein workings first entered on Boxing Day 26th December, 1986 (see appropriate meet report). Ten members attended and eight of these eventually met up in the cross cut where the remains of a dog were noticed. Two routes were descended to reach this point, one being via the surface stope and false floors, which was the original way and the other was via a newly discovered connection from a side passage in Arête Chamber. The two other members spent much time in Arête Chamber carrying out safety work and re-bolting etc. A lot of equipment plus timber and scaffolding was taken up to Levers Water by Landrover and then laboriously manhandled down into the workings. This took quite some time. Meanwhile the first members down set to work on the dig at the bottom of the steep rubble slope at the North East end of the cross cut. This work had been started two weeks previously when it was realised that this blockage and the collapse on Top Level were one and the same. So here at last we had found the possible key to finding a way into the extensive Top Level workings that had eluded us for so long.

We had already fitted many cross stemples to hold the slope and removed a considerable amount of rock from the bottom on our previous visit. This work was continued with great enthusiasm - so much so that those at the forefront would not surrender their position to the rest, who did the labouring in a bucket chain and provided a fetch and carry, stemple sawing service.

Whilst this was going on, those who were apparently surplus to requirements erected a "maypole" in a 30 foot shaft at the end of a short tunnel immediately above the dig site. Water trickled down this shaft which was lined with colourful copper deposits. The tunnel at the top was partially blocked with an upturned wheelbarrow and debris, which held back 18" of water. Above this point an old ladder way led vertically up to other workings. The tunnel was followed for about 50 yards in a north westerly direction to a WOODEN BARRICADE completely sealing off further progress. We believe we have found WOODENDS LEVEL, which formerly came to surface in the bed of Levers Water before the level was raised (see the Mine Explorer No,2 Page 19). We treated the old oaken barrier with great respect and only took photographs of it.

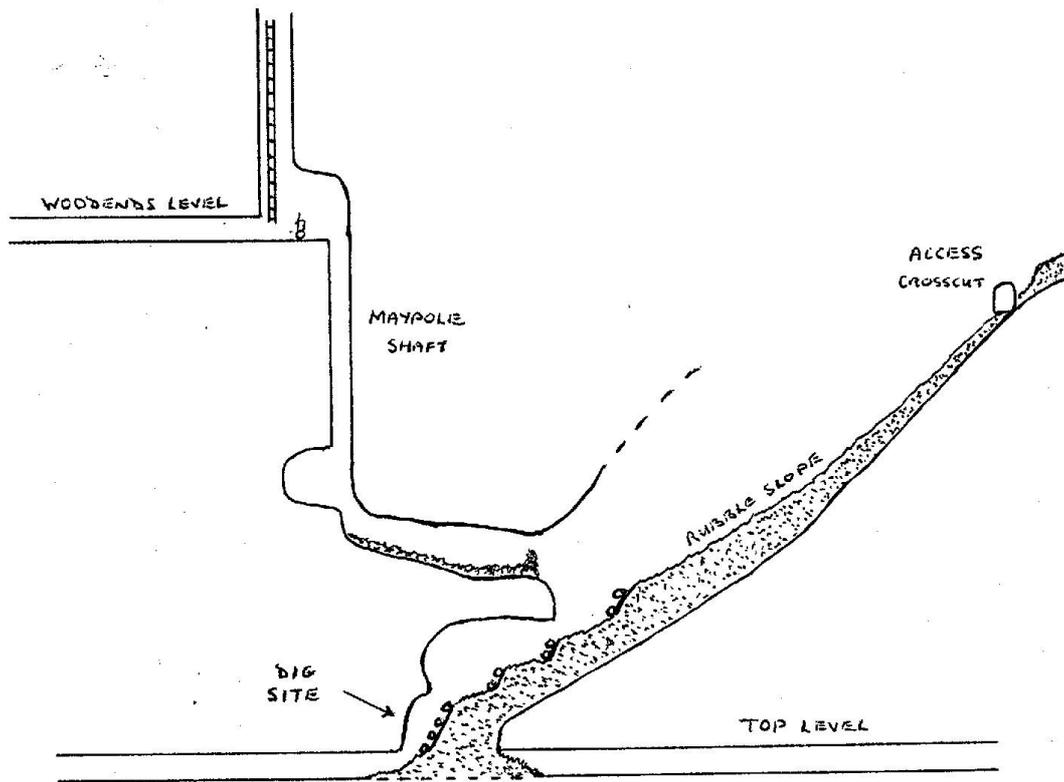
On returning to the shaft the maypole was lifted up and put in position alongside the ladder way, but not ascended. Everyone then gathered together in the closing stages of the dig - the supply of timber having run out by this time, but a break through into the tunnel below was imminent.

It had turned 7.00 p.m. when the 'great moment' arrived. You could sense the excitement.

Those that were left, seven in all, scrambled down into TOP LEVEL EXTENSION and set off along the tunnel heading north west. At about 35 yards a junction was reached, the right hand branch being backfilled and the left hand branch running into a collapse from a chamber on the left, which was made up of decomposed rock and most unstable. At first it appeared to require another major dig in order to get through. The first members to reach this point were, of course those who had had the prime position on the dig that day. They set back out of the mine; rather prematurely as it turned out, as the bucket chain labourers now had access to the second dig and cleared it in less than 8 minutes! Anne Danson was the first through followed by myself, then Ian Matheson and Alisdair Lings. We found ourselves in a long cross cut heading south west following miners' clog marks of long ago.

After eighty yards we reached a large stope with an ore wagon stood on rails partially buried in rubble. After a hurried examination of the immediate area with tantalising views into unexplored regions, time was running out and so we set off back towards the 8 minute dig. At this point we witnessed an astonishing incident when one of the two who had monopolised the first dig, returning to see where we were, lost control and screamed abuse at us at the top of his voice, calling us (who consider ourselves his friends and colleagues) names which indicated he believed our mothers to have behaved improperly, and accusing us of being idle WA---RS. We could not believe our ears, and were left quite speechless. This unjustified outburst may have been the overreaction of a thwarted "glory seeker"!! on having lost the initiative in the final breakthrough, or if not we would be glad to know the cause. Whatever the reason his credibility and standing with those present at the time is bound to have suffered some damage. It was thought an apology would probably be forthcoming when he had cooled down and reflected, but this was not to be. He was later seen descending from the mine in a much happier frame of mind, singing in a loud and lusty voice, but carrying nothing other than his own gear, whilst our other lady member struggled beside him with both hands full of communal tackle bags. Even when she fell on the ice, luckily doing no injury, he made no effort to share her, or any others burden. Anyway the whole incident is not really compatible with the mature and cooperative team spirit which is to be expected in the demanding type of exploration we undertake.

Whilst we made our way out, the other two went on in to see the new finds and they pushed on beyond the ore wagon stope into the continuation of Top Level, discovering more artifacts and even larger stopes - ensuring a busy time ahead for future exploration. The last members emerged to surface at about 9.30 p.m. and got to the Crown at Coniston just in time for last orders.



Members attending this meet were as follows –

Anne Danson, Peter Fleming, Roy Garner, Alisdair Lings, Ian Matheson, Phil Merrin, Alen McFadzean, Mike Mitchell, Anton Thomas, Sheila Thomas.