

January 25th 1987
Coniston Simons Nick

Breakthrough! Woodends Level plus Top Level Continuation.

Ten members were present:- Peter Fleming, Mike Mitchell, Alistair Lings, Alan McFadzean, Ann Danson, Phil Herrin, Roy Garner, myself, and Anton and Sheila C-P Thomas. Mike had brought a lot of timber and he and Alan had arrived early to drive it up to Levers Water. Alistair also drove a load of gear up to save us a lot of effort. We lowered these materials to the floor of the Nick before entering the mine.

Mike and Ann entered via Arête Chamber, followed by Alistair. Alan barred down the unstable corner beneath the 10 foot drop to make it safe. He soon produced a sizeable hole and I helped to cover it over with original timbers, before rigging the pitch and descending to Dead Dog Passage to fix a rope to enable Mike and Ann to ascend from the stope below Arête Chamber. I then made a rough measurement of the depth of the rubble slope, and found it to be 55 feet to the bottom of the dig. The floor of Top Level at the Four Way Junction had been measured as 67 feet below Dead Dog Passage. Six feet to go?

Alistair investigated the dig at the west end of D D Passage and the others got all the gear to the bottom of the pitch. Whilst Mike and Ann began timbering at the bottom of the dig I carried the maypole into the Blue Shaft and assembled it there. Already the time was 1.35 pm. Pete Fleming and Roy Garner joined me in the shaft. I prussicked up to find a level to the left with a ruined wheelbarrow blocking it and a ladder leading upwards. Beyond this was a cross cut which was knee deep in blue water and which curved to the left after a few yards. Thinking that perhaps just out of sight there might be a ladder way down to Top Level, I moved carefully along it trying not to disturb the silt in the water. Around the bend the level was blocked by a wooden barrier let into the rock. This must be Woodends Level! I took photographs and returned to the top of the pitch. The others had been recalled to the dig, so I put in a bolt to make future ascents safer and easier. I examined the rising ladders. There were three sections each of about fifteen feet, the wood was sound, but the rungs which were made of tubular iron were rotten. A bold man might climb it, but not I. However, it would be possible to haul the maypole up to make it safer. I abseiled down to join the dig.

Alan McFadzean was in the hole, now several feet deep, and rocks were being hauled out by a rope and bucket chain. About this time Anton put in a brief appearance, considering the approach up from Top Level to be safe enough for him. Work proceeded until about six o'clock when enthusiasm began to wane. Fleming, Lings, Merrin and Garner went up to view Woodends Level. They hauled the maypole into position by the ladders, but left the ascent for another time. Alan went for a break, and Mike went down to inspect the bottom of the hole, which was now about twelve feet deep. After removing a few rocks he believed that he could see the roof of the level, so Ann and I continued to haul rocks and stack them until he was certain. Alan returned, but Roy Garner left about this time, and the others came down from Woodends Rise. There were some problems with rocks

running in at the bottom of the dig because we were short of timber, but in the end Mike disappeared into the level, quickly followed by Alan, Ann, myself, and the others.

After about thirty yards the level ran into a vein of soft shaley material, partially collapsed, and a continuation appeared to have been backfilled with this material. To the left a rising chamber in the same kind of ground appeared to lead nowhere, but we speculated that the level must lead on beneath the rotten rock. Mike and Alan, having examined this area departed, whilst Peter, Alistair, Ann and I had a look. Peter pointed out a small gap, low down in the rubble, which he thought might be the roof of the level. I wormed down and was able to kick through the soft material and prove that it was so. With the aid of a bar I was able to enlarge the hole sufficiently for Ann to squeeze through. She reported an ore tub and tram lines ahead, so Peter squeezed down and enlarged the hole from below so that Alistair and I could get through. The level went for about 80 yards to intersect a large stope in which was the tub, partially buried in debris with rails sticking out of it. The stope rose high above, and dropped away on both sides of the debris.

At this point we turned back, but then met Alan and Mike coming the other way, very upset and angry at having missed being first in. Whilst Peter and I hauled gear up the Simons Nick abseil, they climbed down below the ore tub, and were able to follow the level to a forehead some 400 yards further on, reporting several drives leading off both sides of the main level, and a huge stope which they christened Carlisle Cathedral. There is obviously much exploration in prospect and with the exception of about 45 yards at the entrance, the whole of Top Level is now accessible.