

20th December 1987
Coniston Copper Mines

DESCENT OF SOUTH VEIN

Dave Bridge, Angela Wilson, Ian Matheson.

The objective was to descend the stope on South Vein from Middle Level to Deep Level, a drop of some 390 feet. This had not been done as a continuous descent, although Mike Mitchell and Martin Maher have been down to the bottom of Puddingstone Level and Dave and Angela had recently descended the stope from Middle Level as far as the Grey Crag Level horizon.

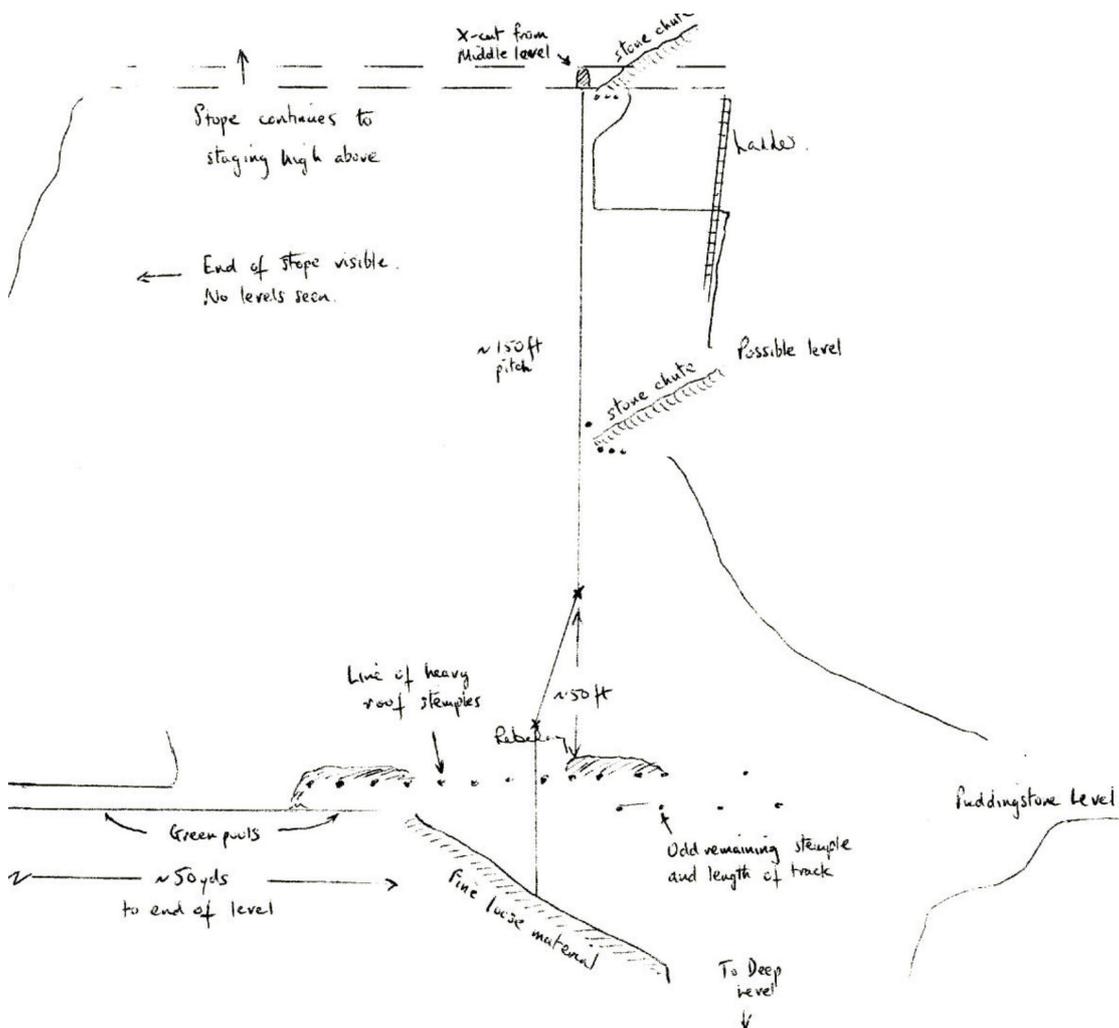
An early start was planned and it was arranged to meet at the BMSC Club Hut at 07:45. However, Ian overslept and didn't arrive until 08:15! We abseiled from Simons Nick down to Middle Level, pulling the ropes down behind us. Dave descended the South Vein stope from its junction with the crosscut on Middle Level, which involved a 150 foot pitch, then a re-belay followed by another 50 feet to land on a short section of false floor with loose ground at both ends. Ian put a bolt in here to safeguard things in case the floor collapsed. It took three bolts to make the hole in the hard rock! Dave set about trying to re-hang the ropes so that they did not touch the unstable ground in order to continue the descent, whilst Angela and Ian explored the continuation in South Vein of the Puddingstone Level, which Dave had entered on the previous visit, and which extends for about 60 yards to a forehead. It lies in the stope for the first few yards, but then continues with a solid rock ceiling. There was a small blue pool, no artifacts were found and tramlines were either not laid or have since been removed and the vein seems to have been abandoned here as being barren.

In order to reach the level just described it was necessary to traverse a gap in the floor by prussicking up a short way, penduling across to a re-belay and abseiling down again. The re-belay bolt was sited in solid chalcopyrite. This gap was descended to a steeply sloping floor of fine loose material forty feet below which had probably been used as an ore chute. The slope was followed to its conclusion some 50 feet further down and directly beneath the hanging death on the end of the floor above. At this point was a short masonry wall, which may perhaps be a section of false floor, below which the stope fell away into the depths. Not liking the situation we returned to the floor above.

Whilst this had been going on Dave had been trying to traverse to the right and re-belay in order to continue down towards Deep Level. It was not easy to arrange a hang avoiding the loose ground and in order to do so it was necessary to pendule several yards. The shape of the stope was such that the rope dragged over the rough surfaces above, so this was both difficult to achieve and involved a risk of damage to the rope. It had been done by Mike Mitchell and others about two years previously, when they made a through trip from Middle Level to Puddingstone Level so on this occasion it was felt that the risks did not justify the end, and the attempt was therefore abandoned.

On the climb out up the sticky ropes the opportunity was taken to examine the stope. The full extent may be seen in both directions and both ends slope downwards to the north. Little of interest can be seen in this direction, but the south end rises to a niche under an overhang. Above this a steep rubble slope rises to where there could just possibly be a level. When this was described later to Peter Fleming he speculated that if so it might lead to the top of the great chain which hangs in the stope near to the junction of Hospital and Grey Crag Levels. Above this rubble slope are some sections of a wooden ladder, which rises close to the headwall and seems to penetrate the rock ceiling which forms the floor of Middle Level. This area merits further exploration.

We descended the last pitch of the Paddy End Through Trip to Grey Crag Level, and went round to Puddingstone Level to view the stope from there. It is possible to descend on a hand line to a place about 20 feet below and forward of the point where the tramline has collapsed and from there we could see the fragment of false floor which we had just left, and view the rubble slope beneath it from end on. Both sides seem to funnel in to the final descent, about 180 feet to Deep Level. We shall return.



DESCENT OF SOUTH VEIN STONE FROM MIDDLE LEVEL, 20.12.87.

