

THE FURNESS FRONT

By A.C-P-Thomas.

Yes, the Furness Offensive is under way and the concept of what began as the Furness Mine Adventurers (now a wholly owned subsidiary of C.A.T. Enterprises Inc.) is now beginning to pay off. It's been a long haul to establish a significant material stock and consistent labour base here and only now do we feel we have anything worthy to report. Here then in chronological order are the events which were contributory to what we have established so far ... a sort of local meet report if you like, of the last 12 months.

Last Summer

Clerks level Survey of Clerks level from portal to blockage. Anticipated projection of Level's course enabled us to find....

Clerks Level 2 Capped shaft onto level beyond blockage allows us to plot another 1200 feet of known ground onto the map. Total known length now approx 5000 ft. Progress terminated by infilled shaft. Decision taken to remove blockage between Clerks 1&2 to allow subsequent work on infilled shaft and progress beyond.

October '87

Clerks Consols Project begun to remove blockage from surface, ie. dig 20 ft shaft onto level and secure collapsed section. A large shaft was needed to account for any survey/plotting errors and by December we were in need of large quantities of timber to secure the shaft walls. To finance this we had a whip round under the auspices of a spoof mining Co prospectus (hence the F.M.A.), the funds from which allowed us to dig deeper yet and in safety.

January '88

Wet weather and 4 ft of standing water in Clerks Bottom forces us off the project temporarily. Prospecting for the next project we begin to muck out Whitriggs horse level. A time to take stock on Clerks, we felt that bursting a gut 4 times a week is to no avail if all it is doing is making up for everyone else who have never even come to see the job. We decide to foreclose operations here, 5 months of digging -100 tons of infill are replaced and all materials stripped out to go to future projects. Completing infill in March, all efforts are now turned to Whitriggs.

Spring Offensive

Whitriggs Whitriggs Horse Level, originally rediscovered by Mr R. Bland by means of a level dug through unsupported overburden, has been

consistently prone to self closure. The most recent collapse was last summer which has denied effective access ever since and it was our intention to re dig the access way and secure it with timber sets to guarantee access at least for the lifespan of the materials used. Whilst work was in progress an even more serious collapse occurred which probably would have proved terminal if we hadn't already have invested the effort and materials we had.

April '88

Henning Valley Cave Taking an evening off from Whitriggs and spurred on by the account of alleged mine spoil in the inner reaches of the cave in Underground in Furness, we went to have a look and see what we could make of it. Using a specialist Furness technique for scaling tight rifts called "widging up with ones helmet off, with one's head plastered in grot and fixed in a right-hand lock, whilst standing on Paul's head" I managed to see what I perceived to be three shot hole marks in the chamber above. Unfortunately the slot or window that this was seen through was so tight as to be totally impossible and we went away musing over various rock removal techniques that may assist our progress.

Lime Blasting

Having an apparent recollection of reading of the use of lime blasting in mines, this being confirmed by someone else's apparent recollection, we thought that one method for getting us up into the workings at the end of H.V. Cave would be this. A means of removing specific amounts of rock in what may be a delicate area, certainly of potential future use and what's more, of archaeological interest as an experiment... to see if it worked or not.

Anyone who's seen the reaction between CaO and water, particularly the expansion rate of the lime during this reaction, may well be expected to share the optimism we had for this technique. We drilled a 150 x 16mm dia hole in a substantial rock and set it on the bench for blasting trials. We then prepared a quantity of burnt lime using several blow torches and in the pre blasting trial we nearly blew my litter bin apart. Things were looking good. We then packed the hole with lime and WOWWweeee,.....nothing happened. We tried it with whole lime, ground lime, injecting water under pressure, drip feed still.... nothing happened. My hunch is that free standing, when the water can get all around the reaction works O.K. but confined, with limited water available from one direction only, the first stage of reaction only occurs, that being where the surface molecules react and gassify to produce micro bubbles which are not sufficiently buoyant to float clear, yet

act as an effective insulant to the rest of the water. So much for apparent recollections.

May 88

Henning Valley Cave Taking another evening off from Whitriggs, we made another visit to the far reaches of H.V. cave. This time we had Andrew Sibbald with us who, whilst doing sterling service as log hauler, was not sufficiently acclimatised to the local red grot to force his way through the final wallow in crimson crawl. So while Andrew shivered in Sludge Chamber, off went Paul and I to work the rift. After the usual spell of rock mechanics with sledge hammer and chisel, Paul had the brill idea of giving the central rift portion a look. Here you understand is a rift, at each end is an open but tight aven, the scene of the previous visits scaling operations and in between is what appears to be an even tighter section which is full of chocked up mine rubble. Anyway Paul gave this rubble a prod and after a gutsy rumble and having watched our exit below being buried by spoil, we were able to see that the rift actually bellied out a little. An hour or so of this, just like emptying a sticky ore hopper really and we were able to access the workings above.

You'd have thought wouldn't you, that after all the discomforts of Crimson Crawl, the diligent lime blasting experiments, etc, etc, that the Gods could have been a little kinder, you know, an underground waterwheel or two, bogeys, a hydraulic engine or something but no.... up the rift we went like moles on heat, mine level , great! 20 ft along turn corner, there on the floor a tin can, artefact, ACE! Along we go, watching the first footprints for 60 years or so unravel behind us and BANG! Slap into a blockage not 70 feet in all from the rift entrance. Still, it's not so bad. This blockage, by the pebbles extant in the infill, is most certainly an infilled shaft. We've gained a foothold in a heretofore unsusded area of the Lindal Moor workings and we fully expect in the years to come to bypass this obstacle and reap the kudos of having rediscovered the next 70 ft or so beyond that.

June '88

Whitriggs At last Whitriggs is secured. There's still some work to be done but access is open and safe. During our operations here and to fulfil our obligations to the landowner (stock proof, childproof etc) we have gated and locked the portal with a combination lock.

This, as one recent self exiled member will tell you, is the responsible and proper thing to do. Now access is open and the number worth knowing, the combination is 2453. This way each member and other responsible persons can have access to the mine without the hassle of going to pick up, or return, the key..... isn't that so Faddy. Please, when using the lock, try not to gunge it up with Haematite sludge ... take your gloves off or wipe your hands first. As the lock is operable from inside and out, maybe it would be best if we locked the kiddies out whilst we're underground there too.

After we've done the finishing touches to the entrance level, we intend to modify the 2nd widge or squeeze at the base of the shaft run in approx 200 M inside. Whilst we do not wish to be the final arbitrators of what happens in Whitriggs and at risk perhaps of being accused of eliminating a "sporting feature", we do feel that the enlargement of this section would have distinct advantages in terms of access and supply to future inside digs and also be of benefit to some of our more senior and/or less supple members. Hope to see some of you there perhaps on the Wednesday evening meet July 20th.

June '88 also
Bolton Heads

Just for a change of scenery, we negotiated permission for a prospecting dig on what appears to be a small mine or large trial at Bolton Heads Nr Little Urswick. Bolton Heads is notable I suppose for its profusion of apparently very T'owd scrin like veins. These scrins or rakes trend roughly NW - SE and we believe that this level, when we find it, will cross cut these veins at a shallow depth. So far we have unearthed some charred timber against an iron ore outcrop (evidence of fire setting perhaps?) and what appears to be a rail dog spike. We'll keep you informed.

Full and comprehensive reports of local activities may be published in the future depending on whether I can convince someone (are you getting this P.T) to take over the duties of local recorder. Thank you C.J. for reporting snippets in past newsletters and thank you everyone who chipped in and helped us set up with the means to purchase materials for these projects. Mention must also be made of non members Kevin Roper and Harry the Shovel, Harry who dug ten to our one for a few nights at the start of the Clerks project, and Kevin who not only helped us considerably at Clerks but has been contributive to Whitriggs also.

We're still hyperactive in Furness and we could still use plenty more consistent and committed members. Anyone who thinks they

may enjoy shovelling some sludge, or maybe just interested in a looksee first, please give either myself, Paul Timewell or John Helme a ring.

La Fin.