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Coniston Deep Level and Taylors Level – Evening Meet

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A small group gathered for a walk in exploration of the more easily accessible levels at Coniston. One tends to pass through these levels quickly on the way to or from some other project and it was thought that as they contain a lot of interest it would be worth while spending some time looking at them more thoughtfully. Indeed there could well be more to discover - Waterfall Shaft, a ladderway down to Deep Level where there is a complete ore tub, was discovered not so long ago when Peter Fleming took the time to consider why the water disappeared through the floor of Grey Crag Level!

For the past year or so LMQT have been engaged on a dig through the blockage between the old North Cross Cut and Deep Level in order to improve access to the stopes beneath the New Engine Shaft. They finally made the connection sometime in August and so it was decided to have a look at this first. The dig is an impressive work, rising through some 20 feet of rubble. Tons of rock have been removed and stacked in the cross cut, and a lot of timber has been used to support and stabilise the ground in and above the dig. To get through one has first to crawl for a few yards and then squeeze beneath a large boulder before climbing up a timbered rise. The boulder has a shattered base and very little other support, and one should squeeze through with great delicacy so as not to disturb anything. One emerges on a rubble slope, and a short climb down leads into Deep Level. It has a timbered roof in this area, which is missing in places, and the stope rises up to the false floor of Taylors Level directly above. This place is familiar to CAT members who first entered via the Red Dell Stopes back in 1983. Since then there have been several visits, including the boating trip and the mass swim along the flooded stope beneath the New Engine Shaft. On the present occasion we walked along the level to the point where the floor is missing and the water can be seen about 20 feet below. An electron ladder was in place, and down below the LMQT group have begun to construct a walkway just above the surface of the water. This will have to be extended about 200 feet to reach the other end, where it may be possible to enter a section of Deep Level which has not yet been explored.

We returned to the Deep Level Portal and decided to examine Taylors Level Adit, part of which lies directly above the area we had just left. When we reached this area we found the ropes in place which the LMQT group use to access the inner end of their dig, 90 feet below. The floor of Taylors Level in this area is false, and we found that some movement had taken place since our last visit. In particular a new crater was forming, caused no doubt by material dropping out of the bottom of the floor. The whole area is very unstable and in a state of collapse, and lying as it does right above the newly accessible part of Deep Level, threatens anyone exploring below. We returned to the surface in a thoughtful frame of mind.

The new connection makes it possible to abseil from the Red Dell stopes or from Taylors Level and walk out through Deep Level. Already quite a few parties have done this.

Whilst the dig must be admired for the skill and perseverance which went into it, there must be concern that the creation of easy access may encourage people who are not conversant with mine exploration to venture into situations where there are dangers about which they have no knowledge or control.