

December 4th 1988

Knockmurton

Knockmurton Revisited Dec 4th 1988

by Dave Bridge

Judging by the weather it couldn't have been a better day for a spot of underground activity as three members of CAT entered the relative calm of Knockmurton forest just to the north of Ennerdale and dropped into No 9 Level (originally High Bottom Level) on the No 9 vein of Knockmurton haematite mine. Unfortunately a combination of circumstances had resulted in a poor turn out for what ended up to be a very worthwhile trip. (It was discovered afterwards that a fourth member in the form of Chris Jones had arrived late and after hopelessly losing his way in the forest had returned home to write his Christmas cards!).

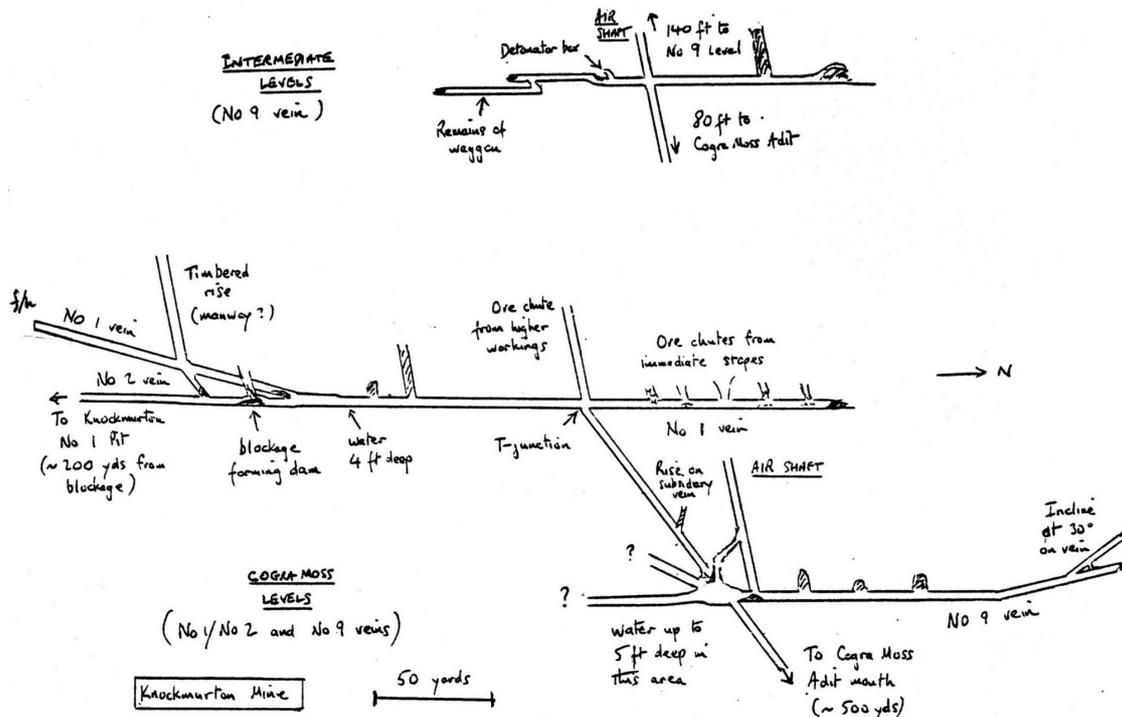
Armed with 140ft of electron ladder and plenty of rope the three members of CAT manoeuvred their way down the narrow air shaft which descends on the vein from a point about 300yds along the level and links with the Cogra Moss Adit some 200ft below. The adit level is almost totally blocked where it emerges 500yds to the NE beside the Cogra Moss reservoir. The ladders were employed to avoid rope abrasion in the twisting upper part of the shaft. For the last 100ft or so the shaft provides a clean descent at a hade of about 30 degrees with internal levels off to the N and S about 80ft from the bottom. A rope was used for this part of the descent belayed to the ladders as the country rock in the mine is too unreliable for bolt belays. A second rope acted as a safety line from the top of the shaft.

The intermediate levels had been explored by two members of the party on earlier visits in 1995 but the detail had not been fully recorded. That to the N leads to a narrow overstope at 45yds which was climbed for 60ft to a blockage. About 20yds beyond the stope the level is blocked by debris from a second stope. The level to the S of the shaft divides at 45yds, the LH branch forming a dog-leg to regain the course of the vein for another 40yds where it is collapsed. In this section are parts of a wagon (minus chassis and wheels). The other branch is collapsed after a few yards. A detonator box and a variety of unused nails have been found here and at one time tramways ran through these levels. A few rotting sleepers are still in place.

The main aim of today's trip however was to explore the lower workings at the Cogra Moss Adit horizon, although being such a small party we had some reservations about making long excursions from the foot of the shaft as this part is in very deep water. Earlier visits had provided an opportunity to inspect this area briefly and it was known that adjacent to the shaft bottom there is an important junction where the Cogra Moss Adit intersects the vein with levels going off in five directions. The adit had been followed to the W for about 120yds as far as a T-junction where drives were discovered along a second N-S vein. As it so happened the NMRS publication by Richard Hewer on the Kelton and Knockmurton Iron Mines couldn't have appeared at a better time and from the mine plans shown we now knew that the T-junction was on the heavily worked

No.1/No.2 vein. Day levels connecting with this working are collapsed and as far as is known the T-junction is the only point of access.

Angela Wilson, being the smallest in the party and not wanting to submerge her caplamp, decided to stay on dry land and keep herself amused by brushing up the steps to some Irish jigs. Meanwhile the rest of the party (Tim Clark and Dave Bridge) abseiled down to a small island at the bottom of the shaft. After a few slithering paces to the left we found ourselves at the 5-way junction with the cold clear water creeping up to our necks. At first sight the levels all looked well nigh impassable, their roofs seeming to dip uncomfortably close to the water. Above our heads a rise in the roof appeared to connect with an ore chute which we had passed on the way down the shaft presumably serving workings in the intermediate levels. We started along the Cogra Moss Adit in a westerly direction and found it to be a major roadway with greater roof clearance than the other branches. A narrow rise on a subsidiary vein was passed at about 35yds (possibly the same vein as that linked by a short crosscut to No 9 level 200ft above).

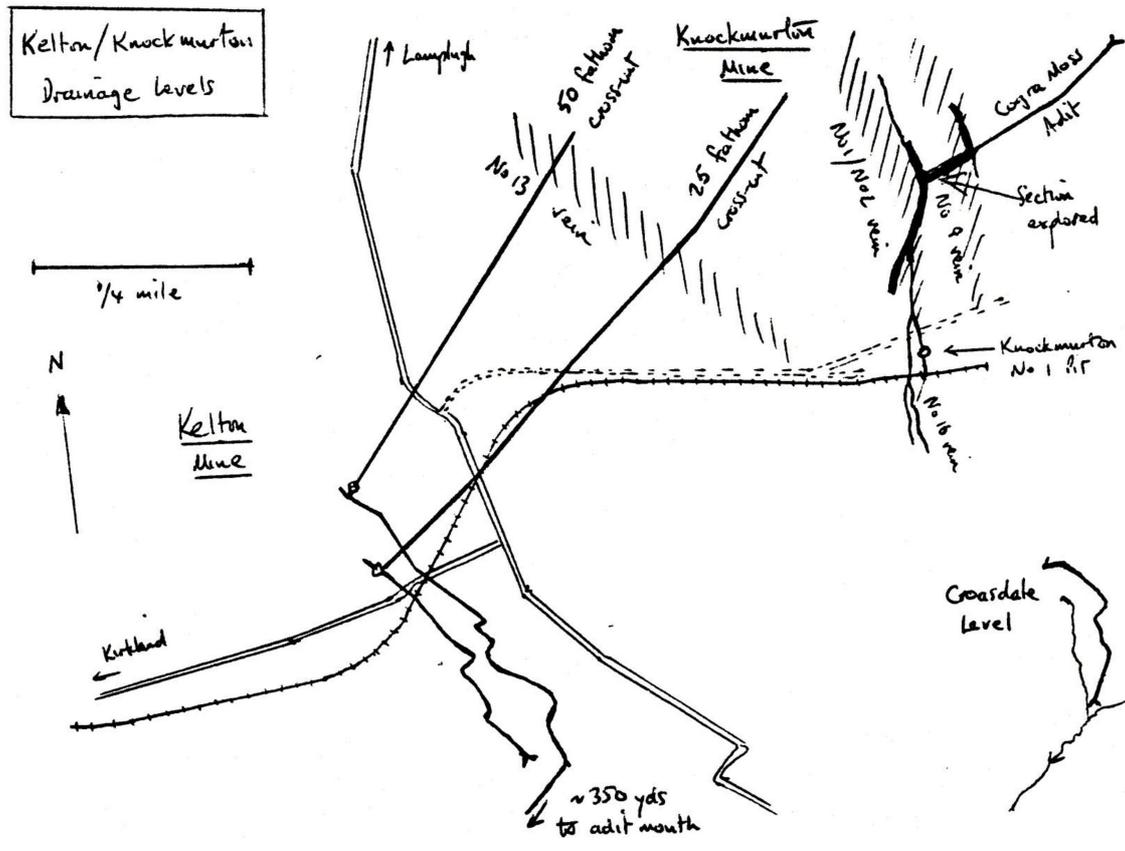


At the T-junction itself, is a major ore chute on the No.1/No.2 vein and according to the plans this served workings high up the vein at a considerable distance above the level. Moving S along the vein from the T-junction, now in somewhat shallower water, we could feel rails in place amongst the mud and timbers underfoot and beyond two rises, the second merely a short blind trial, the level widened to double track width just short of the

point where the vein splits and No.1 vein branches off to the right (at about 115yds). Being partially back-filled the entrance to this branch required a little digging to enable us to follow the level to the forehead at 120yds from the intersection. Here the water was less than chest deep and the floor covered with several inches of thick mud. At 40yds a heavily timbered rise (the only timbering we saw in any of the rises) leads up towards Low Bottom Level on No.1 vein nearly 150ft above - possibly once used as a manway. Also at this point is a collapsed cross-cut to the No.2 vein, everything so far agreeing with the plans. In this section there was a noticeable shortage of oxygen and we were glad to get back into the main drive.

The continuation S along No.2 vein should lead to a further split with the drive on No.2 vein (which is called No 16 vein further S) extending beyond the line of the railway track on the surface and the left hand fork (called No 4 vein) connecting with the shaft from the surface known as Knockmurton No 1 Pit. However a partial blockage just S of the junction with No 1 vein caused by unstable material in the stopes above was sufficient to halt progress in that direction. Some work is needed to stabilise the slope before the continuation of the level can be entered safely but a clear way ahead can be seen beyond the blockage. It came as a disappointment but it had its compensations. Just as we were about to retreat Tim remarked that he could hear running water and a piece of floating timber demonstrated that the water here was flowing to the S away from the Cogra Moss Adit mouth, seemingly to disappear through the floor beneath the collapse. Furthermore a closer look at the level beyond revealed it to be completely dry. Where is the water draining to?

In the 1870's a 25 fathom cross-cut was driven NE from the Kelton mine towards Knockmurton with the intention of proving the ground and providing an additional haulage route from the Knockmurton workings. In 1876 this cross-cut reached Knockmurton No 13 vein which lies to the W of the No.1/No.2 vein system and Richard Hewer is of the opinion that the level connects right through to No.2 vein via No.16 vein to the S. A rough calculation shows this cross-cut to lie below the Cogra Moss Adit horizon. Could it be that the No.2/No.16 vein beyond the point we had reached drains via the 25 fathom level and out through Kelton mine, a total distance of well over a mile? In the 1880's a 50 fathom cross-cut from Kelton mine also reached the Knockmurton No 13 vein. This was driven principally to drain the Knockmurton workings to a deeper level. Yet another possibility is drainage through natural fissures into the Croasdale Level some 400yds beyond the southern end of the Knockmurton workings which was driven to prove the continuation of the Knockmurton veins in that direction. This lies about 60ft below the Cogra Moss Adit horizon. Whatever the explanation a dig at the blockage in No.2 vein could have interesting results and perhaps enable the water level in the Cogra Moss Adit and its branches to be lowered. (Thanks to Richard for his comments on this point and for the plan of the levels from which the sketch below is derived.)



This small diversion had taken our minds off the hard reality that today the water level might be rising as a result of torrential rain from the previous day. We had intended to keep a careful eye on the situation and our return to the T-junction to check this out produced some impressive bow waves! Finding everything in order and the escape route still secure we went on to explore the N section of the No.1/No.2 vein which we found collapsed after about 100yds, just short of an incline which is shown on the plans leading to a major working above. Several ore chutes in this section are evidence of heavy stoping but any hoppers which may have stood there have long since collapsed. Most of the ore chutes are blocked by deads etc, some of the material quite massive, but access to the stopes is still possible in places.

After reporting back at the air shaft where we were reassured by the distant humming of Irish folk tunes from above we moved N along No.9 vein in even deeper water. Beyond several blind trials in the roof an incline follows the vein, rising up at an easy angle, but this was found to be blocked at about 40ft. A narrow ore pass connects the incline with the level below. The main drive beyond here has collapsed at about 150yds from the air shaft.

The other levels from the 5-way junction proved impassable unless one was prepared to take a ducking. An open shaft in the floor which had been reported in this area by Andy Staples after one of the earlier visits was not discovered - perhaps we just happened to be lucky this time!

By contrast the rest of the day was really quite uneventful unless one regards chasing a discarded wet suit across Kelton Fell in a howling winter gale, scantily clad, in the dark, as high adventure.