

4th March 1989
Warton Crag Mines

Meet reports- YARTON CRAG MINES Saturday 4th March 1989

Present:- S.Barker,C.Barrow, D.Bowers, S.Clarke, E.Holland, T.Keates, A.C.P.Thomas, P.Timewell,J.Helme & 7 members of the North Lancs. Bat Group who had asked for help in checking reports that the mines were used by hibernating bats.

The party first entered Moss House Mine (Crag Foot lower mine) and it was noted that the gated entrance had been forced open although the padlock was still present and locked. Do we know who has the key? During the whole day we were fortunate to have with us Eric Holland whose knowledge and experience of these mines goes back more than 20 years and he was able not only to guide us through the workings but also to indicate many features of interest. The mines yielded ochreous iron ore of satisfactory quality to be used as a pigment in paint - hence the local name Paint Mines, although it is probable that some copper was also extracted.

Although the Bat Group members inspected every nook and cranny no bats were found but their leader stated with authority that they had found some droppings! After emerging from the mine and a short surface walk to find the tops of the shafts we had seen underground, we returned to the cars for a picnic lunch.

After lunch the party was reduced to 15 when one of the Bat Group went off to the nearest belfry. Who could blame him after the bat less morning? The rest set off for the Upper Crag Foot Mine noting that the fencing done by the club in 1987 was still in perfect condition. Arriving at the area used on Sundays by the Gun Club we were shown by Eric the remains of the ore crusher which had originally been powered by a steam engine. We then crossed over to the entrance to the mine which was located, after some initial uncertainty, by Eric. The entrance, which we had briefly investigated during the 1987 fencing operation, is in a narrow cleft only a few yards from a covered shaft with a manhole entrance. While Tony Keates rigged the shaft for a short descent to a wooden staging below which was an aluminium ladder the remainder of the party cleared the rift of dead wood etc and the first people wriggled down the narrow tight entrance to where the way on is a squeeze under a rock roof. Arriving at this point, and eager for any excuse not to proceed further, the meet leader surprised himself and everybody else by spotting a hibernating brown, long eared bat. Although it is one of our most common bats it was quite a find and some considerable time was spent getting most of the bat group down to the point to see the creature. Members Holland, Timewell, Bowers and Holme then went on into the mine, noting that a work meet was required to stabilize the loose hanging boulders which were only supported by old rotten timbers. A collapse at this point would make rescue of anyone inside the mine extremely difficult. The mine is a fascinating mixture of natural and mined passages in a maze pattern not unlike the Borrowdale Wad Mines. However, after a few false turns, Eric was able to lead us to the double barrel air pump for which this mine is famous and we were also able to locate the

plastic pipes Eric had taken down years ago in an attempt to siphon off the lake. After an interesting tour of the workings we returned to the entrance and the tight wriggle to emerge under the unstable boulder and up the narrow cleft to surface.

While we had been away the surface party had not been idle. Some had visited Echo Pit where large numbers of bat droppings were reported but sadly no more bats. Unfortunately Tony's valiant effort down the shaft had not yielded any horizontal development or connections with the actual mine. Finally to round off the day about half the party proceeded to Grisedale Wood Drainage Level, a 300' level ending in a natural rift which discharges quantities of water.