

23rd April 1989

Low Water Power House

In 1960 Saddlestone Quarry on Coniston Old Man closed and the nearby powerhouse and smithy was left idle. Power had been provided by a pelton wheel driven by water piped from Low Water, 500 feet up the mountain. The pipeline remained more or less complete until a couple of winters ago, when the fastenings rusted through and some sections of the pipe slid down the mountain side. The slate roof of the building was stripped off and sold about 1975, but the pelton wheel, compressor, air receiver, generator and a belt driven pedestal drill still remain in the roofless building. Many of the blacksmiths tools, his workbenches, anvil and a large vice used to be there, but these have been removed over the years by collectors and by vandals. The building itself has withstood the elements quite well, but recently some ominous bulges have appeared in the walls. CATHMS has obtained permission from Burlington Slate to carry out repairs and preservation work on this building and also upon the Brake House of the Moss Head Ropeway. The intention is to repair the bulging walls, to cap the unprotected gables with mortar to prevent the ingress of water, to clean out the building, to replace the machine parts to their working positions and to erect an explanatory notice.

An article in an earlier Newsletter asking for volunteers produced a response from only one member, so I decided to include it as a scheduled meet in the hope that others would turn up. By a masterpiece of organisational inability I managed to programme this on a weekend when I was obliged to work and therefore could not attend. Paul Timewell agreed to be Meet Leader and we arranged to meet, together with John Helme and Chris Jones with his Landrover, on the Friday evening beforehand at the Walna Scar Car Park in order to assess the job, and to transport sand and cement to the site. Although it was not possible to get the Landrover all the way up the building, materials were cached amongst the rocks to be carried the rest of the way up on the day of the meet.

Eight members were present at the meet and a good start was made. The floor of the Power House was mucked out and whilst Mike Mitchell and Chris Jones hoisted lumps of machine back into place, Angela Wilson, John Helme, Don Borthwick and co repaired the damage to the walls by skilfull dry stone walling with added mortar. Part of two of the gables was capped with cement. A further visit was made on Friday evening 21st May by Ian Matheson, Dave Blundell, Anton C.P. Thomas, Paul Timewell, Derek Holland, John Helme and Chris Jones. We had another three hundredweight of sand and cement and this time as well as the Landrover, Chris had brought his motorbike! We hoped to take the materials as far as possible by Landrover and do the last steep and rocky bit on the bike. This was done by means of a sort of Chinese Cooley system on the back of the bike which was balanced by two runners whilst Chris rode up the hill. It was hard on the runners, but successful and very speedy. I understand that the back wheel of the bike has been rebuilt in preparation for the next trip! The gable end containing the forge chimney was built up with stone and capped with mortar.

There remains quite a lot to be done and future visits will be arranged by telephone. If

you would like to help, or are willing to be persuaded, then contact the Meets Secretary.

Ian Matheson.