

18th October 1989
Birkside Gill Mine

MEET REPORT, BIRKSIDE GILL, 18th October 1989.

Assemble at Wythburn Church Car Park entrance, at 7.30pm. Totally dark, but dry, with a slight breeze. 4 members present, D Blundell, Meet Leader, Don Borthwick, Sheila Barker, and friend, Betty? Followed route described below up the steep, wet, grassy hillside, with many slips en route. At the adit, everyone entered and thoroughly explored the adit. A small bat, possibly a Pippistrelle, was found in the roof at the forehead of the Northern branch of the adit. Taking care not to disturb it, the party exited to day (night)? Following the gill upstream, the capped shaft was reached. Don Borthwick was the only person to express an interest in descending the shaft, so the rope was belayed to a rowan tree on the opposite bank of the stream, with a re-belay off the double layer of steel mesh over the shaft, to ensure the rope hung vertically down the 25foot pitch to the rubble slope. The blocks of stone sealing the base of the mesh were removed and Don made a belly-down crawl under the mesh, to the pitch head. A short abseil and a traverse of the sump gave access to the continuation of the level. On Dons return, the gear was collected and a return made to the car park, arriving at around 10.30pm.

D J Blundell, 19th October 1989.

CUMBRIA AMENITY TRUST MINING HISTORY SOCIETY

Evening Meet Wednesday 18th October 1989

BIRKSIDE GILL COPPER MINE THIRLMERE (also known as Huel Henry).

LOCATION

The mine, which is little more than an extended trial, is situated on the banks of Birkside Gill, at NGR NY 330126, on the lower slopes of High Crag, some 500 feet above the A591 Ambleside to Keswick road. The mine is best approached from North Nest Water Ltd.'s car park at the rear of Wythburn Church, by means of the footpath through the woods, parallel to the road, until the lower part of Birkside Gill is reached. The route then lies steeply up the fellside on the North bank of the gill, following the forestry fence. At the top of the wood, just beyond the waterfall, the level can be found some 50 yards ahead, marked by a long, narrow spoil heap on the bank of the gill.

DESCRIPTION

At the level portal, is the remains of a hut, somewhat indistinct, as some of the stonework has been used to partially wall up the level entrance. This has had the effect of damming

back around 1ft of silt and water in the level at all times. The adit was driven as a cross cut, East of North, for 108', to a copper vein, it continued a further 85' to a second vein, and forward 13' to a forehead. The level extends for 163' on the second vein to a forehead, in a copper-stained sugary quartz string.

The first copper vein runs for 98' from the cross-cut in a North-Easterly direction, the level turns Southwards, then South-East, then North, to a fall. This appears to coincide with a stope to day, alongside the South bank of the Gill, some 450' further up the gill. The total length driven on this vein totals 210' to the fall.

Upstream, the stope to day is capped with a double layer of steel mesh, for safety. The pitch beneath the mesh descends some 25' to a rubble slope, at the bottom of which is a 40' deep flooded sump. On the right? (left) hand side of the sump, some 18" below water level, a rock ledge gives access to the level beyond, which extends for a further 250' to a forehead. Much of the original exploration of this mine was carried out by R E Hewer, of Huddersfield, in 1984.

HISTORY

The mine appears to have commenced around 1840, and closed around 1866. The Chief Agent 1860-1866, was, according to the Mineral Statistics, one J Barrett. Possibly the same J Barrett, as at Coniston Mines? The mine lies within the catchment area of the Thirlmere Reservoir and would have been closed down on the acquisition of the area by Manchester Corporation Waterworks, around 1880.

REFERENCES.

1. I Tyler.
2. Dewey/Eastwood, Spec. Rep., Min. Res. of 6.8., Vol. XYX 1925, Page 77.
3. C Ward. Memoirs Geol. Survey, Northern part of Lake District 1876, Page 56.
4. Burt/Waite/Burnley, The Cumberland Mineral Statistics 1845-1913, (1982).
5. British Mining No. 28. Northern Mines Research Society, Memoirs 1985.
6. J Adams, Mines of the Lake District Fells 1988, Page 141

This Meet Information sheet is a reproduction of the article by R E Hewer, in British Mining No. 28, with some minor amendments to the text, by D J Blundell.
7th October 1989.

