

7th January 1990
Honister Slate Mines

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Despite the change of date and the bad weather, a surprisingly large number of CAT members turned up for the Honister trip on 7th January. A total of 19 people assembled at Honister Hause, got kitted out then made a dash through the driving rain to the main entrance of the mine.

The plan for the day was to show new ground explored during the previous 12 months and also to gain access and explore several areas as yet not entered.

Having passed through the Link Level, a small number examined Level EO which was only re-discovered recently and runs in through the masonry-work below the overhead haulage gantry. The level gains access to quite a sizeable closehead. The roof of the entrance tunnel looks decidedly dodgy (like so much of the Honister Mine). This is not a place for people who tend to bump into things.

The party came out to day and entered the Honister Bottom Level. For the next five hours we would be underground and out of the weather. The group gathered at the foot of the Old Internal Incline where the counterbalance 'dog' of the incline system was photographed (and photographed again -- and again--). The incline was climbed and the winding drum reached at the top. Several members paced out the distance that Top Level runs before the major collapse is reached and duly passed results (all of which were different) to the meet leader.

We then descended the incline to the lower landing and entered No. 4 Level. A short way along three members and one guest (Gerald Colling) climbed a steep spoil slope and gained access to a section of Top Level not previously entered. This part of Top Level is blocked both ways by a roof-fall. Yet another tiny piece of the huge Honister jigsaw is now in place. The group moved on, leaving the more juvenile members playing trains with an ore truck. The rest of us proceeded to the end of Level 4 and then climbed the open spoil slope to Top Level where Mike Mitchell decided that it was lunch time.

After feeding and resting we entered ground that had only recently been explored and surveyed. A narrow climb through stacks of dressing waste led up through levels numbered 7, 8 and eventually 9. This was as high as a previous exploratory group had managed to get. One of the main objectives of the meet was to try and get into Level 10. In two places small openings in the roof looked as if they might lead upwards to Level 10 but were blocked with waste. Digs up into the blockages were energetically started. In the left hand opening, Guy eventually managed to dig himself a sizeable cavern but without breaking through. The right hand one was more successful and broke through to a black void. After some consideration Dave Bridge and Ian Matheson followed later by

the meet leader, plucked up courage to climb up through. After a delicate traverse, they found themselves on the floor of Level 10. Strangely enough there was a smell of cigarette smoke. Eventually it was realised that Guy was resting in his dig and the smoke from his ciggy was percolating through the floor.

The ground in Level 10 appeared horrendously unstable. Masonry work, the roof and the stacks of spoil looked as if they were about to collapse at any moment. Not a place to go if you suffer from a bad cough. A collapse was climbed through and a second climbed over. The level continued beyond a third collapse, no doubt eventually ending at a large closehead. Common sense ruled and the three decided to return but not before a small fall of stone partially cut off their retreat. On the way out a very fine powder pricker was found and salvaged.

The group gathered at the wide mouth exit of Level 9 at the external incline. The breaking through to Level 10 was celebrated by passing round the meet-leaders hip flask. It was obvious that no further progress upwards could be made underground that day and so we climbed the external incline where the only view we had was of the faint traces of becks in spate on the slopes of Dale Head. The Ash Crag internal incline was traversed and the area above was explored briefly. Messrs Fleming, Mitchell, Matheson and others checked out a number of levels and Angela found an underground route up from one level to emerge like a rabbit from a hole at the top of the crag.

By now it was getting dark and it was still raining. We made our way back towards the Hause meeting a late arrival on the way down in the form of Chris Jones who had just returned from his mine exploring trip to Spain.

The internal workings at Honister are not in a very stable condition. The main dangers are the unstable rock through which the levels are driven and the even more unstable banks of walled-up deads some of which are bulging ominously. Massive roof falls block many of the levels and some have happened quite recently. The writer, who doesn't normally worry about such things, found himself wondering what would happen if he became trapped inside by a major collapse. Rescue would take several days at the least. And what if you'd forgotten to tell anyone where you were going ----

Exploring will continue at Honister during 1990. If anyone is interested in taking part they should contact us for details of what is planned. A draft submission to English Heritage has been drawn up for 'scheduling' the External Incline which is considered to be of significant importance. A major task of preparing a field guide to area is also well under way and with any luck will be completed this year.