

23rd & 24th June 1990

Visit to Mines in the Lake District

Report By C.I.A.S members of C.A.T meet organised for the Cleveland Archaeological Society by Tom Knox & David Tomlin

A small party of members visited two mines as guests of the Cumbria Amenity Trust (CAT), a mining-history society. We had driven up a rough track to the Coniston Coppermine site which is partly re-used by a number of occupants. The Youth Hostel Association use the mine manager's house as a hostel and other buildings are used by the Barrow Mountaineering Club. The main area is occupied by Mr P. Johnson who is in the process of rebuilding the former dressing house in its original design, while the gunpowder store is now living accommodation and is not looking like its original design at all. The party, with the chief guide Ian Matheson, entered deep-level adit (started 1825) near some pillars of a former waterwheel, fed by numerous leats from the fell side. At its peak in the 1850s, the Bonsor mine complex produced 3,000 tons of copper ore (chalcopyrite) per annum, employing about 400 people.

After a short walk inside the mine levels, we reached a rising water main and another shaft which had a dual purpose for water pumping and haulage. All the workings below are now flooded. The party followed into a 1950s' working which was unsuccessfully undertaken by Willy Shaw into an ore-rich deposit in east Bonsor. After the short morning visit we had our packed lunch in the Barrow Mountaineering Club house.

In the afternoon we split into two groups, one to explore Hospital level which was partly flooded. The other group went up the fell side to Taylor's level adit and on the surface are many stone relics of the mechanical devices for transmitting power and moving the ore. A feature running up the crag side consisted of a number of pillars which supported the pump rods on rollers. At another adit we saw a beam and a ballast-counterweight box.

At the top of the fell was Levers Water reservoir, while nearby was Simons Nick, three open vertical workings going down to a complex mass of levels in the top and middle network. Members of CAT have used mountaineering techniques inside the workings in their very extensive explorations. Some of our members saw the brilliant shades of blue-turquoise copper carbonate re-formations on the empty vein sides. On the top of Simons Nick we viewed the remains of a barrel kieve, a dressed stone wall and a windlass in the stope below.

Back at the processing area, where we started the day, the site is known as Paddy End works where the ore was stamped, dressed and despatched down to Lake Coniston, to be distributed in early times by boat and later by rail.

On the Sunday we drove to Honister Pass where there is a slate mine. In driving rain we walked up the zig-zag path to the top of Fleetwith Pike. We briefly sheltered in stone ruins of the men's living accommodation before going down the exterior incline which

was strewn with loose slate and rock. We entered a horizontal tunnel adit into the Honister crags and came to the winding drum at the top of an old incline. By the light of our lamps and torches, we descended the steep incline, which still has the rails in place as it has only gone out of use in the last few decades. The party went into a cross passage to the bottom of the new incline which was used until 1986. A tunnel near the top took loaded tubs off the incline under the top winding-drum cabin to a collection point outside. In the last operating period trucks were used to move the slate to the workshops near the main road. We then returned to our cars at the park near the road where we thanked our guides for an enjoyable weekend before journeying back to Cleveland.