

1991

Meet Secretary's Report

There have been slightly more meets this year than last, twenty one in all and no less than twelve different people have participated as meet leader. My aim has been to provide as wide a variety as possible in order to appeal to all interests. An innovation had been two meets, suggested and led by Alistair Cameron, to provide opportunity and guidance for underground photography. The first was at Honister last February and the second will be at Coniston tomorrow. Last April Alistair led a large and not very agile group from the Cumberland Geological society through the slate closeheads at Yew Crag. They enjoyed themselves so much that they asked for another meet at Coniston and this has been arranged for May next year. They are very interesting company and we gain a great deal from their specialist knowledge. The NAMHO conference took place in May at Blaenau Ffestiniog and one of the field meets there was visit to the recently discovered bronze age copper mines at Great Orme. Peter Fleming arranged for a reciprocal meet with the Great Orme Exploration Society and in October he entertained them at Coniston, amongst other things completing a continuous trip through Levers Water Mine, Brow Stope, Tope Level Extension, to finish down the Paddy End through Trip. This meet was poorly attended by CAT members and it was to be hoped that the return visit to Great Orme next year will be better supported

Some exploration was carried out at Nenthead, but little has been done closer to home. We do seem to have lost momentum and drive in this area, which is a pity as there is still a lot to be done, especially at Coniston. Indeed there have been a number of small groups of CATMHS members, including myself, carrying out their own explorations. I am concerned that their discoveries should be reported, recorded and added to the knowledge we already have. I appeal therefore to those doing their own thing to report their activities to the Meet Secretary, or in the case of Coniston, to Peter Fleming who co-ordinates exploration there and to write reports for the Newsletter and Log Book.

There has been a lot of activity involving projects. The Old Engine Shaft Winding Wheel, which was in danger of falling down the shaft, has been restored and a start made to secure the original wooden pump rods and the new catwalk which will restore the continuity of Taylor's Level is almost complete. At Logan Beck Copper Mine Anton Thomas and company successfully completed a four year digging project by pumping the water out and exploring the previously submerged levels. The same group, under the leadership of John Helme have continued the restoration of Newlands Furnace in conjunction with the Cumbria Industrial History Society and have recently succeeded in replacing the main supporting beam for the blowing arch. Much the same group, this time under the leadership of Paul Timewell, have done a lot of work to reverse the dereliction of Mandells slate Office, on the Coniston Station site. It is hoped that the building will be used to mount a display and for occasional exhibitions. In conjunction with Red Earth Publications CATMHS is to publish a book of photographs entitled 'Beneath the Lakeland Fells'. This should be out next Spring and there have been a series of meetings with the Editor, Alan MacFadzean, to discuss the format and to select the photographs.

Many of our members have dual membership with the Cumbria Ore Mines Rescue Unit, who hold training meets on the second Sunday of every month. They achieve much larger numbers at these meets than we do, so it would seem that practicing rescues in mines has become more attractive than exploring them. The CATMHS meetlist has to be published up to eight months in advance and cannot be changed after publication, whilst the venue for COMRU is decided monthly and is therefore more flexible. On March 24th there was a published CAT SRT training meet at Lyon Ladders, but two weeks earlier COMRU held a similar meet at Black Hole Quarry. On June 2nd there was a CAT meet at Flemings Level at Coniston. Three weeks earlier COMRU held a practice there. On October 20th there was a CAT meet at Greenside and the week before COMRU chose that venue for their training. This pre-emptive programming can only be detrimental to the subsequent CATMHS meet, as people must feel less enthusiastic about attending a meet at a venue which they had visited only a few days previously whilst wearing a different hat.

It will be seen from this revue that there has been a great variety of activity within and without the society, a lot going on and this is encouraging, but it seems to me that despite this there has also been fragmentation and loss of momentum, a lack of purpose. There is a need for closer liaison and better communication. It is not sufficient to announce that a particular project will take place on say the last Saturday of each month, or the second Tuesday. People, especially those who are not regular attendees, need reminders and need to have their interest stimulated.

The regular meets programme, despite its variety, does not attract large attendances and it is often the same few people each time. There are a limited number of local mining sites and in terms of visits there is little new to offer long term members. Repeat visits are obviously less attractive than exploring unfamiliar territory and fewer and fewer people will turn up to visit the same old mines. I think that to generate more enthusiasm the meets, maybe the ongoing projects in Furness and elsewhere should be included in the official meets list. Should some meets be non specific, by which I mean that people turn up at a particular venue and then decide what to do? Should we have more weekend meets, or more meets outside Cumbria and if so who will lead them? Can we develop links with other groups outside the County? Is it time to reinstate the annual caving meet? Should we have fewer meets so that people look forward to them, or should we have more so as to appeal to a broader spectrum? I don't know the answers to these questions, but as I said last year I feel that as I have held this post for five years it is time for a fresh approach and a new Meets Secretary. Accordingly whilst I would like to continue as a committee member, I do not wish to stand again as Meets Secretary.

Ian Matheson