

6th January 1991

New Engine Shaft Through Trip

Meet Leaders: Ian Matheson, Mike Mitchell and Chris Jones.

Burnley Caving Club: Jack Nadin (also a CAT member), Steve Taylor, Dennis Wood, John Fairhurst, Katherine Clooney, Paul Hartley, John Birch, Peter Hartley, Andrea Hartley.

CATMHS Members: Alistair Cameron, Dave Bridge, Mark Simpson, Paul Timewell, Peter Fleming, Sheila Barker and Angela Wilson arrived later but did not participate. Pete Blezzard and Ann Danson spent the day at the Middle Level dig.

On the face of it a turnout of twenty one individuals is quite respectable, but this is probably the most interesting, sporting and varied through trip in the Coniston Mining field. The combined efforts of CAT and LMQT have achieved access to previously unvisited parts of the mine and produced a classic descent and traverse. It was disappointing therefore that CAT members were outnumbered by the Burnley Caving Club and indeed, apart from the joint meet leaders, only three CAT members completed the through trip. So where were you all?

The weather was fine but windy and a bit cold for those waiting their turn at the surface. Once below ground conditions were very comfortable. The descent of the New Engine shaft involves three pitches, the first of which involves a pendule of twenty feet to a stemple after a sixty foot descent. Mike Mitchell did this first; everyone following had the advantage of a pull from below to make the pendule much easier! In fact this first pitch had to be re-rigged due to the discovery by Mike of some damage to the rope which had been done previously but not reported. After this short delay things went very smoothly and everyone continued down the second pitch. A second small delay occurred at the head of the last pitch as the bolts could not be found. One was located and Mike descended to the bottom whilst Ian put in another bolt to improve the layout. Chris Jones and Paul Timewell were waiting at the bottom, having come in via Deep Level to rig and supervise the deep water traverse.

From the foot of the New Engine Shaft Deep Level continues into the mine. A spur, the South Cross Cut, driven through solid rock, goes for about two hundred yards towards Paddy End before terminating in a blank forehead. Who drove this, when and why? Were they hoping to intersect some undiscovered rich vein? Was it intended as an alternative tramming route from the Paddy End and Kernal Crag workings to replace the Great Cross Course which had become too unreliable and expensive to maintain? Whatever its purpose it failed and the fine and spacious rock tunnel is a monument to the work of those who drove it and the lost fortunes of those who financed it.

The main drive or Deep Level continues towards the Great Cross Course, passing an old manway down which, twenty feet below, can be seen the surface of the water a thousand feet deep. A little further on there is a waterfall beside which is an ore chute, blocked when discovered, but which was dug open by CAT and LMQT to gain access to the

ground beyond. Shortly after this is the Great Cross Course itself, a nasty clayey claustrophobic place, with poor shaley rock, frequent collapses and chest deep water. Few people have ventured along it, and today no one added to their number. Having seen what there was to see the majority of the group were escorted out by Chris via the LMQT walkway and dig, whilst Mike and Ian ascended the ropes to strip out the gear. Everyone was out of the mine by 3.30 pm. On the way out a sheave wheel was recovered from the foot of the 15th Century Bonsor East Shaft, and this was taken to Mandells Office for safe keeping.