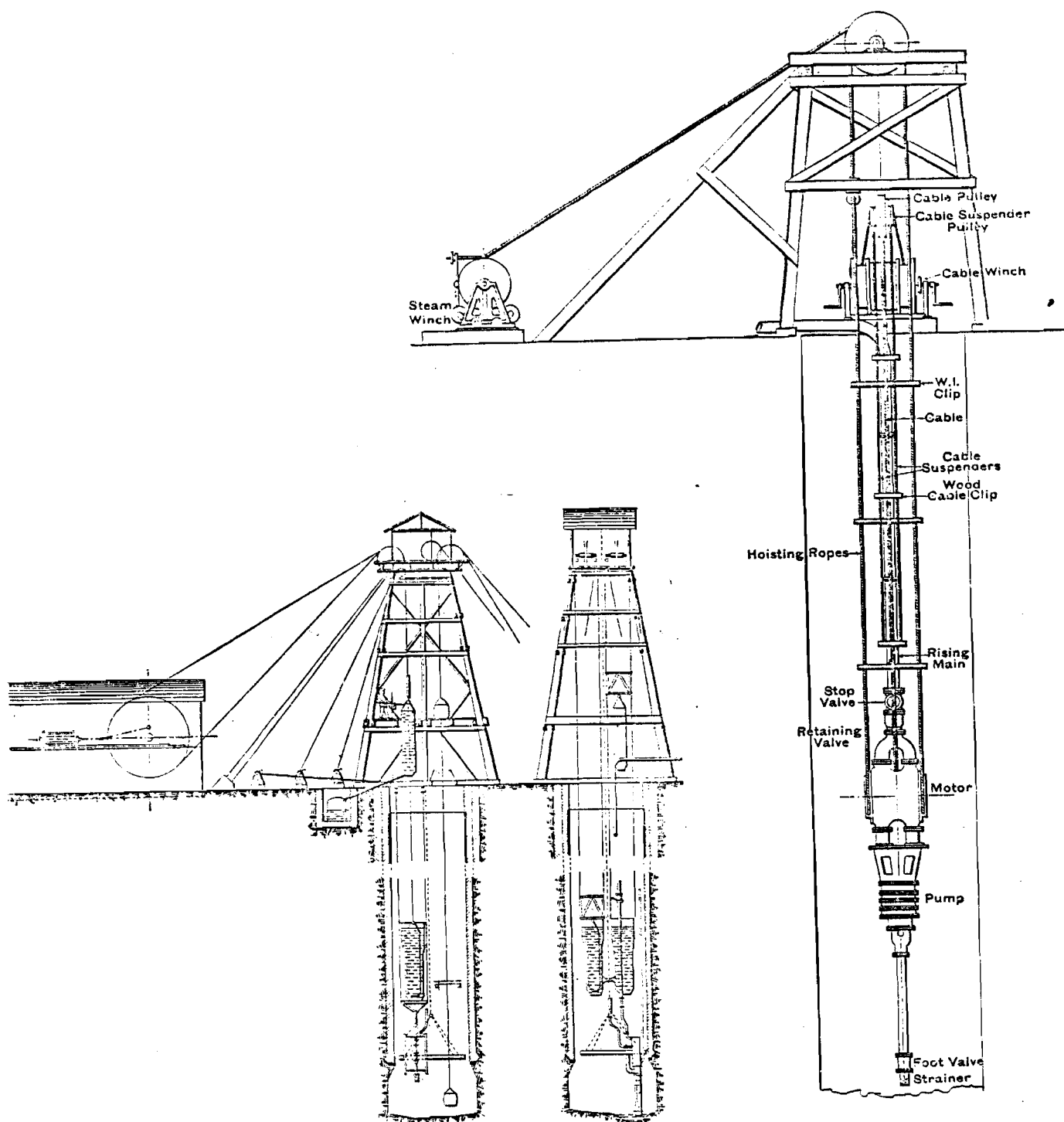


CAT NEWSLETTER 5



The two illustrations above were taken from an early 20th century technical book on mining. They show two methods of de-watering mines. The first shows tanks of water being wound out having first being filled at the bottom by a pulsometer, a special pump. One of these devices lifted 660 gallons per minute in a 1476 feet deep shaft. The second is a conventional electrically driven centrifugal pump shifting 2,000 gallons against a head of 640 feet. Both of these methods were used in Cumbrian mines.

BLAZING A RED TRAIL

By McF

Sunday the 3rd of June.....Standing on the summit of this immense boulder pile at the foot of B47 Pit, looking out into the darkness of a colossal cavern, the largest remaining worked-out ore body in the Furness iron ore field, with the possible exception of Daylight Hole. Had followed Wickenden for hours, through the bowels of Ding Dong, along the 67yd Level chest-deep in water, up the Derby Rise, to find ourselves perching in the roof of this awesome chamber that was so extensive our lights failed to illuminate the farther end. Yet another dramatic discovery beneath the green fields of Furness.

Mine exploration has had a chequered history in Furness. Until quite recently it was generally assumed that there was nothing of any interest left to discover.....all the vast mining systems had either collapsed, flooded, or been filled with rubbish; Furness was a dead area, it was a place to be visited once then ignored, a place bereft of its secrets.

During the heady days of the 1960s there was a brief burst of activity; all the accessible workings were explored and surveyed by the F.S.G. and the R.R.C.P.C., and Eric Holland published his excellent, and much thumbed, guide book Underground in Furness. The mines were mostly small and uninteresting, the majority being trials or the remains of larger workings which had flooded or subsided, though a few were moderately extensive - Pylon Pot, a series of chambers in the Parrock Pit; Pickshaft Cave, a worked-out ginnel on the Whitriggs Drainage Level; Ding Dong, a maze of workings at the foot of the B45 shaft which, before it was fully explored, was filled with scrap cars; and the big daddy of them all, Daylight Hole, a mighty chamber with a fine series of attendant workings.

There were no more significant discoveries till the mid 70s when Peter Burton, then a member of F.U.G., the successors of the F.S.G., descended a narrow cleft on the hill in front of Tytup Farm and found himself in a remarkable system of chambers and levels. This was Tytup Mine, a fine example of a Furness hematite mine, but short lived for the entrance was filled in by C.C.C. during 1983, one of several to disappear beneath Tytup Tip.

In 1979 Mark Wickenden embarked on the mammoth task of reopening Ding Dong, hoping to win into workings that Eric and the F.S.G. had missed during their exploratory trips back in the '60s. Three and a half years later, in April '82, the last car body was removed and Wickenden crawled into the Ding Dong main chamber. Several weeks of frenzied exploration ensued though no new major discoveries were made. Way down in the depths the 67yd Level, the haulage tunnel to B30 Pit in Henning Valley, the main pit in the area, was flooded to the roof.

Ding Dong awakened a new interest in the Furness iron ore mines. All manner of folk took up their picks and shovels and began digging into old workings; the wooded slopes of Henning Valley suddenly mushroomed with brand new crimson spoil-heaps; iron fever had descended on the caving fraternity; the Hematite Renaissance was upon us. Down in Henning Valley No. 7 Level and the Whitriggs Drainage Level were opened, but both terminated in bad collapses a short distance in. Then in February 1983, after several weeks of extremely accurate digging, Ray Bland dropped into the Whitriggs Horse Level, the main haulage route of the extensive Whitriggs Mines. In the ensuing days thousands of feet of tunnels were explored, stopes were climbed, old surveys religiously studied. It soon became evident that this was the most important discovery since the pioneering days of the '60s. The mine passed under the subsidence craters south of Bell Hill Cottages; it could be possible, with further digging, to win into the High Crossgates Mines and Tytup Mines. The potential is stupendous.

In the summer of '83 the water level in the bottom of Ding Dong dropped two feet. Wickenden, Harrison, and Mike Maher waded several hundred feet in the direction of the enticing shaft of B30 Pit but were forced back when the tunnel sumped. However, while exploring a side passage they found a rise ascending about twenty feet. They had no climbing gear so they turned back. Wickenden was certain

this was the Derby Rise and would afford access to the ramified workings of the Derby Pits 1 & 2.

The Derby Pits are situated on a tongue of land which is, in effect, sandwiched between lands owned by the Duke of Buccleuch (hence the B prefix on the pit numbers). In the distant past there was a famous court battle between the dukes of Buccleuch and Derby, brought about by trespass underground, miners abstracting ore from neighbouring royalties etc., so it was known that all these workings were interconnected.

In May 1984 the water of the 67yd Level was again low enough to allow access to the Derby Rise. Late one sunny afternoon Wickenden and Prior scaled the rise and emerged in a nest of extremely complex workings, known to be those of the Derby Pit No. 1. They headed south and discovered a gigantic chamber, site of a vast ore body on the Lindal Moor Main Vein. In their excitement they had difficulty retracing their steps; it was one o'clock the following morning when they finally climbed to grass.

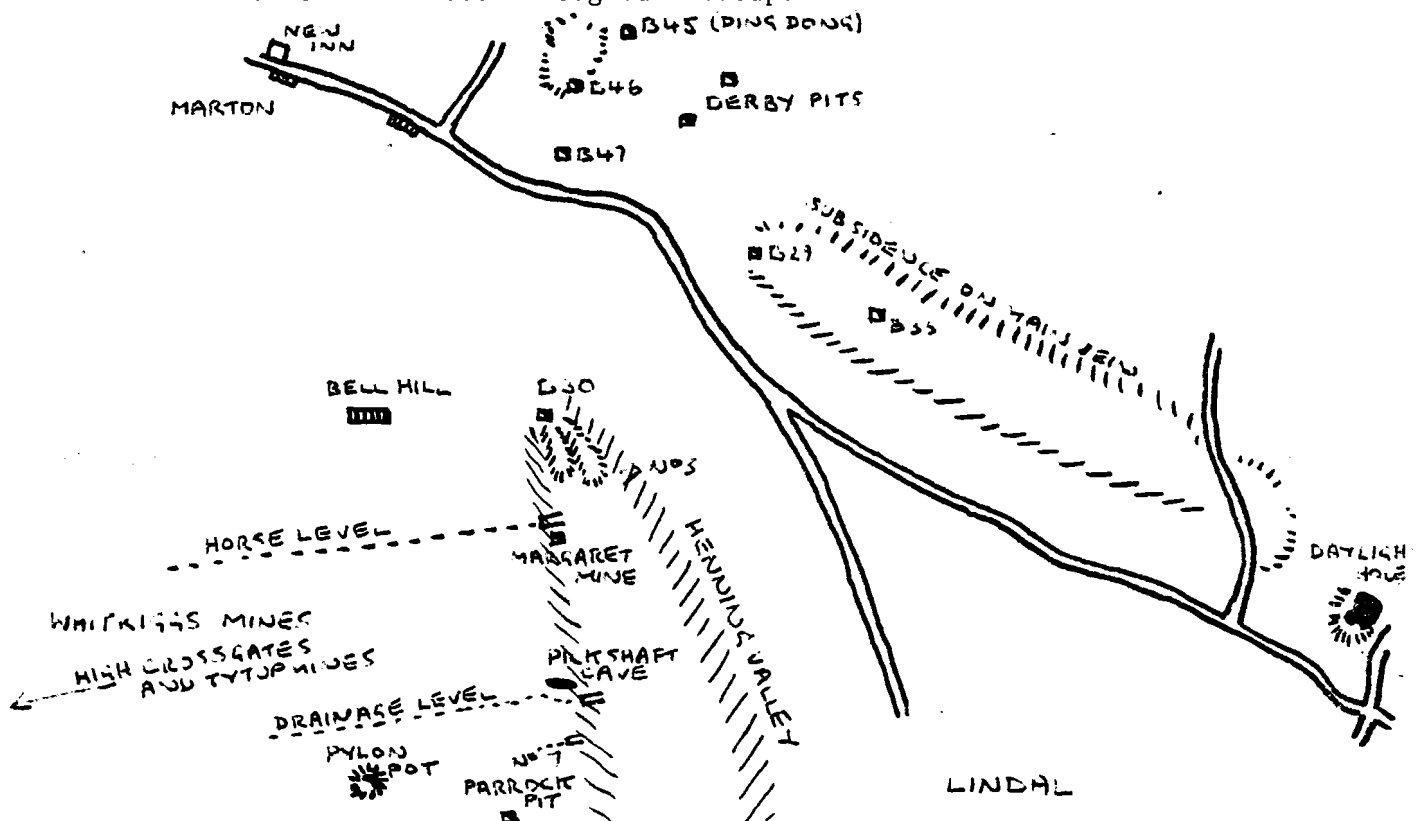
A fortnight later Wickenden returned, along with Jones, Maher, and McFadzean, confident he was going to win into more new ground. After studying the old surveys he had realised that on the previous trip not only had he won into the Derby workings, but had passed right through and back into Buccleuch on the other side. Spirits were high; at last the Furness mines were yielding their dark secrets; things were taking off in an impressive way. In the big chamber Wickenden pointed out the shaft of B47 Pit; we could see it rising high above our heads to a blockage about sixty feet up where a load of old lorry tyres had jammed (Furness farmers are notorious for dumping rubbish in old shafts). We spent many hours exploring along the main vein and its attendant workings; at one point we scaled an air pipe up an ore pass and found two wooden bogies, in perfect condition. There is still much ground to explore in this area, we did not have time to examine everything. We concentrated on the Buccleuch workings hoping to find a way into B30 Pit; at the nearest point we were within a few hundred feet of the shaft. The Derby workings remain, for the most part, unexplored.

On the weekend 9th and 10th of June C.A.T. successfully installed steel pipes in the Ding Dong entrance shaft, thereby ensuring access to B45, B47, Derby Pits, and who knows what else, for a long time to come. Mine exploration is enjoying an incredible revival in Furness, the discoveries of the past two years have laid bare vast tracts of new and exciting ground. And this is just the beginning - the scope is endless.

F.S.G. - Furness Spelaeological Group.

R.R.C.P.C. - Red Rose Cave and Pothole Club.

F.U.G. - Furness Underground Group.



Ding Dong Work Meet, 9th & 10th June 1984.

by Mike Mitchell

Members present. Sat: Martin Maher, Mike Mitchell, Alen McFadzean, John Crammond, Mark Wickenden, Max Dobie, Ken Battersby, Alan Westall, Chris Jones, Lindsay Harrison, Sun: as above less A. Westall & C. Jones and plus Eric Holland, Stuart Cole and Dave Blundell.

Sat. 9th June: As testimony of the higher standards of ability achieved by C.A.T. members, (no doubt due to the success of the Little Langdale S.R.T. meet), the grade of 'E' appended to the Ding Dong work meet by Alen must have presented no challenge to the majority of members as they decided to give it a miss. Nevertheless there was plenty of stimulus for excitement with a little danger perhaps, as lengths of pipe weighing approximately ten hundredweight dangled ominously on the end of chains and S.R.T. rope.

The day started with Alen and I collecting a generator from Vibroplant-Barrow to run the two electric welders provided by Martin and myself. Martin was a little late arriving but the top of his mini was eventually spotted just above the blades of grass coming across the field. When he got to the shaft top and emptied his car you would have sworn Pickfords had arrived, welding plant and tools, crow bars and winch bars, several hundredweight of metal 'D' hoops and assorted chunks of steel for welding to the pipes, a number of S.R.T. ropes and accessories, various other objects of dubious identity and of course his lunch.

Work was soon under way and the first problem was the texture of the green plastic coating on the pipes. This was so hard that it had to be chiselled off in order to weld the lowering hoops on. John played an important part in this operation. The next problem was to secure the winch in such a position that the 50ft. cable was long enough to reach down a 35ft. hole and yet far enough away to be safely anchored and not follow the pipe down; should our enthusiasm to 'get on with it' prove greater than our ability. A chain block was then secured to the trusty ash tree, the first hoops welded on and we were ready to start.

The children who long ago christened No. 45 pit "Ding Dong" may have unconsciously looked into the future for it was DING DONG all damn way! However, the first and longest pipe was only a few feet down when it was found that the winch cable had got inadvertently twisted on the drum (some said it was MY fault). This meant relieving the cable of its weight for a short time. We attempted to haul the pipe back but this tended to pull the winch anchors out of the ground, so we decided to see if S.R.T. is all it's cracked up to be and tied our huge pipe onto a rope, eventually managing to transfer the weight from the steel cable. The rope used was made up of two lengths knotted together and as the load was taken up it squeaked, stretched and groaned ominously. (At this point, for some reason, several people found work to do elsewhere and left the immediate area). The operation was successful. Soon the winch was back in command and the pipe on its way down (and people came back). When the pipe was a few feet from the bottom and in a vertical position the chain block in the tree, working opposite the winch, was used to swing the pipe into the correct position over the manhole in the concrete platform. Mark and Alen then went down to make the final adjustments and the pipe was dropped into position. This method proved very successful and was used throughout the job, achieving bulls-eye accuracy on all but one occasion.

Having got three pipes into position and one joint welded (some back-filling was done at this stage to stabilise the work so far and Mark ceremoniously threw the first chunk of car back down the shaft), at about quarter past ten, feeling quite satisfied and rather tired, we went to The New Inn, but apparently one of the 'wee' doggies was quite unimpressed and peed on Martin's boots.

10th June: A glorious Sunday morning found everybody ready for action again. John was poised ready with hammer and chisel and Alen had got the generator back on site.

4

It had been removed for safe-keeping overnight. Mark arrived later looking like he'd slept in a play-pen with an Old English Sheepdog. (Said he'd just come from choir practice!)

The pipes soon began to roll down and the air turned blue with welding fumes ascending from the steadily growing 'chimney'. Sparks showered down inside and outside the pipes as the joints were welded from both sides. Since I was working below Martin, I got quite worried that my mop of golden hair might go up in flames! Alen and Max both showed their skill at welding and Max taught Mark how to pick up a hot welding rod bare-handed (Mark's bare hand, that is!) The rest of the old cars and scrap were dumped down the hole during the course of the day and it became apparent that it is going to take a lot of filling to bring up to surface. Any suggestions for filling?

The pipe installation was completed and welded about 9pm and as you will see when you visit, Eric's measuring leaves nothing to be desired - he even allowed for the amount the tree would grow in the time since the concreting (he says).

I think that everyone working on this project has shown what can be done with enthusiasm, but I think a special thanks is due to Martin Maher for the effort he has put in and the equipment supplied or loaned by himself or his father and without which this part of the job may never have been completed.

BOOK REVIEW

by C.D.S.

The Life and Work of the Northern Lead Miner - by A Raistrick and A Roberts. £12.95. Published by N.M.R.S. and Beamish Museum.

This is a welcome addition to the bookshelves of anyone who has done any exploration in the North Pennine Orefield. It contains around 200 photographs many of which have not been published before. In addition it has quite a number of photographs of various aspects of Greenside Mine and Thonthwaite.

The only grumbles I have is that only a few of the photographs are dated and also that many of the modern photographs are of rather mundane things and do not truly represent the wealth of subjects which are still available to the modern explorer. But still definitely a must.

Journal No. 2.

This is coming along nicely and will roughly follow the format of No. 1 (which by the way is being reprinted) although I hope to have the quality of paper, etc., improved. Articles which will be included are Part II of Peter Fleming's history of exploration in the Copper Mines, a history and survey of the Borrowdale Wad Mines by Dave Bridge, more on Furness Iron Mines, transport of minerals in the 16th and 17th century, a history of the Coniston Copper Mines by Eric Holland, more on bats and many other things. But don't think your work on that pet mine of yours isn't wanted. Act now, contact me (Chris Jones) and let us get it into print for you.

For those of you who are on the look out for new mining books to add to your collection you could do worse than to send for a list from the Yorkshire Dales Railway Museum, Embsay Station, Embsay, Skipton, North Yorkshire BD23 6AX. Please enclose a S.A.E. They have many excellent titles in stock (including the Mine Explorer). Better still pay them a visit if you're in the area.

MEETS REVIEW

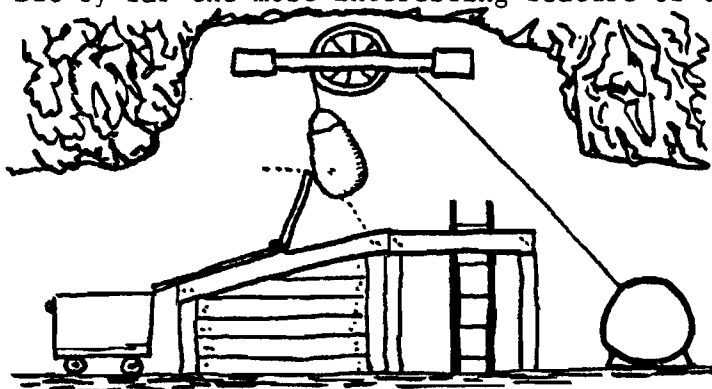
By McF

The wind was moaning in the bare trees of Mungrisdale, snow lay deep on the fields, the sky was black and threatening. Carrock Fell was lost in the clouds, blizzards raged on the crags. So much for the weather on the 15th of January. It was galling to have traversed the whole of the Lake District, mostly in third gear, to within five miles of Sandbeds Mine only to find the road blocked at Mungrisdale on the 'S' bend by St Kentigern's church. We pulled the vehicles into a lay-by and held a council of war, followed by a snowball fight.

This was the first time we had been beaten by the weather. Odin was not smiling on us. We agreed to turn about and try our luck elsewhere, perhaps a mine near the main road or a cafe in Keswick. But Fleming was having none of that: "Let us forge on," he cried, his hair wisping in the gale, and would have walked off into the mist clutching his shovel and bait-box had we not pinned him down and bound him with baler-twine. Stern measures indeed, but it was for his own good. We turned around and headed south; it was like Napoleon's retreat from Moscow but we were in good humour because Dave Blundell drove his car into a snowdrift and couldn't get out.

We decided to try our luck at Rachel Wood Mine on the banks of Bassenthwaite Lake. As we drove towards Keswick the snow got heavier and the wind stronger. Nasty banging noises issued from the rear of McFadzean's landrover where Fleming, now gagged and securely fettered, was thrashing about insanely. In the end we had to fill his mouth with snow, and just for good measure Clare Dobie sat on his chest.

Rachel Wood Mine proved to be interesting though not very extensive. We were underground about two hours and in this time gave it a thorough going over, and even succeeded in doing some original exploration. Martin Maher scaled a couple of ladderways but failed to win into any of the higher levels, and Fleming, now in a more stable frame of mind, climbed to the top of a rather huge and shaky stope, where high above a compressed-air pipe could be seen running off into the darkness. But by far the most interesting feature of the mine was the off-loading apparatus in situ at the top of an internal shaft. This was a hinged device for tipping up the kibbles as they reached the top, and was still in working order. The shaft had been partitioned at one time, one half for raising ore, the other housing a ladderway. The shaft was filled to the collar with incredibly clear water. It looked extremely inviting. Shall have to return with my mask and cozzy.



The snows were still with us on the 29th when members met for a tour of the slate mines on Coniston Old Man. The meet leader, a chap called Westall, failed to turn up. Rumour has it he went skiing instead. The team trudged off up the miners' track wearing snow-goggles on their heads and tennis raquets on their feet, attempting to locate the numerous adit portals which were buried beneath the drifts.

Member Dennis Webb had a tough time. Dennis, who is our smallest member (yes folks, even smaller than Peter Blezard), found it was easier to tunnel through the snow than walk over it. But eventually exhaustion overcame him and Lindsay Harrison was obliged to pick him up and carry him in his rucksack. Now that's what I call team spirit!

The team spent the afternoon exploring the vast caverns on the eastern side of the Old Man. There is a good deal of abandoned tackle in these mines, steam winches, bogies, drill-steels, etc., all of which helped to spice up what proved to be a very interesting day. And to round off the proceedings they visited Taylor's Level, scene of the Boxing Day dig, and had to smash the ice to get in.

On the 19th of February Dave Blundell, having dug his car out of the snowdrift at Mungrisdale, led a meet in the Borrowdale Wad Mines, those delightful graphite workings on the fellside above Seathwaite Farm. A jolly good day was had by all, although there was quite a lot of standing around while the pitches were rigged, and everyone got a thorough soaking. Members had a poke about in the upper levels, Graton's Stage, Harrison's Stage, and Gill's Stage, before abbing down to Farey's Stage, Old Men's Stage (where there is a fine example of a coffin level), and finally Gilbert's Level.

We had decided months earlier to explore a series of levels between Old Men's Stage and Gilbert's Level but because time was running out this idea was abandoned in favour of going to the pub. A shame really, but they will still be there for some meet in the future.

Have incredibly vivid memories of our first ever meet in the Wad Mines way back in 1980. The day was marred, or enlivened depending on how you want to look at it, by a series of accidents, all of which were potentially fatal, but from which the victims walked away unscathed. These accidents were caused by wad, which is pure graphite, accumulating on the ropes and considerably reducing friction. Members who unwittingly hurtled down shafts and peeled off the sides of stopes were, in order of artistic merit, Stuart Cole, Mike Mitchell, Peter Dawes, and Eric (my God I've burst a main artery) Holland. We have not had this trouble since, perhaps because we now use proper caving rope as opposed to the second-hand clothes lines Eric used to purchase.

On the 4th of March we had a double dig, which for the benefit of Mike Mitchell is half a quadruple dig (see paragraph about the training meet), up at the Paddy End workings of the Coniston Copper Mines. One group tackled the Grey Crag Level entrance while the other group abseiled down South Shaft on an attempt to dig into Deep Level. Both digs were unsuccessful, Grey Crag because of the overwhelming masses of boulder clay. Down South Shaft a great quantity of rock was shifted but, alas, the elusive Deep Level is still out of reach. However, all is not lost for the diggers have vowed to return. It is hoped that Deep Level, which at the foot of South Shaft was driven as a crosscut through solid rock, will be intact and prove to be the missing link between the Paddy End and Red Dell workings..

On the 25th of March McFadzean, armed with a bale of industrial towels and a 45 gallon drum of Swarfega, was seen staggering through the woods between Marton and Lindal towards the rendezvous point for the Whitriggs Horse Level meet. Furness iron ore mines are not noted for their cleanness; McF had been in Whitriggs before and was not going to be caught out again.

Aha, they all laughed when their meet leader drew from his pack two spare sets of wellies, an inflatable acid bath, and a pneumatic caulking hammer. "Surely it can't be that dirty," they guffawed. Surely it can, thought McFadzean to himself. After painstakingly explaining that the mine had not been described on the meets list as "Horrendously filthy" purely for dramatic effect, McF led the group through the woods to the entrance dig, which is an imitation badger's hole excavated by Ray Bland (a famous Furness recluse) and situated about twenty feet from the obliterated entrance of Margaret Mine, the last hematite mine to be worked on the Furness peninsular. Incidentally, "Horrendously filthy" turned out to be the understatement of the year.

Within minutes we were thrashing through flat-out crawls in oozing inches of splendid red mud. One crawl was so tight we were forced to remove lamp cells and helmets to get through. Glorious fun. This was followed by a pool of liquid hematite into which unwitting members were lured like lambs to the slaughter. Even greater fun. There then ensued several hours of slipping and thrutching beneath the green fields of Whitriggs, after which the twelve members emerged into daylight and collapsed in the turf of Henning Valley. We had seen a classic example of a hematite mine and felt better for it. Amongst the numerous artifacts we noted were: shovels, picks, detonator boxes, nails, buckets, and a Hartley's beer bottle.

On April Fools' Day a dozen or so likely candidates turned up at Bar Pot for the annual caving meet. This meet was led by Martin Maher, a caver of long standing (or long crawling, as the case may be) and Christopher D. Jones, who claims

he works at Whernside Manor Caving Centre during his holidays as an insrtuctor, though reliable sources inform me he is the dishwasher and toilet attendant.

Most people went down Bar Pot and into the main chamber of Gaping Gill, though a small party entered by Disappointment Pot and completed the through-trip. There was hardly any water in the main chamber, Fell Beck being nowt but a trickle. On the way out there was a deal of thrutching about on the final pitch, which is exceedingly tight, and much wailing and gnashing of teeth.

EASTER, the meets list said, mines in the SCOTTISH HIGHLANDS. There we were at 2 in the morning prodding the turf of this Forestry Commision campsite searching for a dry place in which to pitch the tents. As it happened no dry places were to be found so we moored them to tree stumps and dustbins. Ah, we thought as we bedded down for the remainder of the night, our worries are over. Wrong. Our worries were certainly not over, they had not begun. Odin was wrathful and sent amongst us a winged messenger to plague us and wreak havoc,

8 o' clock Good Friday morning, we lay dozing in our sleeping-bags, when suddenly the peace was shattered by a man screaming in a German accent. We peeped furtively under our flysheets and beheld this strange figure standing over Jonesy's tent dressed in an SS uniform and Jack Boots. "Vot do you mean by camping here, Englander svein-hunds?" the man cried, his black moustache twitching nervously, and bending down he dragged Jonesy from his tent and marched him off to a drab concrete building above the door of which was a sign that said WARDEN'S BUNKER. What was happening? Where on earth had we camped? Over breakfast we gave the matter much discussion. Then after an hour Jonesy returned, white faced and shaking feebly, finger nails wrenched out and a number tattooed on his arm. It transpired we had camped on the Forestry Commission campsite alright, but it was under the management of the Caravan Club. Sighs of horror. Yes, this was a high-security campsite, the Maze Prison of the Western Highlands.....Stalag Luft Glen Coe.

At about 9 o' clock Ewan Cameron, our native guide, turned up on his motorbike but was immediatley pursued around the camp perimeter by the warden in a tiger tank. We cheered and rattled our tin cups as Ewan opened up his throttle and sailed over the fence in a blur of chromium, disappearing up the glen in a hail of machine-gun fire. Ah, a blow for freedom, such is the spirit of the oppressed. At 11 o' clock, heartened by Ewan's show of determination, we made our own escape bid and crashed through the gates in our rented transit van, following the scorch marks of Ewan's tyres all the way to Tyndrum.



THE CAMPSITE AT GLEN COE

The lead mines at Tyndrum were worked from Elizabethan times right up to the 1920s. Two lead-bearing veins were worked from the valley floor to the ridge of Sron nan Colan, much of the intermediatery ground being completely stoped away, resulting in huge dark chasms plummeting deep inside the mountain. We spent most of the day exploring the two levels which are still open, finding these to be quite extensive and thouroughly rewarding. These levels were driven on the Hard Vein, a NE/SW running vein which hades SE, but there are crosscuts to the Clay Vein every few hundred feet, but this, because of the nature of the veinstone, was found to be collapsed almost in its entirity. The mine was last worked by an Australian company who, it seems, sank a considerable amount of money into the venture for the timbering in the stopes and levels is very impressive and still in a remarkably good condition. You can actually smell the creosote in some parts of the mine. Ewan has pioneered the exploration work at Tyndrum, digging holes here and there, bottom-

ing shafts, etc., and had almost exhausted the potential of these two levels. I say 'almost' because there was a 60ft ladderway at the end of the highest level, at the top of which was a trapdoor. No one, Ewan informed us, had ever been able to open this trapdoor. He might as well have said there was a golden fleece at the top of the ladder for it attracted club members like a light attracts moths. I wasn't present when the door finally yielded, I was down below taking photos of a battery of ore hoppers, but I heard on the grape vine Peter Dawes smashed his way through with his head. Some careful exploration ensued culminating in the discovery of an impressive stope, several shovels, a bogey, and a heap of gelignite with detonating cord and detonators. All good mouldy stuff.

That night the heavens opened and Stalag Luft Glen Coe was transformed into a boating lake. We anchored our tents to boulders and gun emplacements and with the grace of God weathered the storm. Martin Maher was not so lucky and his tent floated away; in the morning it was captured by the enemy, towed out into the middle of the site, and used as a target for E-Boat practise.

Spirits were low, Saturday was grey and cold. The English contingent paced endlessly round the perimeter fence looking for a weak spot, the Achilles Heel. Blezard reported that the tunnel he had been digging from the toilet block had flooded during the night, not because of the torrential rain, but because Phil Merrin left a shower turned on. Meanwhile, down at the other end of the campsite, Angela Wilson and Dave Bridge had constructed a vaulting horse from old packing-cases and were busy dragging it towards the fence. Yes, those were desperate days. But we refused to be beaten.

At 10:00 hours the senior British officer (a post which Fleming and Mitchell fought over like cat and dog) called a meeting of the escape committee. It was decided that we would crash the gate again: the Huns would not be expecting this as it was too obvious. The plan worked. We headed north for Strontian.

Ewan had been in touch with the mine manager at Strontian, we were conducted around the opencast site, but not allowed underground. The mine has been operational for a year, and it is obvious from the quality of the plant, machinery, etc., that no small amount of money has been pumped into it. Barytes is the mineral they are after and are, at the moment, producing 500 tons per week. Most of their production comes from the opencast on the outcrop of the Strontian Main Vein, though they have driven a level deep into the hillside and hope to develop underground on a large scale.

We were pretty peeved that we couldn't get underground so we decided to follow the vein east over the mountain to an old mine on the slopes of Druim Garbh. It was a good two-mile hike, but pleasant enough. Once there we found the workings had mostly run-in and only a couple of short levels and one shallow shaft were accessible. Lead was mined here during the last century, and judging by the large amounts of spoil piled on the banks of Allt Foith Dhomhail, the Smiddy Vein was worked extensively. Trials were also driven on Level Vein, High Vein, Antimony Vein, and North Vein.

That evening, while enjoying a Chinese meal in Fort William, the SS burst into the restaurant and dragged us back to the site. A severe blow to moral! How did they know we were there? Did we have an informer in our ranks? Perhaps we had been betrayed by that Highland partisan chappie who tried to thief McFadzean's stool in the bar of the Ballachulish Hotel, or maybe that red-haired wild-eyed lady of the night who approached Mike Maher and said, in sultry tones: "Hey Jimmy, Ah'm yours fer a quid." (money well spent, Mike?)

Later that night our moral received another deadly blow. Martin Maher, Mike's country cousin, while attempting an escape bid, was caught in the beam of a search light and marched off to the warden's bunker. He was never seen again. We have since learned, from a guard Blezard managed to bribe with a copy of the Mine Explorer, that he was transferred to the high-security wing of Stalag Luft Eilean Donnan. Rumour has it that Maher has formed an escape committee in this ancient Scottish castle and is busy constructing a glider high in the rafters.

Sunday morning dawned glorious and golden, the air was as clear as a

bell. On account of this favourable turn in the weather we split into two groups, the largest of which would traverse the Aonach Eagach ridge from east to west while the remainder (the Purists) would have a crack at some alluring shafts back at Tyndrum. The Dissenters, clad in tweed breeches and wielding ice axes and knobbly boots, marched off into the heather whistling "I love to go a-wandering", energetically twirling their varnished blackthorn walking sticks, and ramming binoculars into their eyes every time a crow flew out of a crannie.

Back at Tyndrum the S.A.S. (Special Abseiling Squad) struggled 1000ft to the top of the Sron nan Colan ridge and lowered a 150ft rope down a dark and awesome shaft. Ewan had been partway down this before but had never reached the bottom; this time he abbed down about 100ft to a stance where, he informed us, the rope would have to be re-belayed. We joined him down there and Mitchell set about rigging the next pitch.

The stope/shaft we had abbed down proved to be rather unstable and occasionally a rock or two came whistling out of the darkness. We were all crammed on this tiny stance and were, to a very large extent, at the mercy of the mine. We had a good laugh when Merrin got clonked on the foot with a cobble, but when a lump of veinstone the size of a football knocked Jonesy to the ground we tightened our chin-straps and cowered against the wall. Poor old Jonesy had the wind knocked out of him; but he wasn't hurt too badly for that night he was showing the barmaids the bruises on his shoulder.

The next pitch was 60ft to a blockage. No way on. Curiously enough, way down at the bottom of this evil stope, 160ft beneath the surface, was a brilliant white drift of pure driven snow. There was nothing else to see so we prussicked out, and that in itself was worth going down to watch what with Jonesy and his smashed shoulder, Merrin with his foot in a sling, Long John Cameron and his gammy leg, and Mitchell puffing and blowing and saying he was too old for this caper - what a bunch!

The Dissenters had a marvellous day on the ridge though they said the route from Meall Dearg to Sgor nam Fiannaich was very crowded, lots of walkers and climbers taking advantage of the weather. Still, they had impressive sun-tans; the rest of us were quite jealous.

Monday morning, 11:00 hours, and the Great Escape swung into action. Mitchell, the senior British officer (Fleming was delirious with swamp fever), lulled the warden into a false sense of security by playing "It's a long way to Tipperary" on his mouth-organ while the rest of us snipped through the barbed-wire fence in a last desperate bid for freedom. And we made it. Once clear of the camp we changed into home-made peasants' clothing (Merrin would insist on wearing a black evening dress with matching shoes and handbag) and headed east across the wilderness of Rannock Moor towards Crianlarich.

We stopped for lunch on the south bank of Loch Tay where there was a very interesting copper mine. The mine was mostly opencast but there were the remains of several levels, very short and dry, and one or two largish chambers illuminated by sunlight filtering down through the workings. There were ample specimens of chalcopyrite and bornite scattered on the spoil-heaps; we passed a leisurely hour poking about and smashing rocks with hammers. Then it was doon tae the loch for a wander through the ruins of the mill where the copper was smelted. There was not a great deal to see, a few tumbled buildings and a waterwheel pit, the ruins of a wooden jetty from where the copper was shipped, but it was an ideal place for a picnic and the views along the loch were insurpassable.

Incidentally, for those members who are not aware of this fact: the river Tay, which flows out of Loch Tay, is the premier salmon-fishing river in the British Isles (information donated by Peter -this'll-stop-the-conversation- Fleming).

To round off this article I'll just scribble a few lines about the S.R.T. training meet in Cathedral Cavern. We were a bit sceptical about including this in the meets list for we have learnt, from past experience, that the only people who turn up for these events are those who are quite adept already and don't need to practise. Which just goes to show that we can't be right all the time, for on the 19th of May a formidable army of novices gathered at the ford in Little Langdale, seeking instruction from that guru of mountain craft, Mike Mitchell.

Jonesy and I turned up early to help Mike rig all the ropes and secure rock-bolts etc. Actually, this was just an excuse to try out Mike's goodies before everyone else arrived so that we wouldn't make spectacles of ourselves later in the day. Got to keep up appearances, you know. We rigged four pitches, all about 50ft high: the first was a free abseil, the second an abseil that was re-belayed half-way down (object to manoeuvre past the belay without falling to one's death), the third a free-hanging abseil with a knot in the middle of the rope (object to manoeuvre past the knot - definitely not as easy as it sounds), and the fourth a ladder pitch. Prior to being fastened on the ropes and hoofed over the edge, members were briefed in the finer points of S.R.T. (single rope technique) by Mike, who also gave detailed instructions on the tying of various knots, figure-eight, bowline, and one very dubious specimen which he called a "Half a double-fishermen's knot." This one had them puzzled. "Surely," said a bystander, "Half a double-fishermen's knot is simply a fishermen's knot." Mr Mitchell had no answer to that, but it was noted, later that night, while standing in the bar of the Crown, he ordered three thirds of a pint of bitter, 50% of a large gin & tonic, and a sixth part of a dozen packets of Sailor-boy porky scratchings. Curious behavior indeed.

The abseiling went well. By the end of the afternoon we had members, who had not previously been on a rope, abbing down 150ft pitches; and Louise Hemsley got so excited she had to be dissuaded from riding down the quarry face on her bicycle with 'descender' clipped to the handle-bars. Good for a laugh. But the one that had most people snookered was the free-hanging rope with the knot in the middle. Anne Danson had a crack at this and, consequently, spent the duration of the afternoon suspended 30ft above the quarry floor with a bemused expression on her face. To round off the day everyone had a go at prussicking back up the ropes.

LAST LINE

Just a few words of explanation for those members who were not present on the Scottish meet but who are associated with the Forestry Commission, or members of the Caravan Club: while camped on the Glen Coe site C.A.T. members were harassed by the warden to such a degree that one of our number was obliged to inform him that, on return to England, he would be submitting a complaint to his superiors. The warden's attitude was intimidatory, vindictive, and totally unwarranted; we abided by the camp regulations as far as was possible, and were one of the quietest and tidiest groups on the site. Through talking to other campers we became aware that this authoritarian attitude was not confined to our group, but it transpired everyone who pitched a tent on that campsite was submitted to the same treatment. NOT SO THE CARAVANNERS: they could not put a foot wrong; their dogs could bark all night, their radios blare all day.

Whether it is the official policy of these bodies to impose double standards on their paying customers, we know not; what we do know is that this society will never again advise its members to camp on a Forestry Commission or Caravan Club site.

BOOK CORNER

We are pleased to announce a special offer.....

The Lead Miners of the Northern Pennines - by C.J. Hunt (re-print).

A History of Lead Mining in the Pennines - by A. Raistrick and B. Jennings.

Both of the above retail at £15 each, though a discount is available through the Trust. For details please contact Maureen Stone, Old Stainton Hall, Stainton, Dalton-in-Furness, Cumbria, or ring (0229) 62036.

In Newsletter No. 4 we reported that Haig Pit, in Whitehaven, was on the N.C.B. hit-list and that there would be mass redundancies this summer. Details have now filtered through; the prospects for Haig are grim indeed.

Coal production ceased on Monday the 4th of June when the last shear was removed from Haig's last longwall face, 240. All the chocks and equipment have been removed from 238 Face and 239 Face, and these faces are now being sealed off. On the 4th of August 425 men will be made redundant, then a further 65 men before the end of the month, leaving 185. Once all the salvage work is complete and a new bunker is built on the South Side, these men will go on development work.

Now then ladies.....don't miss this grand fund raising event. While the Yanks are celebrating their independence you can be enjoying yourselves at a PIPPA- DEE party at Margaret Cole's, Colt House, Colt House Lane, Ulverston, Cumbria. Tel. (0229) 53482. This invitation is also open to any interested gentlemen.
4th of July 1984

Christmas card and small gift catalogues are available to members who wish to do some fund raising. For catalogues, please get in touch with Maureen Stone (0229) 62036. All orders to Anne McFadzean, 7 Silver Street, Marton, Ulverston, Cumbria.

