Von dem Teütschen land. dxxxv

Schmelzhütten.

Leberaw.

IN dem Leberthal / wölches dē Welschen namen nach das Hagenthal heißt / ligt das gar alt closter Leberaw / so vō Carolo magno gebauwē / des mā glaubhafftig anzeigūgen hat / dē auch vor knutzen jarē etlich Reichstett zinßbar gewesen / vnd am letsten als der statt Eßlingen jhrē fürmann / so nach alter gewonheit ein wagen flachß vnd ein sester voll haber gebracht / ein aug auß geschlagen ward / haben sie die vrsach an die hand genommen / vnd nachmals kein zins mer richten oder geben wöllen.

The illustration is taken from Sebastian Munsters book 'Cosmographia Universalis' published in Basle, 1550. This book is the earliest work on mining technology and pre-dates Agricola's 'De Re Metallica' by 11 years. It shows many techniques known to be used in the Lake District by the imported German miners in the 16th Century. The picture shows a smelt mill with a waterwheel driving the bellows and two smelters hard at work.

THE GRAVITY OF THE SITUATION

by McF

"Well actually, I don't think it'll ever be used again," said the young official to the visitor he was conducting round his slate quarry, "They don't use navvies in quarries these days." The young official led his visitor up to the next face where a brand new Michigan shovel, thirteen feet tall and with scarce a scratch on its vivid yellow livery, was loading muck lumps onto a brand new Volvo BM articulated dumper, also painted yellow and emitting frenzied shock-waves through the cab window from its nest of hi-fi equipment. "Face-shovels are all the go these days. No they don't use navvies in quarries anymore." And as evening fell and the sun sank behind Black Combe, the shovels and the dumpers rumbled home to their resting places, leaving the grey dust to settle on the rust and grease of their moribund predecessors.

So much for the navvies, those caterpillar-tracked work-horses, they have come and gone and are no more. What do you mean you don't know what a navvy is? Of course you do. It's one of those great lumbering things that looks like a crane only instead of a hook it has a set of jaws; you know what I mean; it has a little square cab with a crooked chimley sticking out of the back that puff-puffs rings of black smoke. Now I can take you to a slate quarry not a million miles from the Farmers' Arms at Lowick and reveal unto you four of these gigantean beasts standing redundant and in various stages of decomposition. Admittedly, three of them have been robbed of all robbable parts but the fourth is in working order and standing idle in a corner. It, too, will never work again, not because it is damaged, not because it is incapable of the doing the job, but because it has been supreseded by a machine far bigger and better. But that's only part of it..... I know navvies are inefficient, costly to run, slow and ponderous; I also know something else, that like the battalions of mining and quarrying machines before them the good old navvy has simply gone out of fashion. Yes fashion. It is not fashionable nor desirable to employ one's navvy to remove one's muck. It is not the done thing anymore. This was brought home to me when I overheard the conversation between the young official and his visitor whilst going about my daily toil: they don't use navvies in quarries these days: said the official, but the tone in his voice and the expression on his face implied that the reason was not because these machines were inefficient but rather that they had gone out of fashion, that they were unglamorous, that they did not enhance the image this certain firm was attempting to create, that all-important image of sleekness and efficiency so crucial for winning new orders from the numerous foreign trade delegations which visit the works.

And so, exit the navvy, unmourned, soon to be forgotten. And who cares? I certainly don't. Bloody awful machines. I was merely using the hapless navvy as an example, for this issue has wider connotations. I will now commit to paper another example, not this time to do with what is fashionable as regards machinery but what is fashionable as regards working practices. For several years I was employed in the limestone industry at a quarry not a million miles from the Miners' Arms in Stainton where it was my unenviable and grossly underpaid task to sink four-inch diameter shot-holes along the top of the face. This quarry was worked by means of two fifty-foot benches, that is to say instead of working a full face a hundred feet high it was split into two fifty-foot faces, one above the other, with a wide working area on top of the lower face. For the first two years of my employment I watched a huge Terex face-shovel dig stone out of the blast, tip it over the lower face to where another shovel, on the floor of the quarry, picked it up again and trundled it two-hundred feet up a slight gradient to the crusher. After a short period of observing this endless ritual I asked myself whether a nineteenth century quarry owner, if given these mighty machines to aid him, would have employed them in the same manner. The answer was no - of course he wouldn't. The nineteenth century manager would have erected a self-acting incline from the top of the lower bench to the crusher, effectively doing away with his secondary shovel, saving himself over three-hundred gallons of diesel per week and thousands of pounds worth of repair work and depreciation of the shovel, his only overheads

after the initial installation being an operative's wages (which cancels itself out against the wages of the shovel driver) and the odd bucket of grease.

One day, by way of lighthearted diversion, I suggested to the manager that he would save himself a lot of money if he constructed an incline from the bench to the crusher that worked on the principle of one twenty-ton skip of stone descending, pulling an empty skip back to the top. Why pay all this money to the oil companies, said I, let gravity do the work for you. He, quite predictably, clutched his stomach and nearly toppled over the face in a fit of laughter. But on being questioned, on what was wrong with the idea, he had no valid argument and admitted that the incline was sound in principle. It just wouldn't work, he insisted, it just isn't done.

But why isn't it done? Because inclined tramways are, like the navvies, not compatible with the all-important image of competative industry. They too have gone out of fashion. But it goes deeper than that, it goes down to the very roots of the matter - gravity, that mysterious force which keeps our feet on the ground, is as much ignored by modern miners and quarriers as it was exploited by the old men. Gravity has gone out of fashion. No one wants to know about gravity anymore. Diesel and electic power rule the roost. And isn't it mind-boggling? all that free gravity hanging about and no one wants to use it. They say that it's not viable to use gravity anymore, that it's more economical to transport stone and mineral from the top of a hill to the bottom in diesel-powered dumpers than use a gravity operated incline. They may be right; I'm no economist; but when the Japanese start buying out our mineral reserves and erecting pre-fabricated, computer-operated, ultra-high-technological, heavy-duty, self-acting inclines I shall purchase a bottle of saki and toast their health.

However, that's enough about modern industry and it's lack of appreciation for the wholesome things in life, what I really set out to write about were the good old days when gravity was all the rage and the only shovel with which a quarrier was familiar was the type he leaned on to have a smoke. All the major Lakeland mines, and even some of the smaller concerns, were dependant on gravity to transport ore from the level mouth to the mills. At Coniston there was an incline from Middle Level down to the mill at Paddy End; an incline from Low Horse Level to Greenside mill; inclines at Helvellyn Mine, Miterdale iron mines, and at the cobalt mine at the head of Coledale. But it was in the quarries and slate mines that gravity really came into its own; here inclines not only lowered slate down mountains but lifted it up as well; nothing could tax the ingenuity of the quarry owners, they had hit upon a powerful and illimitable source of energy and they exploited it to their utmost.

So just what is an incline? Generally it is a set of railway lines, either double or single track, which carries wagons up and down a gradient. The motive force for raising the wagons can be provided by any number of prime movers, steam engines, electric motors, hydraulic engines, though it was on the principle of loaded wagons descending, pulling empty wagons back to the top, that most Cumbrian incline systems were based. The most straightforward designs were arranged thus: two parallel sets of rails ran from one elevation to another; at the highest point a winding drum was positioned, about which was coiled the cables which raised and lowered the wagons . Full tubs loaded with mineral, slate, or whatever, descending on one set of rails hauled unloaded wagons back to the head of the incline on the parallel set. On the next trip the roles were reversed; the empty wagons at the top were loaded and the full ones at the bottom were unloaded. The speed of the descending wagons was controlled by a brake on the cable drum. This system was used on short inclines only, the cost of installing double sets of rails over a lengthy gradient being prohibitive.

The long inclines, although single track, employed the same principle of loaded wagons raising empty wagons , the only difference being that mid way down the gradient the track forked, enabling the wagons to pass safely. The passing place was small, though adequate, rail being an expensive commodity, the remainder of the incline again reverting to single track. These systems were used extensively in the Cumbrian fells, being popular with both mine and quarry proprietors alike, and were in some instances in service for over a hundred years (the Long Incline which transported slate from the Burlington Quarries to Marshside in Kirkby was in use before the Furness Railway reached Kirkby in 1846 and existed

until 1952, when it carried its last load).

Underground inclines were almost exclusive to the slate mining industry, mineral mines not requiring their produce to be lowered gently when it could be tipped down a shaft to no detriment. The gradients were usually severe, following the dip of the slate vein; for this reason waggons could not be lowered directly on the tracks for fear of their loads becoming unstable. Trolleys were installed which allowed the waggons to be lowered and raised in a horizontal position. The wagons could be rolled on and off the trolleys with the minimum of effort, and when in transit were held secure with chocks. The majority of underground inclines, those relying on gravity, worked on the counter-balance system. Two sets of tracks were laid, one inside the other, the outer set carrying the trolley the inner carrying the counter-weight which was low enough to pass underneath the trolley at the mid point of the incline. This system was ideally suited for slate mining because waggons could be trundled on and off the trolley at any intermediatery levels, there being no hitching and unhitching of cables; this was an important factor in a mine which was being worked on a number of different horizons.

There is an excellent example of a counter-balance incline remaining today in the older workings of Honister slate mine. The last load was lowered circa 1964 when the vein became more or less exhausted; but everything is still in position; nothing, so far, has been cut up for scrap. The trolley, when loaded with wagon and slate, was heavier than the counter-weight and easily descended to the lowest level; after the slate had been unloaded, or the laden wagon replaced by an empty one, the trolley was then slightly lighter than the counter-weight and the positions were reversed. Another fine specimen of a counter-balance incline can be viewed in Croesor slate mine, high in the mountains above Blaenau Ffestiniog. This differs from the Honister version in as much as the cable passes through a system of sheave wheels at the head of the incline as opposed to a winding drum.

The most ingenious gravity inclines employed by the old slate quarriers were designed not to lower slate but to raise it from deep workings to where it could be easily worked and transported. These were the famous water-balance inclines, all of which have disappeared, that served some of the larger open quarries for many years. The principle was simple enough: a large tank of water descending on one set of rails raised a trolley with its wagon-load of slate on a parallel set. When it was time for the trolley to descend, the tank, which was standing at the foot of the incline, was drained, rendering it lighter than the trolley with its empty wagon. Water-balance inclines worked in conjunction with steam cranes in the three-hundred-feet deep hole of Hodge Close Quarry near Tilberthwaite; one worked in conjunction with a horse-gin in Crow Brow Quarry, Kirkby, and a whole plethora of them (one incline, two vertical shafts, the deepest being the Rachel Hoist which raised slate by means of a water-balance over a depth of two-hundred-and-sixteen feet for several ages of men and only froze up once) in Fisher Quarry, the most easterly of the Burlington quarries. (A chap was telling me that the bloke who operated the Rachel Hoist used to keep a sack tied over the end of the inlet pipe which filled the balance tank, not, as one was led to believe by the bloke in question, to stop impurities fouling the system, but to catch trout for his tea).

And that's it. I've said all I'm going to say about gravity, its uses and abuses. I'd just like to add for the record that the water-balance in Crow Brow Quarry was removed when that quarry closed during the First World War, the Rachel Shaft was filled with rubbish during the 1940s, and the Fisher Plumb-Balance and the Fisher Slope-Balance became redundant in 1947, after the installation of an electric hoist, and were ultimately quarried away. What fate befell the balances in Hodge Close Quarry I dare not hasten to guess.

Many thanks to Peter Holmes for supplying me with some very helpful information.

Percy Pitprop says:

Take your personal rope to a personal stope
for a personal peep at the pit,
But if your personal knot's incorrect at the top
then you're going to end up in the.....

The editors would like to emphasize that they had nothing to do with this poem!

AND WHILE WE'RE ON THE SUBJECT....

Here's another delightful excerpt poached from the North Lonsdale Magazine, and written by the chap responsible for the description of the river and the dresser, printed in the last Newsletter. These are actually the opening paragraphs of his article and come directly before the excerpt in Newsletter No.7. This time he treats us to a ride up the Long Incline, from the slate office at Incline Foot, Marshside, Kirkby, to Wiseman's House, the drum-house on the batteries below the Burlington Slate Quarries. Sooa hod on tull yer hats.

T'rooad wos o' down-bank now, sooa I manisht gayly weel; an' when I gat to t' mill at Beckside, I meeadd accross t' fields reet away to t' Crah brow, whahr t' sleeatt office is, an' men skiftin' sleeatts owt o' lile waggins intul girt uns on t' railrooad. I gat leeave at t' office to gang up i' t' waggins; an' while they wor gittin riddy I watch'd a chap catchin' eels i' Kirby poo. He whipt 'em out yan efter anudder as sharp as ivver he cud; yan mud ha suppooazed t' eels wos waitin' the'r torn ta be takken owt. I sa' t' rowm whahr o' the'r girt meetins er held; an' a gradely spot, tew, for sic like jobs it seem'd. Teetotal chaps hed hed the'r treeat an' yarly meetin', an' o' t' decorashuns were on t' wo's, meakkin a tremendius consarn o' t' inside. A man telt me ta git intul yan o' t' empty waggins, an' ta keep me heead lah down while I went under t' brig a bit up t' incline.

T' waggins set off at a terble reeatt, maist like fleein' of owt, an' I seed a reeapp pooin' 'em, but nowt else. When we'd gitten abowt hofe way up, I met a lock mair waggins, full o' sleeatts, gahin' as fast as if they wor ganging be steeam, an' anudder reeapp teed to t' hinder end o' them.

T' lile train seean gat to t' top, an' then a chap i' a sma' wood howse com owt an' dropt a bar reet accross t' line. "Hello! Will," sez I, "How is ta, me lad, an' how's ahd Deeavid?" Will stayrt at me a good while, an' sed, "Middlin', how's yersell," but he dudn't ken me, sooa a thowt I woddent let on. I ext 'em if he twin'd thor waggins up t' brow wi' a masheen or owt inside his box, and he girned an' sed, "Nay, nay, barn, I izzent quite match at dew that yit." "Wy, then," I sez, "how is it dun?" Sooa Will a-mak a show'd how t' full waggins pood t' empty yans up t' incline, and whahr t' reeapp meeadd o' wires went ooer t' rollers atween t' rails. "Wy, if that duzzent cap the divvel," sez I, "I nivver seed sic mak' o' wark afooar." I telt 'em I thowt it wos a terble nice spot, an' a good leeak owt tull it ano', and he sed, "Wy, mappen it wos, but it wos rayder o' t' wettest sometimes."

Percy Pitprop says: Always check your welly before you put your foot in it!

Percy Pitprop says: Many batteries make lights work! (bad enough to be one of Fleming's)

Percy Pitprop says: A rolling stone can stove your head in!

Force Crag Mine is in the process of being reopened by the New Coledale Mining Company. One of our members has been devoting practically all of his spare time to helping with clearing and retimbering the levels. Here are some extracts from his diary.

FORCE CRAG MINE 1984

by R. Calvin R.M.

Work restarted at Force Crag Mine on Sunday the 27th of May 1984. Present on that day were three of the mine owners, Peter Blezard, Lindsay Greenbank, Mike Sutcliffe, and Ronnie and Elsie Calvin. The first job was to clear a fall up at the entrance to No.0 Level and replace broken side timbers. This was a rotten day, it poured down all the time. There were no tubs we could use to clear the fall up; all the tubs were inbye a second fall on No.0 Level, so we got a tub bottom from No.1 Level, it was used to transport timbers, then we put a tub top on this and then made good use of our makeshift tub. Then on to the second fall. This was a bit harder to clear up, the side timbers had broken and the sides run in, and with the water, this had spread back down the level. It took us two weekends to clear and timber this up. Anne Danson, Alen McFadzean, and Roger from Kendal assisted us with this. Then it was inbye No.0 Level clearing small falls and retimbering till the level was clear. In all it took us five weekends to complete this work. Then it was up to No.1 Level to tackle the big fall that killed off the last owners. This was a large fall of ground, very heavy in places, and wet, and a lot of old broken timbers in the way. Good progress was made at first. We set three complete setts of timber on Sunday the 29th of July. Then the compressor was brought up to the mine so we could use the air-driven chain saw; it had been hard work using a bow saw. The new air saw made short work of the old spiling boards and head trees that were in the way.

Sunday the 5th of August we set four legs and two headtrees, assisted that day by Mike Mitchell. This gave us 44" of advance. On Sunday the 12th of August Dave Blundell, Roger, and Mike Mitchell were with us again. The rails from the tip to the fall were moved over 2" to 2ft guage so we could use Coledale Mines own tubs and we gained 22" of ground that day. On Sunday the 19th of August we got two more headtrees set. We are right into the heavy ground now. Anne Danson had some good hard shift on this fall.

Saturday the 25th and Sunday the 26th of August - extra hands at work this weekend. Friends of Peter dug trenches and laid electric cables. The rest of the gang assisted by Dave Blundell and Mike Mitchell set two headtrees and two legs. We had to cut the old timbers away. This was one of the many hard shifts we had. We had to set a good stell at the end of the shift. The forehead was heavy and running in. Then we had two weekends off. Our thanks to the mine manager Mr Blezard.

Sunday, 15th of September, two legs and one headtree set, filled all the shift, this due to shale running in from the sides and roof. Saturday the 22nd and Sunday the 23rd, CAT members gave us good support. Glass was put into office windows and a shower fitted, but parts are required yet. A good deal of work was put in on the roof. Thanks CAT. I have missed Roger out. He came over from Kendal and gave a lot of his time. Cleaned three skips out, lifted bottoms, drove eight spiling boards in 2'6" so that we could clean middles out. Now the office is in order. Pete, Anne, Mike and Lindsay stayed at weekends. Saturday the 29th and Sunday the 30th, spiling boards knocked in 2'6" more. Repairs completed to office. Three skips cleaned out. Got one headtree set at 2'6" on middle leg, about 4ft to hole through.

Saturday the 6th and Sunday the 7th of October. About this time we got young Neil with us, a young lad from the village. Set one leg on left side and cleared seven and a half tubs out. Set right side leg, drove board in at roof right side, set headtree and half a headtree on middle legs. Can see into No1 Level now. This was a good shift.

Saturday the 13th and Sunday the 14th of October. Lindsay, Mike and Neil cleared two skips out and drained water off No.1 Level down to a foot. Pete and Anne salvaged four lengths of rail and three headtrees from No.0 Level. We then filled six skips, set two legs, and set headtree on middle leg. Coupled pump up to keep water down so we could work dry. Had our first good look in No.1 Level. Monday to Wednesday, 15th to 17th, the team stayed at Force Crag Mine, cleaned through

the last of the fall, set four headtrees and legged same out. This was tricky as the run of shale kept them at it. Lifted bottoms at fall area to let the water out. This looks good now but we will have to back brush this area.

Saturday the 20th and Sunday the 21st of October. Re-laid rail and laid new rails on our way to No.1 Stope. Ten yards short of points, built second dam to keep level dry for track laying. This was one of those wet and dirty jobs no one wanted. Saturday and Sunday, 27th and 28th of October, extra gear brought to mine. Pipes, air-hose, and 500 gallon tank. Hung 3" pipes up and 3" air-hose. These laid into entrance of No.1 Stope. We require one bend to complete this job. Had to blow side off in places to get pipes laid.

Saturday the 3rd and Sunday the 4th of November. First snow fell on Sunday. Cleared small fall on No.0 Level and replaced broken boards at sides, thirty yards in. Built dam to keep water in old No.1 Level so we could complete rails to points at entrance to No.1 Stope. Lifted right side of points, had to chisel all the bolts off. This was a wet and cold job. Heavy rain washed away part of the mine road but young Neil put this right. I am fifty today. This was the day the manager gave me a new large shovel for my birthday.

Saturday the 10th and Sunday the 11th of November. Pump took to dam in No.1 Level, this coupled up and six holes bored and fired at entrance to No.1 Stope so we could move points over. Cleaned six skips out. Had to change 3" pipe, laid water on to No.1 Stope and re-laid right side of points.

Saturday the 17th and Sunday the 18th of November. Bored side holes for boring platform, dragged timber from inbye No.1 Level and built platform, laid rail in split to No.1 Stope. Bored and fired four holes for slusher house.

Saturday the 25th and Sunday the 26th of November. Moved rail over on tip so we can clean out faster, got fourteen skips out of slusher house, had to bore and fire large stones, seven holes bored and fired. Fired top-hole at end of shift to make roof safe.

Saturday the 1st and Sunday the 2nd of December. Completed cleaning of stone up from last week's shot, then started to back brush in main fall area in No.1 Level. No one wanted to work on this. It is a wet job and we left the back brushing for as long as we could, but Mr Blezard drove us to it. Drove spiling boards in at right side. Took old timber out and got one complete sett of timber in. I was glad Elsie kept a good fire going in the office so we could get dried off.

Saturday the 8th and Sunday the 9th of December. Large compressor and slusher brought up to mine. Slusher now in No.1 Stope siding. Dave Blundell and Neil got all the old 1'10" guage tubs out of No.0 Level, these put away. One complete sett of timber set at back brushing. Had to struggle with this, wet shale kept trying to run in from the right side. Another wet shift but this job is starting to look good.

Saturday the 15th of December. Mike, Lindsay and Neil replaced one complete sett of timber fifteen yards inbye fall area in No.1 Level, then worked on the new compressor. Sunday the 16th, Mike, Lindsay, Neil and Ronald changed sett of timber ten yards inbye the fall area. This now complete. One sett to change inbye yet. Elsie worked round the office for a shift. Hard frost all day, snow on the felltops, Manager away on skiing holiday. Bottom gate now kept locked by the National Trust.

Saturday the 22nd of December. Lindsay, Mick, Neil, set one complete sett of timber inbye fall area on No.1 Level, then replaced water tank on the compressor. Sunday the 23rd of December. Mick, Lindsay, Neil and myself changed two legs at left side of level inbye fall area and replaced ten feet of side timber and cleaned level out. Layed 7'x 3" air pipes on through fall area, had to bend three pipes to get round corners. Pipes need joining up yet, and two pipes to go inbye entrance to No.1 Stope then we will have air down to No.0 Level as well as No.1 Level.

Thanks to all those who have assisted us in this work.

This brief report on the work so far at Force Crag was compiled from a few notes I made.

R. Calvin R.M. 28/12/84

Who said it?

This newsletters quiz contains well-known phrases used by club members recently, can you spot who said it? Sorry no prizes.

1."I'm just going out to take my dog for a walk."
a) Captain Oates. b) Mary Wodehouse. c) Ian Matheson.

2."I'd be over there like a shot if my legs were a bit longer."
a) Dennis Webb. b) Quasimodo. c) William the Conqueror.

3."I'd be over there like a shot if my legs were a bit shorter."
a) Zola Budd. b) John Crammond. c) Princess Margaret.

4."Has anyone seen my bottle?"
a) Prince Henry. b) Chris Jones. c) W.C.Fields.

5."Stop messing about with those fireworks and get me down from here."
a) Guy Fawkes. b) Princess Di. c) Alen McFadzean.

6."Anyone can get a job if he's prepared to get his hands dirty."
a) Mike Mitchell. b) Attilla the Hun. c) Margaret Thatcher.

7."If I hadn't blown them up someone else would have."
a) Heydrich Himmler. b) The Montgolfier Brothers. c) Eric Holland.

8."I'm not coming underground today, I'm going fell-walking."
a) Wainwright. b) Mike Maher. c) Sebastian Coe.

Bats in the Belfry

If any member is interested, the international authority on bats, Dr. Bob Stebbings will be in the Lake District to give a talk in May. Please contact Chris Jones for further details.

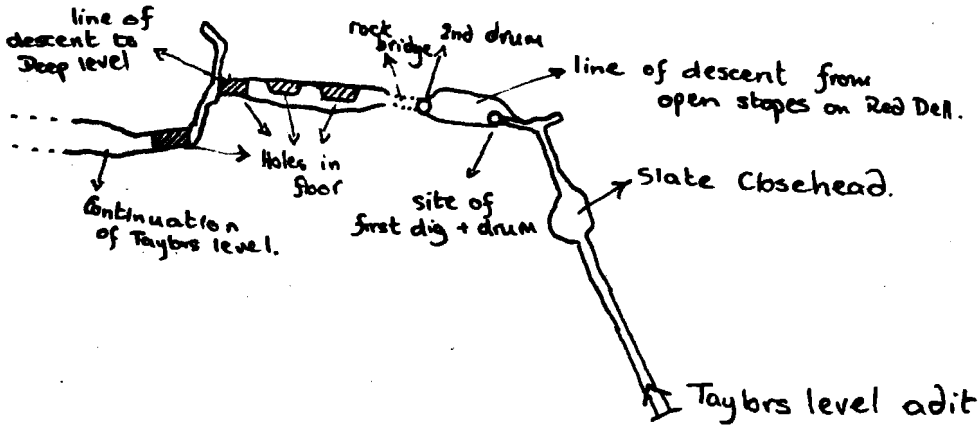
Taylors Level Revisted.

After the unsucessful digs at Paddy End on Boxing day a large team set off to Taylors level to open a route through to the open stopes and install a drum to make this safe. It must be said that Pete Flemming, not wanting to get his feet wet managed to persuade Mike Mitchell to carry him through the wet entrance on his back. The drum was quickly installed and access to the stope was gained. The way on appeared to be over a rock bridge via some steps cut in the stope a tantalising 25 ft. up. Unfortunately this had to be left until a return could be made with a maypole. Mike and Chris returned to tackle this on the 30th December. After their erection was complete and they had climbed up they stared out over a new stope with a floor about 40 ft. below them, this was pitted by large holes revealing unknown depths. After placing 2 bolts Mike descended and discovered that this was the sought after continuation of Taylors level. It also looked as if he would be able to dig his way back into the original stope. Chris went back to dig towards nim and eventually a hand connection was made. A larger team was

needed to tackle the floor. So Mike started the return trip. At this point Alastair arrived and agreed to dig and fit a drum in the 'handshake connection'. For the next few days Alastair laboured on alone but succeeded in placing the drum making the passage through the stopes considerably easier. On the 3rd January the team returned and a series of bolts were placed across the stope and a traverse line was put in. Unfortunately the floor ended some 15 ft. short of the far end with a not inconsiderable drop beneath. Over lunch a plan to cross the void was formulated and Mike in a fit of daring decided to have a go. Carrying 2 lifelines and the traverse line the lad was beginning to look like a plate of spaghetti on the move. After some very hairy antics bridging he made to the other side and placed some bolts allowing Chris to join him with considerably less effort. Taylors level continued at right angles to the stope in both directions although the right hand branch ended after 30 ft. The other branch went some 20 ft. to a right angled turn into yet another huge stope and Taylors level continued on. Only one snag... the floor was missing for some 20 ft., ah well another day. This branching is the dog-leg which can be seen on the surface seperating the open stopes. This spelt the end of the days activties and an exit was made. On the 13th a strong party returned to descend the stope and it was thought that the best place to go from would be the far wall of the dog-leg again. Dennis was the first to go and he found the pitch to be some 85 ft. landing on the roof of a level. A deviation belay was used about 20 ft. down. Dennis was quickly followed by other members of the team and it was discovered that the level which could be entered was deep level. It could be followed towards the adit mouth until it ran into Cobblers Hole and a note was found from the original team who first entered this area some 18 months before. Deep level was followed the other way to where a small drop led to the water level.

Anyone wishing to visit the mine should be careful after passing the first drum as the ground is very loose. A handline has been put in to help. A traverse line will be needed in the second stope as well as sufficient bolts and hangers (6).

SKETCH PLAN
(NOT TO SCALE)



ALDERLEY EDGE MINES

by D. Webb

Alderley Edge in the county of Cheshire, lies almost due south of Manchester city centre, some twelve or thirteen miles away on the gently undulating Cheshire plains. The mineral deposits are small by world standards, but compensate for their lack of volume by the variety of minerals present and the unusual form and setting that these display. The mines are seen today are, for the most part, not ancient, but the result of mining in the last two-hundred years. These are generally dry and with one or two minor exceptions where tunnels pass at shallow depth under locally unstable ground. The only subsidence associated with the mine workings has been the settling of material infilling shafts and tunnels.

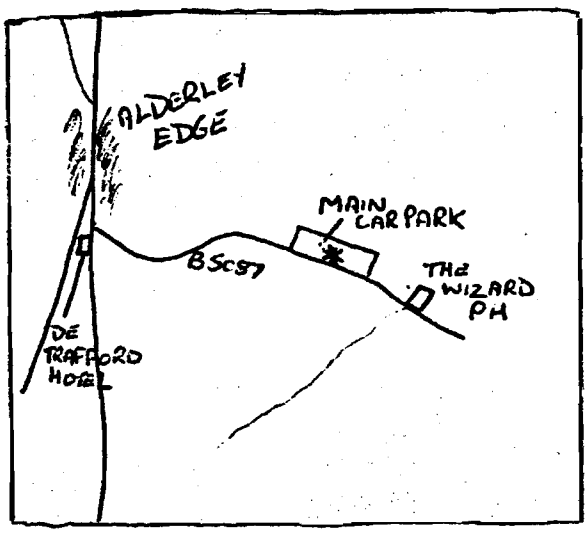
The rocks which build Alderley Edge and the surrounding area are a series of sandstones, pebbley rocks and now hardened muddy sedimentery deposits. They are 190-230 million years old and belong to a time in the earth's history known by geologists as the Triassic Period. The minerals at Alderley Edge at present form uneconomical mineral deposits, but at several periods in history constituted valuable ore deposits were worked at a profit. The chief ores are those of copper and lead, but cobalt, silver and iron were obtained and arsenic, nickel, manganese, vanadium, antimony and even gold have been recorded.

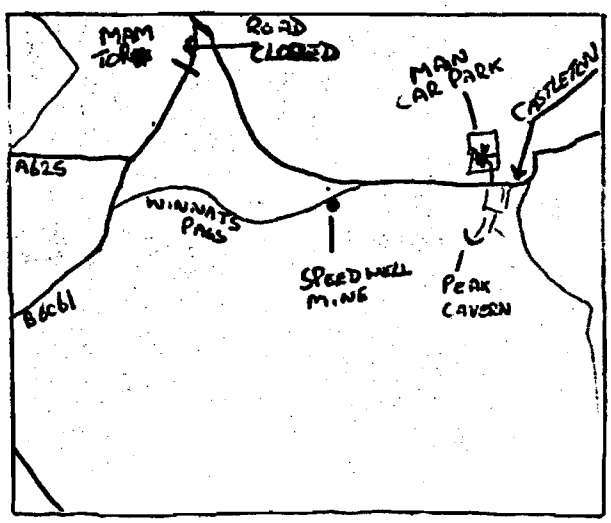
The first mining activity to be accurately stated was in 1693. Minerals were being worked by pits and galleries, the ore being drawn from the mines by means of windlasses. Mining operations had ceased by about 1827 and were not resumed for some thirty years, when the period of greatest mining avtivity began. In the period 1857-78 and the twentieth century, West Mine and Wood Mine were excavated. By 1878 all mining activities had ceased and the mines lay disused. In 1911 mining began again but only a small workforce were employed. All mining ceased in 1919 on the Edge and the mining sites are now on privately-owned land or under the care of the National Trust.

No other area of Britain has witnessed so many accidents associated with abandoned mines or natural caves as Alderley, most accidents and incidents of one sort or another occurring at Engine Vein Mine, in Wood Mine, and especially West Mine.

In 1957 the Territorial Army blasted in the entrance to Engine Vein Mine only to make it bigger. They eventually managed to seal the entrance only to have it dug out again the following week by persons not in agreement with sealing the mine. In 1960 between 300 and 400 tons of brick, rubble and rocks were poured into the entrance to West Mine, and 1964 saw Wood Mine sealed. In 1969 Wood Mine was reopened under the auspice of the Derbyshire Caving Club and the National Trust. And 1975 West Mine was reopened by means of a specially constructed shaft.

West Mine and Wood Mine are now marked at the surface with manhole covers in the corner of two fields. Engine Vein Mine is a conspicious gash in the Edge in the woods behind the Wizard, and the workings at Stormy Point are partly collapsed, partly open, and resemble natural caverns.





PEAK CAVERN

by D. Webb

Peak Cavern has the largest natural entrance of any cave in Britain, over ten metres high and thirty metres wide. From it some four kilometres of passages can be explored, of which the first kilometre is now the show cave.

Peak Cavern is one of the most important resurgence caves in the Castleton Valley, and the passages which carry the stream out to daylight are large and spectacular. Ropemaking at one time went on in the mouth of the cavern and remains of the machinery can still be seen. And the roof to the entrance of the cave is blackened with soot. The explanation for this is that at one time there were houses there and the smoke from their chimneys had blackened the roof.

Show Cave description (for members who want an easy day.)

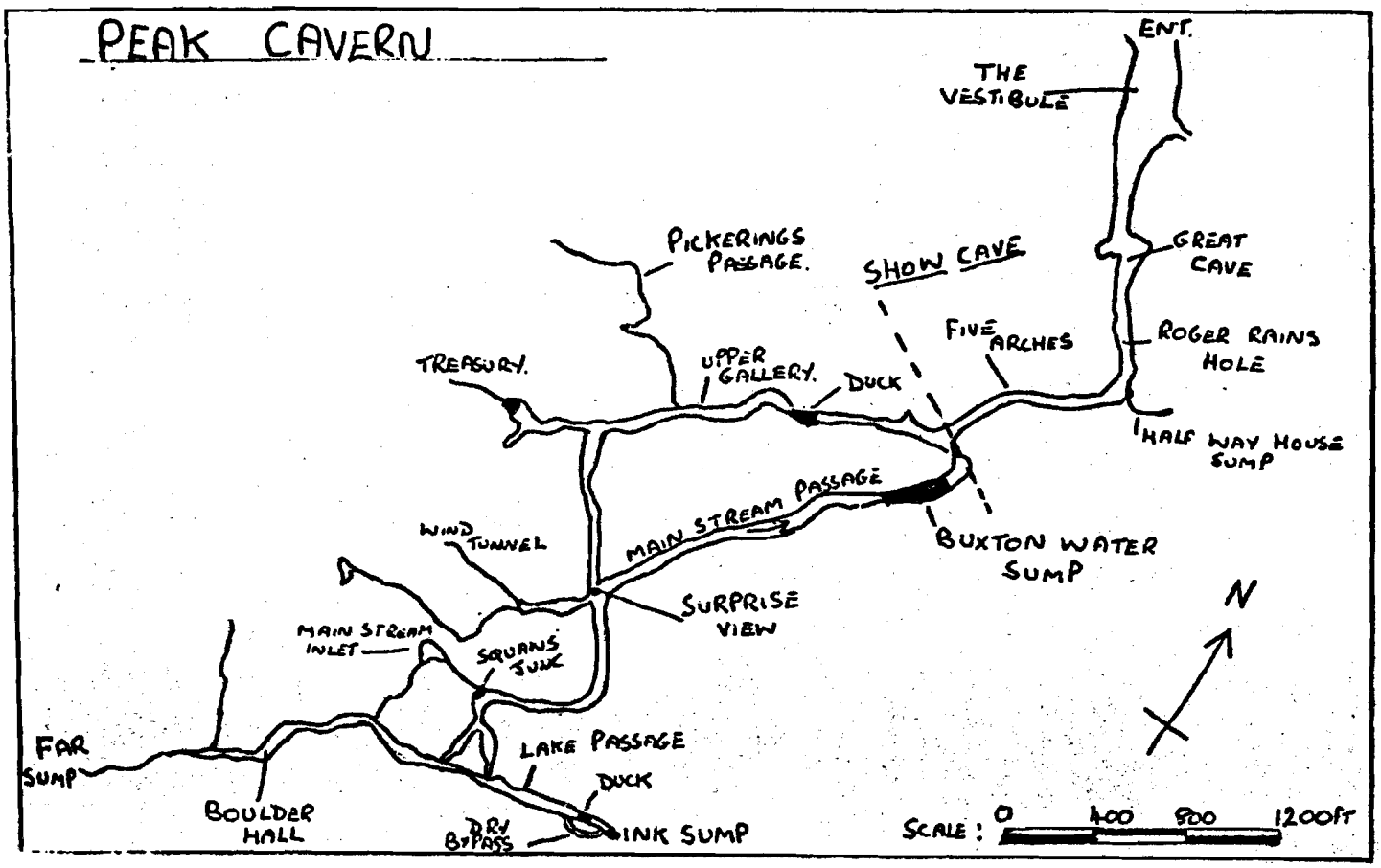
After entering through the gate, the entire Vestibule is 330ft in length, 102ft wide and 60ft wide at the end of which is another gate and chamber called the Bell House, from here a short stooping section named Lumbago Walk leads to the inner Styx lake. Years ago the only way to progress from this point was to lay flat out in the straw-covered floor of a boat as a guide pushed you under the low arch into the Great Cave. Since those days a tunnel has been driven to by-pass the lake. This is the only man made section of the entire cave and shot-holes can be seen in the roof. After emerging from the tunnel the Great Cave is a fine contrast - a chamber 150ft wide and 90ft long and 60ft high. A high well-formed passage leads to Roger Rain's House where there is a perpetual cascade of water. The way on from here is a wide flight of stairs down to what is named the Devil's Cellar. Here the River Styx is met at Halfway House. We are now in the newer part of the system, the Great Cave Series is an old master cave which has been abandoned by the river in favour of deeper channels. As the path leads along the river passage, the water is crossed four times by small bridges. Above the fourth crossing are two high avens - old water inlets over a hundred feet high. After a few yards a 'T' junction is reached marking the end of the show cave.

The Far Reaches

Left at the 'T' junction takes one to the Buxton Water Sump, the other side of which you can get to by the main route. Right at the 'T' junction the route passes by Speedwell Pot to muddy ducks, which normally are just short damp stoops in chest-deep water to emerge into Upper Gallery which is easy walking past Pickering's Passage, on right to junction with the Treasury which is used by divers to enter Speedwell Caverns. The main route continues down to Surprise View, where a fixed iron ladder 20ft drops into the main stream passage which is a classic example of a phreatic tube sometimes seven metres in diameter. Downstream the passage can be followed to the upper end of the Buxton Water Sump. Upstream at Surprise Junction the high impressive passage leads to the triple waterfalls of Squaw's Junction. Left here takes you to Ink Sump and further on Far Sump both of which are being given a lot of attention by local diving groups, in fact Far Sump has been pushed 1,400ft by Martin Farr, to emerge in a large passage 1,600ft long. It was soon clear to Martin that he was not the first to see this sight for Derbyshire's t'owd man (the lead miner) had been here before him. He noticed pick marks on the wall and the stunted remains of an old candle. Further down the passage evidence of how the miners had entered was found up an aven where countless rotten stemples were seen wedged from one wall to the other.

CAT Meet

Most of the above passages mentioned will be visited as far as the sumps. No tackle for rope and ladder climbing is needed, as the only pitch is made by way of fixed ladder. Anybody wishing to try a short dive, this can be catered for on route by way of a short duck avoiding drier route to Ink Sump. A wetsuit would be more comfortable but for those without, plenty of woollies would do the job as most of the cave is easy going which means little standing about.



IMPORTANT - Meet at G.R. 149 892 at 10:30 am, Sunday the 3rd of March 1985.

MONTHLY MEETINGS are now being held on the second Wednesday of every month in the lounge of the Farmers' Arms, Lowick. Non-members are welcome. It is hoped to have some main attraction - slide show, gear demonstration, illustrated talk, possibly even Roy Garner's epic video of the discovery of Levers Water Mine. So get there early.

PLEASE NOTE - members who decline to come on meets because they have no S.R.T. gear - are you aware that electron ladders are always available and are brought on every meet (unless stated otherwise on the meets list)?

THE 31st OF MARCH is the last day for paying your 1985 subs. Single membership £4, couple £5. After this date members who have not renewed their membership will be removed from the mailing list. Sorry about that but things are getting tight.

A LARGE LORRY is needed for transporting old tyres and various other assortments to the DING DONG site for back-filling the shaft. Anyone with a lorry they wish to lend for a day (diesel will be paid for) please contact Mike Mitchell.

DING DONG has now been gated. Anyone wishing to enter the mine would be advised to take with them a selection of spanners. Some time in the future a lock will be fitted and the key available on request. Many thanks to Mike Mitchell for putting in a lot of time, money, and effort.

ANYONE wishing to take part in unofficial exploratory meets in the Coniston Copper Mines, please get in touch with PETER FLEMING who is the new exploration coordinator. The nature of these meets renders them unsuitable for inclusion on the meets list: they are hazardous, arduos, and usually downright suicidal. Also they are S.R.T. only.

No. B46 Pit, Martin.

Whilst delving through the county record office in Barrow recently I came across a charming document showing a sketch plan of this and other mines along with a small drawing of the pit heads and the winding arrangement. This particular pit is of interest as it is near Ding-Dong and its workings connected with them. It was a horse gin pit and continued to be certainly to 1910 but perhaps later. There was also the following brief note... "In this pit are 17 men working 7 workings. Average drawings about 15 tons per day - At the pit there is 1 top hand - 1 Picker - 1 Horse & driver - The average price per pit ton is about 6/- for 33 cwt - Top hand £1 per week - picker 9/- week Horse & Driver 7/- per day - The Ore is tipped down at the Pit, then it is filled up again and Carted to a shoot ¼ mile away - and tipped into Trams, 2 men engaged for this £1 per week each, Carter about 9d ton, with 2 men to help at 22/- per week - the Ore from the last named shoot is run in the Trams to the B30 siding. " ... Unfortunately the above is not dated. This pit is featured in a photographic record of the old Harrison Ainslie Company which was sent to shareholders in the first decade of this century.

Alastair Lings, Come on Down !

The lucky prizewinner of the Christmas competition was Alastair, who sent the following detailed solution. Many thanks to the other unlucky particpants, I was truly under-whelmed by the response. His prizes will be on their way shortly.

A. Orders.

1. By telephone to Carola - Radio to barge C at Carola. 'Load barge with coal and prepare to move.
2. By telephone to Bontoc to barge B at Bontoc 'Prepare to move, do not load.'
3. By telephone to Hospital. 'One skipper is to take barge A at Port Elizabeth (P.E.) up to Carola mine, load up and tow barge C to P.E. Stand down when 4 barge loads delivered to P.E. Other skipper to go by landrover to Bontoc, pick up barge B and go to Carola, waiting as required at Lock II where he will load up and proceed to P.E.,stand down when barge unloaded, Landrover to pick up 4 engineers and take them to lock II, return to P.E., collect 3 engineers and the Bontoc skipper. Drop the engineers off at the lock and carry on to Bontoc. Stand down.
4. Telephone to Engineers. ' Start repair work as soon as you arrive at lock II.'
5. Telephone to docks. 'Start loading zinc in one hold of freighter as soon as she docks. Load coal from barges as soon as they arrive into other hold.

B. Timing.

Hours.	Situation
0	Initial orders given
2	4 engineers arrive at lock II
5	Barge C at Carola is loaded
6	3 more engineers arrive at lockII. repairs commence
8	Skipper arrives at Bontoc. Collects empty barge B.
12	Barge A arrives at Carola, starts loading.
17	Barge A loaded, sets out for P.E. with C in tow.
18	Lock II working.
30	Barge B arrives at Carola, starts unloading. Barge A & C arrive at P.E. unloads.

35. Barge A & C unloaded, head back to Carola, Barge B loaded, sets out for P.E.
47. Barge B arrives P.E., starts unloading.
48. Barge A & C arrive at Carola, start loading.
52. Barge B unloaded, stand down.
53. Barge A & C loaded, sets out for P.E.
65. Barge A & C arrive at P.E., Start unloading.
70. Barge A & C unloaded, stand down.
73. Freighter sails on time.

5 barge loads @ £2000 per barge ···· £10000

£10000 & £22000 (zinc) ··· £32000.

Well done, unfortunately the uninsured freighter was attacked and sunk by pirates in the South China Sea.

The Best Dressed Man of Seghill

Some things never change, the following extract is from an old folk song probably sold as a broad sheet for a penny. These broadsheets were often produced in the 18th and 19th century in great numbers usually as a critical commentary of the day. This particular one tells of a strike at Earsdon Colliery in 1831 when one man tried to take work at a neighbouring mine, which his fellow workers thought was a betrayal of the common cause. The song goes on to tell of the viscious reprisals that his former workmates carried out. The strike itself was a sucess and led to the formation of the Durham and Northumberland miners union. It was also notable in that the authorities used the local yeomanry and a detachment of eighty marines brought by sea from Portsmouth to try to subdue the miners spirit. This provocative act caused the striking men to throw corves (coal skips) and winding machinery down the shafts at Blyth, Bedlington, Hebburn, Jesmond and other places. Finally in June the employers conceded the mens demands including a maximum working day of 12 hours for boys. The following year the union was broken by the employers.

It was on March the nineteenth day,
Eighteen hundred and thirty one O,
A man from Earsdon Colliery
His brethren did abscond O;
As other men were standing off,
He would not do the same O;
For idle work would never do,
He'd rather bear the shame O.

How like the present dispute. How many songs will be written and performed of the events of 1984-85 ? Who will sing the praises of the striking miner now? Do we have a bard in our midst who will produce a song, a historical verse to commemorate these sad times. Send them to McF. or CDJ for inclusion in the Newsletter.

Percy Pitprop says: Many hands are never there when wanted!

CONISTON COPPER MINES - A PROGRESS REPORT

by Peter Fleming

An important discovery was made on 17th November, 1984, by four CAT members at the 'Back Strings' Levers Water. Mike Mitchell, Peter Fleming, Dennis Webb and Ian Mathieson, had gone there to check out a couple of things that had been noticed on the 2nd September 1984, when "The Funnel" was descended for the first time. If you have all been reading your Newsletters, you will know to where I refer, if not read Alen Mc Fadzean's lead article in Newsletter No.6, page 3 para 4. Two thirds of the way down the funnel crater, on the right, we had spotted a small suspicious hole in the clay bank. We enlarged it enough to shine a light into and to our surprise it looked like a tunnel with over three feet of water in it. Not wanting to get wet so early in the day, we decided to come back to it after completing our other tasks. Quickly we abseiled down the first short pitch over the brink of the stope and belayed to the bolt at the top of the big pitch. Fleming set off to force a way along a sloping ledge covered in loose rubble, which ran across the opposite wall ("Just like the Alps" he said). Dennis played out the rope as progress was made, and loose rubble and timbers were sent crashing down the 170 ft drop below. A rock peg served as a runner until progress was halted when the ledge petered out after about 45 ft. Two more pegs were hammered in and an abseil rope was lowered into the stope, where it was estimated a tunnel we had spotted previously would be about 50 ft below. Dennis abseiled down from his end and penduled across to a ledge to meet me. As I braked opposite the tunnel, a peg came out and I felt myself drop two or three feet until the second peg took the strain - would it hold? It was my lucky day - it held. The tunnel was entered, but there was nothing to be found here, it was blocked after only five yards, but it almost certainly used to connect with the next stope, in Arete Chamber.

Whilst all this was going on, Mike Mitchell was getting a bit bored and began poking at the clay bank below the small hole, where a trickle of water came out. Suddenly a torrent was unleashed. A waterfall cascaded down the stope carrying everything loose before it, like a flush in a rush. The noise of the 170 ft mini-Niagara, made communication difficult. Dennis and I prussiked back up to Ian. We stripped the traverse rope and pegs and still the torrent raged. Ian went down to look at the stope and tunnel then returned. After an hour, with no sign of the waterfall abating, Mike re-belayed our rope so that we could get out without a soaking. We joined Mike, while the torrent still raged. By this time we were having anxious thoughts about Levers Water. Had we pulled the plug? What would the North West Water Authority have to say? Would Coniston Village be awash? No one dared to go and look. It was two hours before the water began to subside. It was obvious that we had unwatered something big. We enlarged the entrance and scrambled in. The water

was now only one foot deep. The tunnel ran due south and after a hundred feet we entered a stope with a sump to the right. On climbing into the stope we found the higher we went the more interesting it became. First there were straw stalactites up to four feet long and only a quarter of an inch thick, and also stalagmites, and then a whole wall of colour ranging from all shades of bright blue through to green and white. This was copper carbonate leached from above by percolating water from the surface and resulting in this secondary mineralisation. Continuing along the tunnel a right hand branch beneath more stopes brought us to another colourful spectacle, the floor on the coninuation of this tunnel was the most beautiful pale blue, shimmering beneath three inches of water. We could see about 40 ft along the "blue passage", as we called it, but we decided not to disturb it until it had been recorded on film, however we were intrigued to find out where it went. We followed the main tunnel again for 127 ft. to another right hand branch, where the mud on the floors was covered with miners clog marks. Fifty feet further there was a hole in the floor to the right, with the remains of a ladder in it and nearby lay old detonator boxes, fuse wire, and a small wooden pricker. Moving on a left turn brought us into a small stope with a 15 ft ladder against the side. It was in sound condition and safe to climb, and carved on it was the legend "C M Co" (Coniston Mining Company?). Nearby were blue and white stalactites and associated stalagmites, also a bat in hibernation, and there were tallow candles everywhere - the place was wick with them!

By now we were amazed at the importance of our discovery, which was not shown on the old Coniston Mine plan we had, and therefore not expected, and we had not seen all of it yet. We wondered how old the mine was and when had it last been entered - for the answers, read on.

At the opposite end of the stope to the ladder, a collapsed floor revealed a gaping hole of great depth. Stones thrown down it took an incredible twenty-three seconds to come to rest. It was later proved that they rolled part of the way, but at the time of writing no one has been to the bottom despite one attempt, which was aborted at 200 ft.

We made our way out to the surface, where it was now dark, and decided to come back as soon as possible to survey and photgraph the mine and finish exploring at least the tunnels.

We returned the following Saturday, and just to prove how important this discovery was, Eric Holland took his gear out of mothballs and came as well. Chris Jones and Lindsay Harrison also joined us. The moment came that none of us particularly relished, and that was the desecration of the "Blue Passage",

but it had to be done - or someone else would! Sure enough, after 40 feet the passage turned right and soon came to a fourway junction. The right branch was partially stoped with stacked deads on timbers, which formed the roof. It was blind after 26 ft. The left branch ended at 40 feet in an alcove filled with a blue pool, and into it flowed static cascades of intense blue and green copper carbonates. It was a most beautiful sight - an Aladdin's cave of colour. It is to be hoped that it will remain undisturbed. There is no reason why it would not be. We named it "The Blue Lagoon".

Returning to the junction and turning left, we came to another offset fourway junction. Gaps in the floor gave glimpses of a stope below. Parts of the floor were false. Straight ahead the tunnel was partially back-filled. To the left, passing over a manway with a ladder below, the end of the tunnel was reached after 45 ft. Another bat was found hibernating here. Back at the junction and turning right, the floor had gone after 34 feet, leaving a deep stope bending away out of sight. It is possible that this connects with Brow Stope on the surface, providing access for the bats. This completed our preliminary exploration of these workings, which, it was decided, should be known as Levers Water Mine. The original entrance can still be traced on the shore of the tarn. It is certainly one of the most important finds we have made in the Coniston Mines, revealing 750 ft. of passages. Eric says it probably dates from the 1830 period but was reworked in 1908, therefore most of the artifacts including a number of ore sacks we noticed relate to this later date. He also stated that the existence of this mine was known to him, and it is mentioned in his forthcoming book, but he was unaware of its location until now. The deep stopes and ladderways will be the subject of future investigation by CAT-SAS (Special Abseil Squad) in the hope they will provide the key to the lost extensions to Top Level and Middle Level. The mine being of reasonably easy access, will provide an interesting extension to Coniston Copper Mines for the more casual researcher, but it is to be hoped that the beautiful and delicate features in there will be respected and not disturbed. At the time of writing, Roy Garner is busy producing a colour video film re-enacting its discovery and exploration with sound recordings. So far the results are very encouraging, and it is hoped on completion of this documentary film that a social evening will be arranged for members to view it. You may even see it on your telly, who knows!

Percy Pitprop says: What goes up must come down - preferably without assistance. (Learn to ladder on S.R.T.)

Percy Pitprop says: Abseils give you time to ponder.

Percy Pitprop says: A pitch in time is just fine.

More Welsh Wheels.

As mentioned in the last newsletter the Cwm Ciprith waterwheel has had some rudimentary repairs done to it. Since then several members have expressed a wish to do a little more. Perhaps they foresee it working again although this would be a major task. I know that CAT member Damian McCurdy is involved in this work so perhaps he would let us know if future work parties are necessary or desirable.

Boring Holes!

Again as covered in the last newsletter the Parys Mountain saga carries on. The Canadian company are now drilling and one of our sister organisations, the Welsh Mines Society, are confident enough to have organised a future trip there. Such is the benefit of inside information.

Information required.

Chris Jones would like any information on the present state of the Muirshiels and Gasswater mines in Ayrshire and Renfrewshire (or whatever they are called this week). These two barytes mines were held up in the late 50's as the great hope for Scottish mining but since then he can find little. In 1957 both mines were equipped to the very highest standard with skip-wound shafts and underground transport provided by battery locomotives. Barytes from one of the mines was sent to Widnes in Lancashire for treatment. It is thought that Gasswater mine was owned by Anglo-Austral Mines Ltd.

Ireland.

Is anyone interested in another trip to the emerald isle in 1986? It will be possible to visit a whole load of new localities from our last visit in 1983 although several of the old locations should also be worth seeing again such as Silvermines and Avoca. Please inform Chris Jones on (0229) 63892.

THE EASTER MEET will this year be centred in the Galloway region of south-west Scotland. Members wishing to attend please contact Chris Jones, 0229 63892, about a week before the event for details of camp-sites etc.

ANYTHING TO SELL OR BUY? then why don't you advertise in the Newsletter. No charges but donations are welcome. Get rid of your old ropes and raggerly wet-suits in these pages, advertise events etc. Anything to grouse about? then get it off your chest and write a letter to the Editor. Send articles, cartoons, gossip, money, blank cheques. And send them soon 'cause we're running out of ideas.

WENDY, thank you for a marvellous evening. The fungi al aglia was divine.

Percy Pitprop says: A rolling stone is sometimes thrown (by you know who!)

Percy Pitprop says: A scaffolding pole can take its toll.

Percy Pitprop Definitions

(1) "Level" C.A.T. Members leaving the PUB.

(2) "Lode" Eliphants Droppings.

(3) "Stemple" Plural of Temple !

(4) "Crosscut" Work of angry Hairdresser.

(5) "Orehopper" Type of Cricket found in Mines.

(6) "Stope" Habitat of Greater & Lesser Orehopper.

(7) "Kibble" Orehopper's Feeding Vessel.

(8) "Jackroll" Something he likes to do with Jill.

(9) "Run-in" Pub Doorway.

(10) "Dressing Floor" Area behind C.A.T. Members vehicles.

(11) "Wheel-Pit" Hole where certain members get their cars stuck.

(12) "Drift" Additional Winter parking for certain Members!.

(13) "Adit" A form of Boasting!

(14) "Backfilling" The art of leaving gear for others to carry.

(15) "Horizon" The point over which the Backfillers rapidly disappear.

(16) "Deads" The group left with the gear at the end of the day.

(17) "Hanging-Wall" Could be useful if things dont get better.

(18) "Footwall" A leg up for some members.

(19) "De-water" A useful practice before putting on a Wetsuit.

(20) "Fault" Something you find always belongs to someone else.

(21) "Jumper" See "Adit".

(22) "Country-Rock" Music to go down Mines by.

(23) "Buddle" A b***++*+ deep puddle.

(24) "Scraper" Method of getting onto the Committee.

(25) "Screening" Means of keeping you off the Committee.

(26) "Fathom" Three people or One Man and his Dog.

(27) "Hush" A term of endearment used by my wife.

Who is the mysterious Percy Pitprop? How did he amass his fortune? Who is the woman behind the man? How much power does he wield from his top-secret mountain hide-away? How does his influence effect East-West relations?....Questions that might never be answered. READ PERCY PITPROP ONLY IN THE C.A.T. NEWSLETTER.

meets review

by McF

SCENE I

And there we sat, sixteen members with a heap of ropes on the shaly rim of the Funnel, that daunting hole at the side of Levers Water. On a rocky hill, his rucksack bedecked with car spot-lights and clanking cans of video film, stood Roman Garnanski, camera in his hand, loud-hailer pressed to his lips.

"Action."

Ah, the film epic of the year, the re-enactment of the Cumbria Amenity Trust's discovery of Levers Water Mine, filmed in glorious video by this famous son of Ambleside. You could almost here the gruff voice of Orson Wells rehearsing the narrative as Dennis Webb slid down the hand-line to the mine entrance..... "Coniston. The final frontier. Man's five year mission to seek out new mines, new experiences. To boldly go where no man has gone before."

The leading actor, a Clint Eastwood look-alike fresh from his holiday villa in Kentmere, stood up and addressed the cast of thousands: "Can I have your attention, Dahlings. Now the plan is to split into two groups. Group A will conduct some exploratory work down in the Windy Stope, Group B will try and push the new mine. You may choose to go on whichever trip you fancy."

"Which mine is the film crew going in?" said Chris Jones, slipping shoulder pads into his furry-suit and dabbing his cheekbones with rouge.

"The new mine," said the leading actor with a fixed toothy grin as Roman Garnanski's camera zoomed in on his shiny head.

"Well the new mine's for us then," cried the overwhelming majority of the cast of thousands as they recreated the crowd scene from Ben Hur.

"Fair enough, Dahlings," said the leading actor.

"Cut!" cried Mr Garnanski, "Bloody battery's gone flat."

"Bugger this," said Mike Maher, making a rare guest appearance, "I'm going fellwalking instead."

SCENE II

Down in Levers Water Mine things were getting quite hectic. Jonesy, now wearing a wide-brimmed hat, safari suit, and wielding an eight-foot bullwhip, was charging about the place insisting that his name was Indiana, and not Christopher as the registrar had erroneously stated on his birth certificate. Lindsay Harrison, after failing the audition for a part as an Arabic pit deputy, was allocated the post of lighting engineer, and Angela Wilson, who dressed up as a nun because someone told her we were filming the re-make of the Sound Of Music, got the job of carrying Roman Garnanski's collapsable canvas chair which had El Supremo stamped on the back in Gothic script.

"Action!" cried Mr Garnanski through his loud-hailer,"Scene two, take one."

Jones and Webb abseiled along a horizontal boulder slope. To make things look more impressive the camera was turned on its side and Peter Burton made fearful rumbling noises with a stick and an oil drum.

"How deep do you think this black abysmal pit is, Indiana?" gasped Webb, as he dramatically wiped beads of sweat from his brow with the sole of his left boot.

"It's hard to say," answered Jonesy, fighting with the nine-foot rubber anaconda he had surrepticiously removed from his tackle bag, "I expect it's two or three thousand feet at least."

Two-hundred feet down they came to a place where the stope narrowed to a slit; alas, it was just too narrow for Jonesy's wide-brimmed hat.

"Gosh. Dashed hard luck, Indiana," exclaimed Webb, "It looks like I'll have to push on by myself."

"Rats!" answered Jonesy as he shot a pair of camel spiders off his arm with a revolver, "I think you might be right. Good luck old pal."

Webb who, along with his six brothers, had starred in other films such as Snow White, The AdventuresOf Tom Thumb, and The Time Bandits, swambled through the slit and descended into the unknown. After a few seconds the rope jerked fiercely and there was an ear-rending scream.

"My God, what's up now?" shouted Mr Garnanski, tearing his hair out at the top of the pitch.

"Webb is suspended above a pit of hungry alligators and he can't get back up the rope," replied Jonesy, boredom creeping into his voice, "And I've run out of bullets. All I've got is my razor-sharp Persian scimitar. What shall I do?"

"Cut," rasped Roman Garnanski as he replaced the lens-cap on his camera.

Meanwhile, down in the Windy Stope, far away from the roar of the grease-paint and the smell of the crowd, Wickenden was abseiling down a rather shaky shaft which had been discovered on the day we explored the Funnel. It was our hope to find a new route down to Grey Crag Level.

"What's down there?" enquired Fleming when the rope went slack. The rest of the A Team waited with bated breath.

"Sod all," replied Mark from below, "That was a waste of time."

And so another epic trip drew to a close

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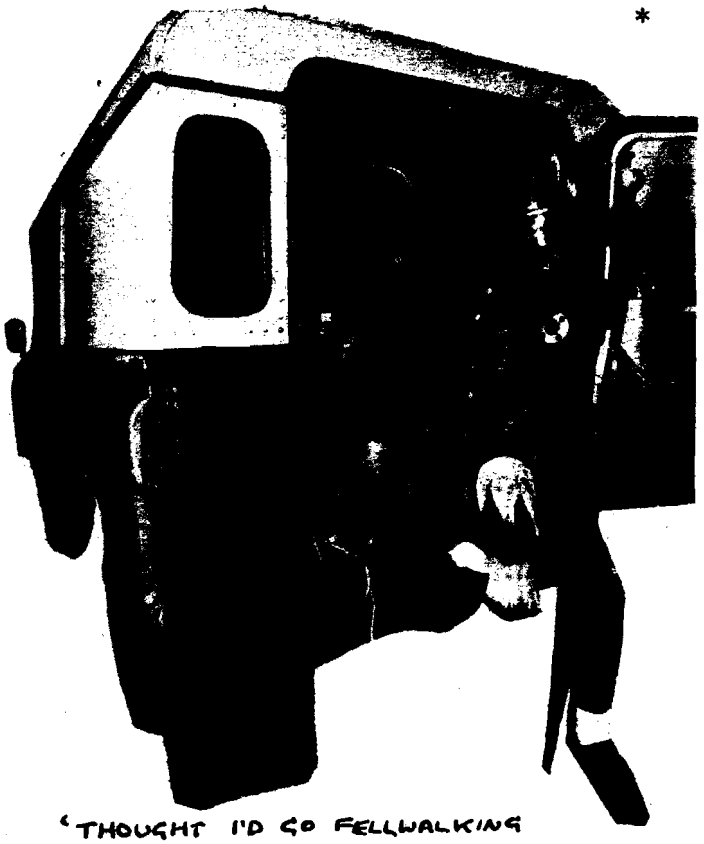

'THOUGHT I'D GO FELLWALKING INSTEAD,' SAID MAHER, LEAPING DRUNKENLY FROM THE BACK OF HIS LAND ROVER.

Boxing Day was icy cold. Deep snow lay on the Coniston Fells; the wind was sharp and merciless. Again we split into two groups, one to have a crack at digging into Kernal Crag Level, the other to push the dig in Gaunt's Level. As we were pausing for breath after carting the gear up to Paddy End - the mill site beneath Levers Water - Mike Maher rolled up in his Land Rover. "What's this?" we muttered amongst ourselves, "surely Mike's not thinking of going underground." We were not mistaken: Mike was not thinking of going underground. "Not today, chaps," he cried jovially through the Land Rover window as he lurched past in an acrid cloud of black smoke, "Thought I'd go fellwalking instead."

Both digs were miserable failures. Kernal Crag kept running with loose scree and Gaunt's Level required timbering heavily to support a roof choked with massive boulders. Both these digs are long-term jobs and are, quite frankly, not worth bothering with when there are hazard-free, and ultimately more rewarding, digs such as the one at the foot of South Shaft.

Disillusioned by events at Paddy End, both teams joined forces and marched round the crag to Taylor's Level with a view to pushing the dig in the Red Dell Stopes. Now at this point I must mention that several members - those suffering from frostbite and hyperthermia - regarded the prospect of wading through the icy water at the entrance with dire misgivings. It's only fair to admit that I was one of these faint hearts; yes I, the intrepid McF, baulked at the thought of immersing my throbbing chilblains in that freezing liquid, and took instead a party of one (Mad Max Dobie) on a conducted tour of the snowbound, but dry, Blue Quarries. Max and I were not the only ones to chicken out - there was a certain person, would you believe, and a founder member and pillar of this society, who took advantage of poor old Mike Mitchell, yes he actually played on Mike's good-nature and begged to be carried piggy-back through the water to firmer ground. Shame on you Fleming; I know Mike's the new chairman but that's no reason to sit on his shoulders.

The dig was successful. Much work by Mitchell, Jones, Webb, and Lings has been done here since that Boxing Day meet, culminating in a new, and much less

arduous, route into the fabled Cobblers' Hole. With a bit of luck this exciting trip will be on the meets list for the second half of this year.

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On the sixth of January a dozen members met at Warton Crag for a trip down the local iron mines. It was disconcerting to note that the majority of those who turned up did not attend the previous meet at these mines, and that those who had been here before refused to go underground. Very suspicious, thought I, me being one of the unwitting majority who had never supped the celestial pleasures of the North Lancashire iron-ore field.

As we were about to set off up the track, an old ramshackled Land Rover with hens on the roof and donkeys' heads lolling nonchalantly out of the windows screeched to a halt six inches from the boots of Eric Holland, our meet leader and residant sadist.

"Ah, good morning Mr Maher," said Eric as he lit the candle on his Tyrolean hat, "are you coming underground today?"

"Not bloody likely. I've been down there before," replied Maher, through the steam rising from under his bonnet, "I'm going fellwalking instead."

Main attraction of the day was Crag Foot Mine, situated high on a hill in the middle of a clay-pigeon shooting range. Lucky for us there were no clay-pigeon shooters about, but having said that, if there had been they might have stopped us going underground. Still, can't win them all.

"Here we are," exclaimed Eric, dramatically throwing wide his arms as though to reveal some wonderous sight, "This is the stuff adventure is made of. Go ye now into the earth and do great deeds."

All very well but we could see nothing but rotten trees and broken clay-pigeons. Then Dave Blundell, after chasing one of his pet ferrets under the roots of an oak, proclaimed that there was a deep and slimy hole descending steeply into gloomy darkness. Eric eased himself down into the thick red mud with a gleeful smile on his face. He was followed by Alistair Lings, Dennis Webb, Max Dobie, McF, and Mike Mitchell who got jammed between two rocks and was obliged to retreat to the surface.

I am at pains to think of anything nice to write about Crag Foot Mine; it is not an endearing place. The tunnels are about four-feet high, half-filled with hematite sludge, topped up with evil-smelling air, and wind round in ever-decreasing spirals to deliver all would-be explorers to an unhealthy-looking sump that Eric had the nerve to call a lake.

"Of course it's a lake," insisted Eric in an injured tone.

Bring on the Oxford Universal Dictionary:

LAKE (lēik), sb². A large body of water surrounded by land; in recent use often applied to an ornamental piece of water in a park etc.....nothing about a glutinous, man-eating pit of red slime, 10' x 8' with six inches of air space above it and, for some unearthly reason, a double-core telephone cable disappearing bravely into its depths. But perhaps I've got hold of the wrong end of the stick, for glancing again at the dictionary I see there is another meaning for the word.

LAKE (lēik), sb³ 1616 1. A pigment of reddish hue obtained by the combination of some colouring matter with metalic oxide or earth.

That sounds more like it. Roll on Easter.

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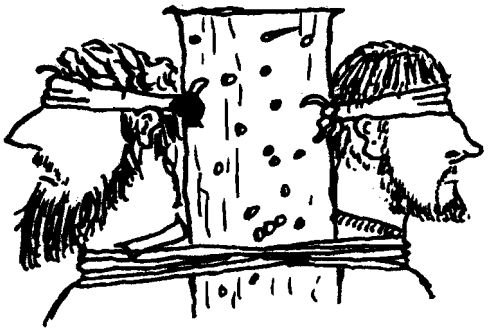

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