

18th & 19th June 1983
Nenthead

Meet Leader P Fleming

On Saturday, four members, Richard Hewer, Phil Murphy, Ian Matheson, and myself, all clad in wet suits, set off on what must be the longest and wettest underground through trip in a disused mine anywhere. The Caplecleugh/Smallcleugh system is about a three mile circuit, which demands a good knowledge of both mines for route finding. We entered Caplecleugh Horse level and went up the incline and passed a few roof collapses then suddenly dropped into chest deep water, beyond this point the mine becomes very interesting, there are many artefacts in side passages and up in stopes and rises – wooden ventilating machines, wagons, toilet boxes, templates for the arched tunnels, spades and candles, etc., but you have to know where to look. We carried on for what seemed ages through the deep water. We passed the Bog Shaft and its machinery room, and soon reached a calcified ladder way, which took us to the sub levels below Smallcleugh. Another ladder way took us into the Cowhill Cross Vein in Smallcleugh Mine. At last we were into a dry and familiar area. On the way out we visited the Ballroom Flats and some new workings (to us) nearby which are not shown on PDMHS mine plan. We then continued through the Wheel Flats and Smallcleugh Flats and out to daylight.

It is a rewarding trip and will worthwhile for all you people out there who have yet to do it. Grade “W”. Walk and wade – no tackle necessary.

Sunday was a day to remember as well. Six members made what may have been the first descent of Brewery Shaft by SRT. These were, Martin Maher, Ian Matheson, Phil Murphy, Pete Blezzard, Anne Danson, and myself. Supervision at the shaft top was by Mike Mitchell. The single 250ft pitch caused a lot of elasticity on the bottom end of the rope. While the rest of the team pushed on further up the Ramp Ghyll Deep Level and released dams of water, I concentrated on taking photographs of the machinery in the rooms near the shaft bottom. It was obvious that some bearings had recently been taken from the Gilks Water Turbine. The old waterwheel and mine trucks at the head of the Nent Force Level were worth seeing. The others returned, having pushed the level further than anyone before. The climb out took a long time. It was a test of perseverance and strength and Anne Danson was presented with the Award of Merit at the Annual Dinner for taking part in this descent, probably the first female ever to go down there. Three other members spent the day exploring Ramp Ghyll Mine.

Once again we stayed at Cherry Tree. It is fortunate that we have at our disposal, in a small place like Nenthead, a homely and comfortable place, which can accommodate all of us at a reasonable price. Not everyone would put up with the dirt and turmoil of a Mining Society invading their home.