30th Sept – 2nd Oct 1983
Nenthead Weekend

Six members assembled at Cherry Tree Cottage on the Friday evening, being joined by a further four members on the Saturday morning. Travelled across to Groverake Mine on the Allenheads to Rookhope road, a fluorspar mine recently abandoned by The British Steel Corporation. Machinery nearly intact on surface, including shaft headgear. First tackled concrete lined incline at south end of mine yard, but ended in neck deep water at base of incline. Returned to surface & entered gated level at northern end of yard. Wide level leading to head of incline with gantry over containing switchgear. The electricians in the party threw a few switches and the lights came on down the incline, with a submersible pump running at the bottom. Levels off at bottom of incline & inspected stopes up 70' ladderway, with 40' ladderway above that. Vein appeared very wide & loose but no obvious signs of recent mining activity on this horizon, despite strings of tubs (approx 100 in total) & four Eimco compressed air loaders in levels at base of incline. After 3 hours underground, surfaced & interpreted surface installations.

Returned to Nenthead via Burtree Pasture Mine at Cowshill, formerly worked by Weardale Lead Co, & later by Swiss Aluminium UK Ltd. Mine abandoned in 1981, level gated, with recent pile of spoil dumped in front of gate to prevent access and very effective it was too! Interpreted timber framed, corrugated asbestos cement sheeted offices, workshop stores etc, then back to Cherry Tree.

That evening, after dinner, Peter Fleming gave voice, "How about a quiet, discrete trip into Smallcleugh, under cover of darkness, to a fabulously mineralised flat that I know, beyond the Ballroom Flat, Richard Hewer showed me where it is, I'll take you there for you to collect mineral samples galore". The raiding party stole across the moor, not a light showing, dismantling the top 18" of the dry stone wall at Smallcleugh Level entrance. There then followed an extremely rapid (40 minute) trip through to the Ballroom Flat. Peter then feverishly scrabbled round attempting to find the fabulous grotto, whilst the remainder of the party stood around, tapping fingers, whistling & staring intently at items you wouldn't normally give a second glance to. Half an hour later he gave up, muttering "Its round here somewhere, I'll check with Richard and we'll come back again". The exit from the mine was even more rapid than the entry, beckoned on by the prospect of a pint or two at the "Crown". Arrived at the entrance with everyone sweating freely, to find that we had been walled into the mine by persons unknown. The wall was dismantled & rebuilt, the party then creeping back over the moor by the light of the moon, passing steamed up cars full of watchful eyes en route to Cherry Tree Cottage.

Sunday

With the arrival of four additional members, a conflab was held, with the party deciding to split. Mark Wickenden, Alen McFadzean & Martin Maher elected to descend Wellgill Shaft by S.R.T. to the Nent Force Level, to force the exploration upstream towards Brewery Shaft. After seeing off the S.R.T. group through the twice sealed shaft inside the barbed-wire fenced enclosure, the remainder of the party entered Brownley Hill Mine. Spent 3 hours underground climbing up into stopes &

flats, then the party started to break up on exit to day. Mike Mitchell led a party on a surface walk over the upper reaches of Gudhamgill & across the moor to Roughside Farm, to check out shafts for future exploration, encountering a friendly gamekeeper en route, who offered much assistance to enable the party to locate the whereabouts of the public footpaths in the area.

On return to Cherry Tree prior to breaking up the meet, Peter Fleming was still trying to whip up enthusiasm for the Smallcleugh Flats trip, "I've checked with Richard, I'm certain I know where it is now…… I think" Not surprisingly, there was a distinct lack of takers, everyone too tired after an active weekend.

Joint Meet Leader – Dave Blundell 16/10/84
Compiled from my notes.