

Summer 1986

Ding Dong Exploration

Following the death of a dearly loved and dearly missed friend I am attempting, along with others, to continue the exploration and, hopefully, the eventual surveying and recording of the Ding Dong Extension, namely all those workings to which the Derby Rise allows access and which were partially explored by Mark Wickenden during the summer of 1984.

The nature of these workings, because of the fluctuating water table, dictates that access can only be gained during prolonged periods of dry weather, the 67yd Level, at the end of which is situated the Derby Rise is flooded in its entirety for most of the year.

16/7/86 Work Meet.

Unable to drum up support I descended the entrance shaft alone in order to inspect the water level in the lower reaches of Ding Dong. Lindsay Harrison had reported during the winter that the water was as high as the 55yd Level, so I was not feeling particularly optimistic. Now, I am not too familiar with the Ding Dong workings so I was pleasantly surprised to find myself in the Marton Chamber and down at the 67yd Level, without a single deviation from the route; I was seven more surprised to find the water level low enough to allow me to push through to the Derby Rise. I returned to the surface rather pleased with myself.

5/8/86 Exploration

I arrived at Ding Dong at 6pm to meet Dennis Webb and Bert Wheeler. We descended to the 67yd Level without incident and rigged up a knotted rope to drop on down the final 20'. Water in the level was deeper than in '84, possibly 5'2" in places and poor Dennis was obliged to swim for most of the way. No one was wearing a wet suit, Dennis and Bert soon became quite cold though I, particularly, felt quite comfortable.

We scaled the Derby Rise and began to make our way towards the foot of B47 Pit, a shaft which lies on the edge of the main worked out deposit. Route finding in the Derby workings is extremely difficult; there are no levels and shafts as such, the whole place resembling a Swiss cheese with interlinked chambers on all horizons and the occasional stope. Eventually we were through to B47 though not by the route Mark had taken in 1984. I noted on the way, a huge boulder pile rising to an aperture in the roof of a large chamber – possibly an old shaft down which spoil had been tipped many years ago (my reason for thinking this is because the Main Chamber is partially filled with spoil which had been tipped down B47, and this new shaft is just a few yards away).

We explored the Main Chamber to its southerly conclusion in an immense roof fall, presumably in the vicinity of Tom Burrows house, where on the surface the broken ground can be seen. It was interesting to note that our 1984 footprints had been almost obscured by the silt from the flooding of two winters.

In 1985 Mark and myself had scaled a shaft up which was rising a compressed air pipe. We didn't get to the top and I have reason to believe it once came to the

surface. I took some hasty compass bearings in the shaft from B47 and guessed some distances, hoping to locate the shaft at the surface.

Chris Jones welcomed us back to the surface at 10.20 and helped us to remove the tackle. We removed from the mine 1 broken pick head and 1 small jumper which are to be kept by Lindsay. I have in my possession a clay pipe discovered near the Derby Rise which has clasped hands embossed on it and the legend: For Auld Lang Sine.

10/8/86 Surface Observations

With the aid of Chris Jones and my son, Fergus, I plotted out the location of the air shaft in the field. Taking bearings from the collar of B47 we arrived at an obvious depression in the corner of the field, close to the road which is depicted on the Ordnance Survey map of 1913 as 'Old Shaft' (incidentally, this applies also to B47, B46 and Ding Dong itself, the only working mine in the immediate vicinity appearing to be Derby Pin No.2). We were, at this juncture, joined by Bert Wheeler and Don Jones who were out for a walk. Bert informed me that he and Lindsay had located plans for all the relevant Buccleuch workings in the area but had so far drawn a blank as regards the Derby workings which, in effect, form a huge wedge neatly dissecting the area which we were exploring. Bert is going to trace the surveys which have been examined.

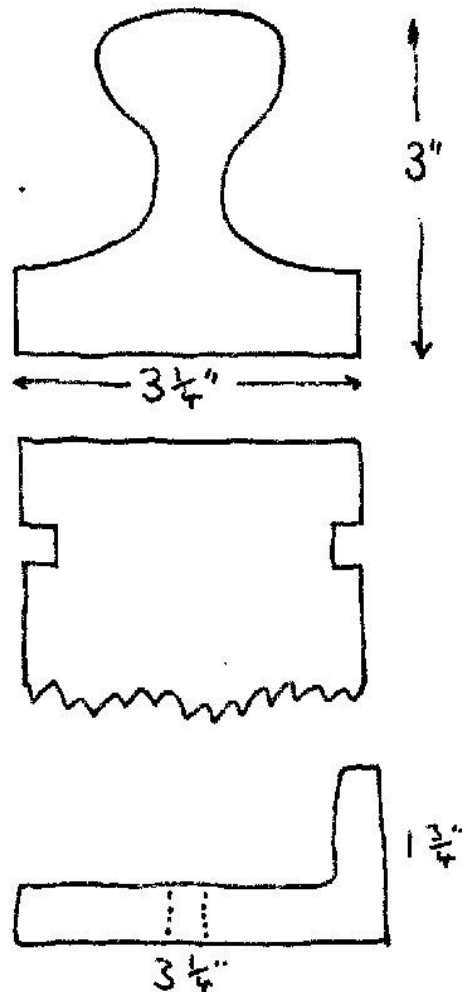
16/8/86 Exploration

I arrived at Ding Dong at 10:00 and rigged the entrance pitch. As I was completing this task, Chris Jones arrived and a few minutes later Bert Wheeler and Chris Moor rolled up. We were soon changed and down to the ledge 20' or so above the 67yd Level. Jones put a bolt in the wall just below the ledge and put in a second hand line. He dropped down to the 67yd Level, closely followed by myself.

Disappointment!! The water had risen by about 18" and we were unable to progress any further. The south west branch, along which our route lay, was sumped to the roof as was the north east branch into the workings below Lindal Chamber. The branch running straight ahead into the north stope had an air space of about 2". We returned to the lower workings and had a look along the west branch of the 55 yd Level, noting water cascading down through the roof and percolating through a hole in the sole of the level. This water was, perhaps, from the breached pipe in the collapse hole next to the entrance shaft. If the pipe was fixed this would possibly arrest the water level and keep it at its lowest possible horizon. Actually, we had been quite disturbed by the alarming rise in the water level for there had not been much rain to speak of. We decided that in future the 67yd Level should be treated with caution, almost like a natural cave and a weather forecast obtained previously, not wishing to be trapped in the extension, despite its attractions.

On the return Bert and I had a look around Pulley Passage at the Winch Stage, this being a part of Ding Dong I had never visited and one I, in the event, was thoroughly impressed with. I was particularly intrigued by one of Mark's ropes dangling down out of Top Stope, which I started to climb but decided against it when only a few feet up. Examining Mark's survey, Top Stope lies directly over the workings at the head of the Derby Rise. Could there be a high level connection Mark had missed? I doubt it, though its something I shall look into before very long.

I recorded details of the types of rail in use in various parts of Ding Dong, primarily for Peter Holmes, who is extremely interested in such things; the details are jotted down here also, just for the record.



These metals were found in situ in the 55yd Level and had a gauge of 16". They were in very long lengths, over 10' and I couldn't measure them accurately (the length that is) because of the glutinous mud. A lighter version, $2\frac{1}{4}$ "2" was also noted. A fine example of this angle iron rail runs to the Winch Stage. The rails are set to a gauge of 13" and there is a whole stack of these standing against a wall. They are in lengths of $43\frac{1}{2}$ "and have fixing holes a couple of inches from the ends.

11/9/86 Underground Explorations

At 7:00pm I turned up at Ding Dong with my neighbour's son, John Lowrey, who had wanted me to take him on a tour of the mine. We had a good root around the workings before dropping down to the 67yd Level to inspect the water. On examination we found that the water had dropped back down to a passable level, it coming up to the middle of my chest. This is very interesting because we have only had a week of dry weather, the previous fortnight, bank holiday especially, being quite wet. It seems that the water fluctuates quite readily and I now believe it may be possible to win into the extension during dry spells in the winter, especially during those long frosty periods.

14/9/86 Exploration

With Chris Jones and Phil Merrin I descended to the 67yd Level and found the water to be low enough to allow access to the Derby Rise. As it turned out the depth of the water was about the same as it was on the 5th August. I scaled the rise, removed the rope installed in its stead an old length of electron ladder that had been damaged years ago in the Copper Mines and was of no use. The ladder turned out to be just the job.

Once in the near workings I proceeded to make a rough sketch survey, not measuring accurately, for time was against us, though taking compass bearings at strategic points. We were extremely surprised to discover that our mental pictures of the workings had been out by 180 degrees. The large stope along which we had assumed we were travelling in a north west direction was in fact running south. Consequently, instead of pushing deeper into the Derby workings we were going in the opposite direction!

We dropped down as far as we could below the first stope and noted a level right in the bottom which was flooded to the roof. It had been a main level and I have a suspicion it was a branch of the 67yd Level. Crawling over some deads I found myself in a heading, unsupported by timber and discovered a ledge upon which was a collection of pipes. There was one complete clay pipe and one or two broken ones and three blackthorn pipes one of which had a tortoiseshell stem.

We noted many rises and levels just out of our reach. We decided that when we had an opportunity we could bring a maypole down here and leave it in the workings for there is no shortage of work for one. We did in fact manage to scale the Air Pipe Rise, to the west of the Main Chamber, and sketched the wooden ore tub discovered in '84 measuring all the details with accuracy. We put a bolt in with a piton backup in a hole below the rise and Phil abseiled down the 25' to the bottom. Unfortunately the workings below were linked to the Main Chamber so he was able to walk out instead of coming back up the rope – so that exercise was a waste of time.

We noted many wooden ore tubs in the workings though they had all, with the exception of the one up the rise, had been smashed up to have their wheels and axles removed. Also noted was a decomposed wooden wheelbarrow near the top of the Derby Rise, which had a spoked iron wheel and another wheelbarrow wheel at the foot of the Air Pipe Rise.

All three of us exited safely having spent a total of seven hours underground.

20/9/86 Exploration – Photography

The water level in the 67yd Level was perhaps 2" lower than it had been on the 14th. Bert Wheeler and Dennis Webb accompanied me to the Derby Rise where, with the aid of a slave unit and secondary flash, I proceeded to photograph the entire workings. By the end of the day I had taken thirty two photographs underground and if the results are successful, these will be the first photographs ever taken in these workings.

We descended first to the semi-flooded section where I had discovered the clay pipes. Bert had finally traced the Buccleuch survey in the record office and we believe that the only portion of the Derby workings we have been in is this tiny area at the foot of

the first stope. There are two levels running at right angles to the vein, both sumped to the roof though running through solid rock. The branch running east must run directly into the Derby workings and the westerly, if it is not blind, back into the Buccleuch. By the dimensions alone, this had been a main haulage level and as the northerly end of this area is blind, one or the other must lead directly to a main shaft. We photographed the pipes in situ then carefully removed them, dividing the equally between us. For the most part both clay and wooden pipes were plain though one of the former had a bowl fashioned like an acorn. Bert has this in his possession. One of the broken stems had 'The Trooper' embossed on it.

We made our way to the foot of B47, photographing everything in sight as we went, including a collection of cap boxes. In the high stopes, just east of the Main Chamber, I examined the small lake and, with the aid of Bert's survey, concluded that we were looking down into another portion of the flooded 67yd Level. This was photographed, also a smashed wooden bogey in the parallel stope.

After taking several shots of the Main Chamber, we entered a very filthy level hitherto flooded, running west at about directly under the Lindal road. Although collapsed after 20', it had been, for its entire length, mined in solid ore! We proceeded to the air pipe, which we now know to be very close to B43 (the depression on the surface), and after scaling it and installing a hand line, I photographed the wooden ore tub. The rise ascends again to another level though only poor old Mark has ever been up there. I remember him saying that, after a dog leg, it goes higher still. That is one place we still have to tackle next year with the maypole. We left the hand line in position.

We proceeded north along the Main Vein, taking photographs all the time. We entered some small workings at the west that had not been explored before but they were nothing significant. Dennis found another clay pipe bowl with a heart embossed on it. Lindsay Harrison was waiting for us when we got out at 6:30pm.

4/10/86 Exploration – Breakthrough

Firstly a few corrections. I have drawn out my rough survey, compared it with the Buccleuch survey and concluded that a much larger proportion of the workings lie in the Derby Royalty than I had previously thought. In fact, all the workings between the Derby Rise and B47 appear to belong to this royalty as opposed to the Buccleuch.

I met up with Bert Wheeler and together we descended through the Ding Dong workings to the 67yd Level, setting off at about 7:00pm. The water level was about the same as it was on our last visit so we didn't hold out much hope for getting into the flooded level down in the Clay Pipe Chamber. However, upon our arrival at this place, we discovered the water to have dropped by about 18"! Now this is really interesting. I had a nagging suspicion that the water level in the Main Chamber was dropping faster than that in the 67yd Level, though I aren't quite sure. This new discovery illustrates that there is not one overall water table, but a series of isolated levels which are flooding and draining at different heights and different rates. This is worth bearing in mind. Perhaps after a dry spell in the winter it would be possible to win along the 67yd Level and observe the Main Chamber in a partially flooded condition.

We dropped back into the water below Clay Pipe Chamber and followed the new level in an easterly direction. After about thirty feet the roof had dropped so low that we were obliged to immerse our entire bodies, with only half of our faces in the air space. Suddenly we emerged in a huge black chamber. It was perhaps thirty feet wide by ten feet high by a hundred and fifty feet long. It was blind at its southern end but at the northern end there were several galleries leading off one of which was out of reach and another which ascended like an incline and swerved round to the west. A high level cross cut led about thirty feet east to a parallel working. This took the form of a vertical stope and is probably the largest working of its kind I have seen in a Furness iron mine. If the water had not been crimson it would have passed for a stope in the Coniston Copper Mines. We dropped down through a pile of deads and timbers to the Main Level. Somewhere under the debris, there must be another cross cut running parallel to the one we had just passed through. I waded up the northerly continuation of the Main Level, at the end of the stope, but found it to be blind after a few feet. We made our way to the northern end of the stope, which was perhaps a hundred feet away, maybe a little more, and observed the level continuing again into the limestone. However, to get down to it would have meant a tricky climb down through a shaky hole in the false roof of the level. Seeing that we didn't have our rope (left at the Derby Rise) and there was only the two of us, we left it for another day. I must mention that I have high hopes for this level for it is probably the nearest we have been to the Derby Pit 2&3 workings.

Returning to Clay Pipe Chamber we followed the westerly continuation of the level, again in chest deep water. After a few feet we passed under a man way rising up perhaps thirty or forty feet. There was a wooden ladder still in situ pinned to the wall. This looks very promising indeed and we will have a go at bridging up it sometime, it being narrow enough. The level ended in a run in perhaps 100-150 feet from where we entered. At this point we are under the Derby workings already explored so there is little point in pushing it any further.

Our last discovery was up in the higher workings where the spoil heap rises to the aperture in the roof a few feet before the Buccleuch royalty commences. I think that perhaps this aperture was the Derby Pit No.1 and the spoil came from one of the later workings. There is a depression on the surface which roughly tallies with this. We climbed the spoil heap and managed to scrape round the western side of it, pushing away rocks to make a gap wide enough. Soon we dropped down onto a ledge which allowed us to look down into a fair – sized chamber. It would have been easy to have dropped down to the floor but because of the undercut wall a retreat would have been impossible without a rope.

We climbed out to surface for 10:15, where Lindsay Harrison met us.