

7th December 1986
Force Crag

Foul Weather at Force Crag
A Day of Attrition

A total of fifteen CAT members were present at the Force Crag meet on the 7th of December, though they were not all there at the same time. The prevailing weather, steady rain and a boisterous wind, may have had something to do with this, for Mine Manager Blezzard had devised a selection of strenuous surface jobs to maximise its effect.

It was intended that we should first complete these tasks, and then make the through trip from No.3 Level up the La Porte incline to High Force level. At the outset there were eight members present, plus members Blezzard, Blundell, and Calvin, who were doing their usual Sunday jobs. Ann Danson, Dennis Webb, and Rod set off down the mine track to repair the damage wrought by the recent rains, whilst the meet leader together with three members from Lancaster and one from Kentmere set about diverting the stream of water issuing from No.1 Level back into its proper channel, and repairing the damage which it had done to the banking.

The arrival of Chris Moore and Peter Fleming during the mid morning break enabled us to add a third task, that of setting a four foot by five foot by six foot high water tank into a six foot deep hole, which we had to dig. The weather continued foul but the job progressed, and by about two o'clock we had the site prepared. Discussions took place on how to get the tank into the hole, for it weighed three quarters of a ton, and was resting on the roadway above. At about this time the penultimate arrival, Chris Jones appeared, reporting that he had just seen Dennis Webb driving towards Keswick. Dennis, who had been the first on the scene, soon after dawn, was apparently going for petrol, but none can have been available, for he didn't return.

The final plan to get the tank into the hole, viewed with some trepidation, involved moving it on planks and rollers to balance over the edge, and then, by raising the planks, to slide it into place. This was not a complete success, for on the way down the bottom edge of the tank caught on a projecting rock which we had not been able to remove, and which tipped it forward onto its front edge some two feet short of its proper position. Efforts to correct this failed, but caused the sides of the hole to run in. It was obvious that a quick solution was not possible and by this time everyone had had enough and so, shortly before three o'clock, we retired for lunch.

Lunch coincided with the arrival of Alistair Lings, who, after first enquiring as to how many Jaffa Cakes anyone could get into their mouth at the same time, went off into the working part of the mine. Shortly after Chris Jones set off home, like Mitchell made the excuse that he had to find some lost caving helmets which he had loaned to members of North Staffs Poly, who were there for a conducted tour of the mine, and Ann Danson went back to road mending, and so a depleted party of six set off up the screes towards

No.3 Level.

Part way up Norman went back for his camera, but, as he didn't return, only five members entered No 3 level and made their way in to the foot of the La Porte incline. For those who have not been there this remarkable incline is well worth a visit. It is over a thousand feet long, driven through solid rock, and contains many interesting artifacts. The cable and many pulleys and rollers are still in place, a trapdoor leads down to an ore pass and service rise, there is an air winch, and, in the upper part, a scraper system by which ore was dragged down the incline. At the top Chris Moore, not feeling at his best, decided that he had had enough and returned to base.

Four CAT members continued on up the ladders, lead by Peter Fleming, who professed to know the way, but who kept muttering 'this doesn't seem right, we'll have to go back'. This part of the mine has been stoped out for barytes. The vein is about four feet wide and pillars of solid baryte have been left for support. There are numerous hand tools and a sledge, and the whole area is liberally provided with wooden ore chutes of a variety of design. After some false turns and searches for the way on we were confronted by a ladder way rising through a torrent of water. The members from Lancaster were unprepared for a cold shower and turned back, leaving just two CAT members to continue on up towards High Force level and the surface. Climbing blindly through the falling water we got off the ladders too soon, and spent some time vainly searching for a way up through the hoppers of an intermediate level. Re-entering the torrent the way on was found at the top of the next ladder, and thankfully leaving the water behind we climbed the last two ladders onto High Force Level.

There are four wooden ore tubs on this level, and after inspecting and photographing these we made our way towards the adit, but were dismayed to find the exit blocked by a fresh fall of rock. Attempts to dig through this enabled us to see part way in, but with running water causing constant slippage in the unstable debris we reluctantly decided to return the way we had come. Into the torrent for the third time, going down now, and feeling for the missing ladder rungs, we were soon out of the water and emerged from No.3 portal some twenty three minutes after leaving High Force Level, five hundred and thirty seven feet above. A long day!

Ian Matheson.