

9th April 1989
Langdale Axe Factory

LAKELAND'S OLDEST INDUSTRY
LANGDALES STONE AXE FACTORY SITES,

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Members attending:-

P. Fleming (Leader), Maureen Charlesworth, Mary Kindred and Friend, Barbara Mitchell, Angela Wilson, Don Borthwick, Dave Bridge, Alastair Cameron, Alan Charlesworth, Clive Barrow, Chris Jones, Stewart Cole, Mike Mitchell, Peter Sandbach.

The Meet gathered at the New Dungeon Ghyll car park on a beautiful morning, sunny and clear, with fresh snow on the tops. From the Old Dungeon Ghyll Hotel, a steep ascent was made up the screes to the left of Raven Crag, following the climbers' track up towards Gimmer Crag. At about 1200 ft., where the track crosses a stream, a small mining trial on a haematite vein was examined. A tunnel driven in steep ground for 10 metres has in the roof a continuous but narrow vein of high grade haematite. Higher up on the open fellside, the vein was still carrying good haematite. The period of working here would probably coincide with that on the other side of the valley at Red Tarn, in 1865.

We stopped for lunch higher up with a good view of climbers in action on nearby Gimmer Crag. From here the party split - the larger, more adventurous one ascending South East Gully, alongside the crag. We all met up again at the top and then continued across towards Pike o' Stickle. Instead of going up to the summit, we made a diagonal descent off the East and South face over steep ground above the South Scree Gully. This brought us to the area of major working sites for stone axes. The period of working, according to recent investigations by archaeologists using carbon dating, was between 2500 to 4000 B.C. and firesetting techniques were employed to wrest the rock from the outcrop. It consists of a fine grained rhyolite (volcanic tuff), laid down as ash. It has similar cleaving properties to flint.

About an hour and a half was spent here looking at various small caves and chipping sites. A number of damaged roughed-out axes were found. The best, a small one and a large one, were found by Dave Bridge. We then descended through the only line of weakness in the crags below, by going NW until a sheep track was reached. Here seven members returned to the valley, whilst the other eight carried on over Mart Crag Moor to Stake Pass, then down to Mickleden, followed by a pleasant walk along the valley back to civilisation.

The day provided convincing evidence to support the theory that there is more to life than going down dark and dirty mines!

Peter Fleming