

26th December 1990
Coniston Copper Mines

Dig at Middle Level Entrance

Fifteen members arrived on a windy and wet day to work off the extra pounds put on over the Christmas Break. As we reached the site of the buried entrance, the rain abated, but a cold wind persisted. Levers Water Beck was a foaming white torrent and was quite spectacular.

The real purpose of this meet was to attempt to re-open the Middle Level entrance at Paddy End workings. This dates from the early 19th Century when it provided access to the rich veins previously worked from above. It is possible that the entrance was deliberately sealed using explosives when mining ceased around the turn of the century. The reason could be because Middle Level would run into the roof of the large stope in Grey Crag Level after only 30 yards or so.

Our work started by digging a pit to locate roof timbers which had been reached some years previously when the site was investigated in a small way. Efforts were made to stabilise the scree slope by erecting two barriers above the dig. A copious flow of water was noticed lower down the steep hillside, which was believed to emerge from the level. Digging was started here also. The angle of the slope combined with the flow of water made it easy to remove large quantities of rubble very quickly. Soon a trench was cut back right to the entrance timbers where it was 8 ft deep. The concerted effort resulted in many tons of soil and rock sliding down into the river, where it discoloured the white torrent as it was carried away. The main roof timber over the portal was revealed, measuring 10" square, and about 10 ft long. Further in, it was noticed that both walls were stone lined and about six feet apart. The next roof timber was circular and had broken in the centre allowing the roof to collapse. As it was not wise to push the dig any further without measures to support the ground above, it was decided to return the following Saturday, 29th December with suitable material.

Sixteen members turned up this time, half of them being different to those present on the previous occasion. Crosstrees were erected and heavy spilling boards were driven into support the overburden. More clearance work was carried on in the tunnel entrance until it was possible to see several yards down the left hand side, but a large flat slab of rock halted further progress until it can be supported to allow work to continue safely beneath it.

Peter Fleming