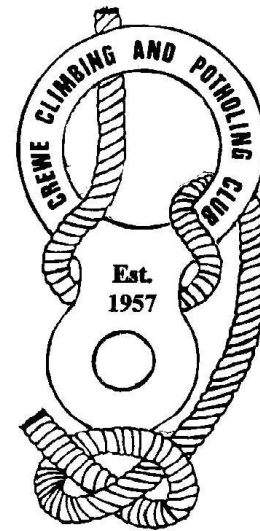


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Cavers & Bat workers Workshop at Pooles Cavern Thursday, 6th July 2005

According to the paperwork sent out beforehand, the purpose of the meeting was: 'to explore issues relating to bats in caves, and to provide a forum for the invited groups – Derbyshire Caving Association, Derbyshire Bat Group and English Nature – and to exchange knowledge and ideas'. 'The workshop has resulted from The Derbyshire SSSI Cave Monitoring Project, which is an English Nature initiative, ... in collaboration with Derbyshire Caving Association'.

Jo Poll, Assistant Conservation Officer for English Nature, opened the meeting, and welcomed those present, which included representatives from: Buxton Civic Association (owners of Pooles Cavern and the surrounding woodland), and Buxton Bat Group. The cavers present were from Crewe C.P.C., Masson C. G., Orpheus C.C., T.S.G., and P.D.M.H.S., with some individuals also representing Derbyshire Caving Association. (Apologies to anyone missed.)

Debbie (English Nature) then gave a talk about bats in general, and about the law concerning bats and bat roosts. She explained that the partnership between English Nature and D.C.A. had been established in order to monitor fauna in the caves of The Peak District, especially those designated as S.S.S.I.. This would provide a baseline for future study. She emphasised that in Britain, all bats, and their roosts, are protected by law, and any breeding or resting site is a roost, and is protected whether bats are present or not. Volunteer 'bat wardens' visit homes or other structures to advise about bats which may be present, and, apparently carry out surveys of sites, including caves. Debbie went on to explain that it is important to find out more about how bats use caves, and about how cavers use caves, in order to avoid problems.

I felt here that there were major misconceptions about what cavers are actually doing underground. There seemed to be a series of incorrect assumptions concerning the number of cavers nationally, the number and frequency of caving trips taking place, and the size of individual caving

parties. I pointed out that the great majority of cave sites in the Peak District would be visited on only one or two occasions in five years, and only by two or three cavers. Certainly, questions about lunch stops and smoking breaks showed a lack of knowledge about the basic dynamics of most recreational caving trips.

Fortunately, at this point Dave Webb (Masson C.G., D.C.A.) stepped forward to talk about 'What Cavers Do, and Why !'. Dave started by explaining the current structure and organisation of caving in Britain, including the operation and funding of cave rescue. Information about caving areas nationally, and about the S.S.S.I. of the Peak District, led into Dave's slide sequence illustrating caving activities. A series of excellent slides showed recreational caving, digging, and archaeology, with conservation issues such as taping vulnerable areas of formations or sediments, photography and shaft capping included. There were also slides of cave life, such as cave spiders, and lots of formations. As far as bats are concerned, Dave included the old quotation: 'If you see a bat, say now't, or the cave will be closed', which led to some useful discussion.

Pete Bush (Derbyshire Bat Conservation Group) took over, to talk about 'What is a bat worker'. He explained that there are seventeen bat species in Britain, eleven of them present in Derbyshire, and five species found underground in the Peak District. Pete used transparencies to show the pattern of bat activity during each year. It seems that the bats look for hibernation sites during October, and start to hibernate in November. They remain inactive until the temperature starts to rise during Spring, perhaps as early as March. The females find a breeding roost during May, and the young are born in June. Most roosts are used repeatedly, and frequently by the same individual bats. Significant local roosts are known in Beresford Dale, and at Beeston Tor in the Manifold Valley.

Pete explained that bats require minimal disturbance, a cool, constant temperature, safety from predators, and alternative locations in each roost to allow the bats to take advantage of a range of climatic conditions. The most obvious visual sign of bat use (apart from roosting bats of course) is likely to be bat droppings, which are small and black, and not unlike mouse droppings. The bats themselves are harder to spot, as they often use narrow crevices to roost in. The presence of Herald Moths on cave walls indicates that the humidity is correct for bats.

In response to a question about Rabies, Pete stated that there is some evidence that some bats have been exposed to Rabies, but there is little risk of infection to cavers or householders. (I believe a bat worker in Scotland died from Rabies last year !)

When questioned, Pete did not seem to have any real concerns about the activities of cavers, as explained during the meeting. He was against the use of grills or bars at cave or mine entrances, even the supposedly 'bat-friendly' type, as it seems these can discourage the bats from using such sites. I was disappointed to see that the Derbyshire Bat Conservation Group leaflet (made available at the meeting) includes the following: 'Derbyshire's bats have declined in recent years. This is due to: (second factor of four listed)

Disturbance of natural hibernation sites, especially caves.' Pete stated that there was no recorded evidence that cavers, or their activities, had affected any known bat roosts or populations. Other factors, such as loss of trees and

hedgerows, and reduction of food sources due to the use of insect and weed killers in the countryside are also listed, and could well be far more significant to bat survival than recreational caving is ever likely to be.

Pete suggested that cavers could limit disturbance to bats by avoiding visits to particularly sensitive sites at critical times, however this would need a two-way exchange of appropriate information.

The meeting was then opened for discussion, however many points had already been raised during the presentations. It was suggested that cavers could aid the monitoring process by reporting sightings, or evidence, of bats underground, however this led to questions about the interpretation of the law concerning disturbance of bats. The excellent English Nature publication: 'Focus on Bats – discovering their lifestyle and habitats', was freely available at the meeting, and includes (on page 16) a simplified interpretation of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 and the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations 1994, as they apply to bats. The following statement is included: 'You must not ... Disturb bats, for example, by entering known roosts or hibernacula'. Taken literally, that means that as Pooles Cavern is a known bat roost, then it should be closed to the public ! This doubtless applies to the majority of show-caves in the country. Cavers are unlikely to be willing to give information about bats underground, while the threat of prosecution hangs over them if they return to the site. The Derbyshire Bat Conservation Group leaflet (see above) uses the phrase 'intentionally or recklessly', applied to damaging sites or disturbing bats, in its interpretation of the law, and this seems to be more acceptable.

Clearly what activity is, or isn't, legal and acceptable needs to be much more precisely defined, so that cavers can choose to take an active role in monitoring bats underground, without risking an overall reduction in access to caves.

The meeting began to break up, and we moved into Pooles Cavern to look for signs of bats. Several of the bat enthusiasts had brought electronic bat-detectors, which can pick up the high pitched sounds made by the bats, and which make it possible to identify the individual bat being detected ! Although we found bat droppings on a white, flowstone-covered boulder at the far end of the tourist route, no bats were detected in the cave. Outside, despite the rain, Common Pipistrelle bats were active around the trees and over the visitor centre, and were both seen and detected electronically.

We reassembled briefly, to enable Jo Poll to thank everyone for their contributions, and hopefully we all went away with a better understanding of the 'other side's' point of view. Certainly, Dave Webb, and the other cavers present, gave a responsible and clear picture of our activities, and emphasised our commitment to the continuing preservation and conservation of all aspects of the underground. English Nature, Peak District and Derbyshire Team, also deserves to be commended for their support for the scientific exploration of caves and work to discover new caves. Their leaflet: 'Do you dig caves on S.S.S.I.s ?', includes the Cave Conservation Code, and states that 'Trips down known cave systems are invaluable in keeping us (EN) informed of the condition of cave systems ...'.

Steve Knox. 15th July 2005



Exploring the Welsh Slate Labyrinths

Tanygrisiau, Blaenau Ffestiniog. Thursday, 1st September 2005

Ralph's invitation to have a day out to Wales, looking at some abandoned slate mines, sounded like a good idea. 'Just a wander around on the surface, with a few open entrances to investigate. Not too far to walk, and no SRT gear needed'. It turned out to be just a little more energetic than expected !

Ralph, Darren and I met up with Len, John Shenton and Lionel, and with Tim and Judy, at Llechwedd Show Mine entrance. We drove the short distance down to Tanygrisiau village, and up a steep quarry access-road to a parking area at the end of the tar-mac. [SH 6835 4540]

This is a mountain location, with the peaks of Moel-yr-hydd and Foel Ddu rising steeply to the west, and Moel Druman and Allt-fawr due north, surrounding the wide basin of Cwmorthin.

Carrying our underground kit, we plodded up the steep roadway of slate debris, following the base of the enormous spoil heaps of waste slate which covered the mountain slope on the right, and with a torrent cascading down on the left. The track led on, up to the brink of the cwm where the views opened out to show extensive terraces of waste, and numerous ruined buildings. Ahead there was a large lake, and we followed the east shore, between more ruined buildings, until we reached a horizontal cutting which led directly to a wide, adit opening with shallow water stretching away along the passage into the darkness.

Cwmorthin Underground Slate Quarry [SH 6800 4625]

The portal was in poor condition, with seriously stressed timbers holding back a vast quantity of large slate blocks and debris. Once inside it was clear that the initial 10 metres of passage was running horizontally through the surface spoil heap, and had been supported with timbers and dry-stone packs. The whole area was hazardous, and not everyone was willing to risk entry, so the group separated in to two parties. Darren, Len, Lionel and I opted to continue exploring this mine, while the others went on up the valley to check out other sites.

From examination of the incredibly complex survey (later, at home) I believe that the adit we entered through is called 'Floor 1 North'. It was about 2.5 metres wide, and 2 metres high, and, once beyond the unstable entrance, it was driven horizontally through sound rock composed of steeply tilted beds of slate. After about 60 metres, an opening in the left wall gave access to a short slope down to a wide ledge at the highest point in a huge, worked-out void [1 West]. The head-wall, below the ledge, was at about 50 degrees, and had a stairway leading down it to the level floor, about 20 metres below. Wooden treads about 1 metre wide were supported by horizontal metal rods driven into the wall, however many treads were rotted through, and the support rods were in poor condition. When Darren looked through the opening, he was surprised to see several lights in the chamber below ! As we were unsure of the access situation he quickly ducked back out of sight. When I looked down, a few minutes later, the lights had disappeared, and there were no answers to my shouts. We moved on and, a few metres further along the adit, we reached an enlarged area at the head of a steeply descending incline [Back Vein Incline]. A pair of railway lines led downwards, at about 40 degrees, into the lower reaches of the incline, far beyond the reach of our lights. Large chambers, just past the incline top, contained much waste slate, and a bizarre selection of out-of-place rubbish, including a modern, tall fridge, bags of carpet off-cuts and plasterboard, and a fully tiled 1940's fireplace !! How and

why this junk was brought to such a remote location remains a complete mystery. Passages seemed to go off in all directions here, but we decided to investigate the lower levels first, and so returned to the incline.

Descent was straightforward, following the rail-tracks down. Hauling-cable rollers remain in-situ between the tracks at regular intervals, and there are various pipes clamped to the passage wall, as well as other assorted metalwork. The first side-passage we reached, on the right [Floor A], had been completely 'stopped' with concrete, bearing the date 1935. On the left its continuation led through the incline wall as a window into the side of the worked-out void seen from above. A horizontal railway 'siding', initially supported by decaying timbers over the continuing incline, ran directly forward for a short distance at this point, to a left turn into a second access passage opening high up in the side of the void.

We went on down the incline to a complex junction at 'Floor B', where we were able to enter the void at its floor level, through a passage on the left. [It was here that we made contact with the owners of the other lights seen earlier ! It turned out that the three guys involved had been just as nervous of meeting someone 'in authority', and had quickly ducked out of sight when they saw Darren's light above. They were staying at Aberglaslyn Hall Outdoor Centre, and had already visited the mine several times before.] Back at the 'Floor B' junction, a sharp right turn from the incline revealed another 'stopped' passage, again with the date 1935 in the concrete. A pipe ran out through the concrete to a valve, then on down the incline, where it was fractured and was spouting water. Floor B itself was a walking size passageway, beyond the turn to the 'stopped' passage, and ran horizontally for a short distance to break out high up in the wall of another massive void [upper section of 2 East]. Twenty metres away in the opposite wall was the continuation of the passage, but no way across ! While the mine was being worked, the miners could pass this way by using a suspended bridge, but only two pairs of metal rods hanging from the roof, with each pair linked to a cross-timber, remained. [The survey shows at least fifty bridge sites like this through the many levels of the mine, and as the bridges are either collapsed, or lethally unsafe, progress for modern cavers is impossible along many routes.]

Once again we returned to Back Vein Incline, and continued our descent. Similar passage arrangements were met and investigated at each horizontal development [Floor C and Floor D], with horizontal 'sidings', and cross passages leading into further workings on 1 West to our left, and 1 East to our right. Eventually we reach the bottom at Floor E, with about half a metre of standing water to dampen our enthusiasm. The survey shows Floor E stretching away in both directions, linking the lowest level of voids 1 to 6 West, and 1 to 11 East but the water discouraged us from investigating further on this trip. Opposite the foot of the incline there is an alcove with heavy duty electrical switchgear still in place, and a line of parked wagons stands in the water, waiting for loads that will never come. [The other group exploring the mine had waded through to the foot of void 1 West to examine a crane which stands at the head of yet another incline, going even deeper into the hill, but now completely flooded.]

After taking photographs we climbed back up to the entry level on Floor 1 North, Daren and I had a trip down to the foot of the ladderway to retrieve a bag, and found the steps easier to climb than descend, as, on the way up, you could see just how bad the supports were, and adjust your route accordingly.

Moving on, through the chambers scattered with junk, we followed a passage which soon brought us out into more large chambers and a series of junctions. The sound of

falling water led us to a large space with the bases for a number of pieces of mine machinery, probably all associated with haulage, as we were at the top of another major incline [Old Vein Incline]. Water was cascading down from above, and there were several areas of major collapse. In one area, huge slabs of slate had fallen from above, having become detached along a weakness created by a 1mm thick layer of white clay. Another area, 'The Stripey Vein', seems to have a number of veins of Calcite or white Quartz running through it.

[After clambering over one collapse, just beyond and to the right of the falling water, I could see a passage heading off, which, according to the survey, seems to be another way in from daylight – Floor 2 South.]

With time running out, we headed for the surface, having seen only a fraction of this incredibly complex mine.

Sticking to Ralph's plan, we then had a mile to walk, half of it steeply uphill, to the next mine at Bwlch y Rhosydd. Outside, a pile of stones with a message informed us that Ralph's party had been and gone, so after a short break we had a brief trip in by ourselves, then returned to the cars, arriving only a short while after Ralph's party. They had managed to find lots more holes to explore, so no doubt we will be back in this area soon.

The survey referred to has been obtained by Ralph, and has:

"Been drawn up from several source plans and is not intended to portray any specific period or means of access" [Note on Survey].

It is incredibly complex, and seems to show the whole mine, as it was, rather than as it is now.

Steve Knox. 12-9-2005

Rhosydd Slate Mine.

Having take a look at the entrance to the above I decided to give it a miss and set off up along the lake and up the steep incline to Rhosydd mine about 1.5 k distance.

The entrance "adit" goes in a straight line for a kilometre with a couple of passages either side leading off to large cavities. At the end of this passage (3" water max) there is an old wheel round which ran a continuous cable hauling trucks into/out of the level, the tensioning device is still in place.

The passage to the right soon leads to a LARGE chamber with a collapse (or working face?) to the left. Straight-ahead is a DEEP lake, the roof shelves steeply to the left and soon meets the water level. Beneath the surface lie the old workings. Across the lake a passage can be seen, well worth a visit but a wet suit or dinghy would be required as the water is not terribly inviting and is no doubt bitterly cold.

To the left a roadway goes "for "miles" with workshops and a major collapse. Back on the surface a couple of steep inclines lead in a southerly direction to various interesting features:

A short adit 6647 4579 with a stopping was visited, someone has started to dig through this but I suspect the sight of water squirting through the TOP layers discourage them!

An open shaft at least 25m deep could be seen 6654 4548, spikes were provided for a rope but a stream deliberately channelled into the shaft means a dry spell of weather is required before a descent.

To the southeast of the shaft a tunnel can be seen and this leads into the large southerly Rhosydd quarry which is marked on the OS map. **This is NOT**

the best way of accessing the quarry. The northerly quarry has seen some major earth movement in recent times and is probably the top of the collapses seen at the end of the mine tunnel as it lies 1 kilometre south of the entrance portal. The southerly quarry 6649 4519 has a couple of very large stopes (?) in the bottom and these are well worth a look, a rope might be handy as the sides of the quarry are steep, the easterly one being most caver-friendly. Another stope is hidden in the grass at 6672 4532, again well worth a look.

Stop Press. Darren and Tim managed to access the adit via the quarry-enter the most northerly passage in the southern-most quarry.

Wrysygan Slate Mine.

This mine can be accessed from the incline and tunnel clearly visible from the car park (look NW) but those less nimble could be dropped off at 676 451 for a short (uphill!) walk while the driver parks at the reservoir at the end of the road or back in Tanygrisiau.

The entrances run in a line from 6722 4509 to 6755 4535. The ventilation adits (western entrances) have a couple of feet of water in them, the rest are dry, and the rest I'll leave to you!!

Surplus Equipment.

We have a certain amount of equipment for sale so if there's something in the list give Ralph a ring and make an offer.

Rocker, double and single pulleys, Fig 8s, Industrial sit and chest harnesses, chest harnesses (several different models), Chest jammers, Stops, Lamp belts, Wet suits, Darren drums, Chargers CS& FX2/3.

Little Glory at 'Glory Mine', Priestcliffe.

This project got started through an enquiry from a 'local' who had seen the finished results of our restoration work at Neptune Mine and thought we might want to open a mine he knew of at Priestcliffe, near Taddington.

Len, Darren and John Shenton carried out an initial investigation, and found what appeared to be a choked level in a small limestone outcrop. The whole area around the site was disturbed, and seemed to be a series of small quarries and extraction pits, however, one substantial lump of masonry may possibly have been part of an old engine house. Apparently there are records of a deep shaft in the field, associated with the name 'Glory Mine', and it was hoped that the 'level' would lead into this mine. The first excavation carried out was to clear the entrance to the blocked 'level', and involved digging down about a metre through old, domestic rubbish, containing large quantities of bottles, bones, broken china and glass, and rusty tins. Sadly, as the hole went down, and the level was cleared, it became apparent that this was only a very short, horizontal trial, ending in unworked vein material.

Undeterred, during the next two digging sessions the base of the first hole was deepened, following two solid side-walls and an original dry-stoned linking wall downwards. The fourth side was unstable rubbish, and we had to support it with timber shuttering to protect the digger from being buried if the bank collapsed. We had just convinced ourselves that we were excavating a filled shaft, when Darren began to remove material from underneath the dry-stoned supporting wall and discovered that he could see into a lower, choked level. It was enough to encourage us

back for another session, however, after only another couple of hours digging we had reached the end and it was clear that this level was also only a short trial. Attention returned to excavating the floor, however, after only a few minutes work Darren hit solid vein material, and we realised that this was the sole of the 'mine', and there was nowhere else to go !

In total our hole was 4 metres deep, and 5 metres long (with the bits added together), and was probably originally a trial on the line of an unpromising vein, possibly exposed during quarrying activities. Certainly there was no evidence of any workable minerals in the exposed vein material, and only waste barytes and calcite in the extracted spoil.

Altogether we must have removed over 6 tons of debris, which then had to be put back into the hole once we had measured it and taken photographs.

Those involved: Darren Conde, Ralph Johnson, Len Kirkham, Colin Knox, John Shenton.

Colin 'Steve' Knox. 26th September 2005.

Gating Redhurst Swallet, Manifold Valley.

Redhurst Swallet is the first major swallet in the River Manifold, downstream of Wetton Mill. The river is well known as a seasonal stream, running on the surface until it reaches the reef limestones at Wetton Mill, then disappearing underground at the major sink below Darfar Crag, during the drier, summer months. The river bed is then dry all the way to the Main Rising at Ilam. During the winter months, or in wet weather, the water levels rise, the Wetton Mill Sink is overwhelmed, and the river flows in its bed as far as Redhurst Crag, where there are a series of small entrances at river level. For a short time a major part of the river disappears here, until the complex of narrow, muddy passages is completely full, and the river then continues to the next swallet downstream.

Because of its position, the entrances to Redhurst have always acted as receptacles to every kind of water-borne rubbish, and the passages are generally slimy and smelly, with jammed branches and leaves lodged at each constriction. For a long time an old grill had been lodged in place to try to keep the debris out, but this has disappeared at some time in the last couple of years, and it was clear that something needed to be done to improve the situation.

The healthy relationship which has developed recently between The National Trust (landowners) and Len Kirkham (caver) led to a plan to install a new, permanently fixed grill at the largest opening, while maintaining unrestricted access for cavers. The grill was intended to keep rubbish out of the system during flood conditions, and to make the entrance less tempting to passing members of the public when the river was dry, however a 'bolted' gate, set into the grill, would be no barrier to cavers.

Len and I turned up on 16th September, with a car filled with tools, and a newly constructed grill, only to discover that rain the previous day had filled the river with a rushing brown torrent ! The top of the main entrance was barely visible, so there was over a metre depth of water rushing by.

The following week, on 22nd September, we were back, accompanied by Darren Conde, and this time the river-bed was dry.

With two National Trust wardens to mix concrete for us, the whole job was done in about four hours. Len's superbly constructed grill is bolted and concreted in place over the central, largest entrance, with the flanking openings loosely packed with large boulders. An opening gate in the grill is held closed by a single large bolt which

can be easily opened with an adjustable spanner. Another, smaller entrance, a few metres downstream, was left open, as it was a narrow tube which would be unattractive to anyone other than cavers.

Those involved: Darren Conde, Len Kirkham, Colin Knox, plus National Trust staff.

Colin 'Steve' Knox 27th September 2005

Exploring the Welsh Slate Labyrinths, Part 2

Tanygrisiau, Blaenau Ffestiniog. Wednesday, 5th October 2005

This was a further visit to the valley of Cwmorthin, with its range of surface and underground slate quarries. Our party, comprising Ralph, Len, John Shenton and I, set off from the parking space at the end of the road below Craig yr Wrysgan, and plodded up the steep slate track below the huge Cwmorthin Quarry waste tip. Where the track levelled off, we crossed a footbridge to the left, over the fast flowing Afon Cwmorthin stream, to an area of slate terraces, with rail tracks and a low building.

This is the abandoned site of an attempt to open a 'tourist attraction' here, with a reconstructed slate cutting area, and even a slate fountain ! Len and I went down the steps into the building, and found ourselves on a rotting floor about five metres above a relatively modern 'Pelton' (I think) waterwheel, which was set up to drive a generator on the platform above. There were tools, oil cans and piles of rubbish everywhere, but the assembly was essentially complete.

We moved on, passing the header-pool for the waterwheel, and shortly beyond, we turned left off the main pathway, to follow a narrow, flagged pathway which climbed towards the slate-rock outcrops above. The path has the appearance of an old pack-horse route, and climbs steadily to a large, flat terrace, with two ruined buildings, close to an open adit. According to the Mine Plan which we had with us [see below] this is the entrance to 'Floor 1'.

Wrysgan Slate Quarry

[SH 6780 4575]

A level, walking-height passage, about two metres wide and with a few centimetres depth of water covering the floor, led away into the darkness. After about sixty metres, the passage broke out onto a level space at the base of a huge, sloping void, stretching up at about forty-five degrees to the left. Far up in the darkness, beyond the top of the steep slope of slate rubble, a vague patch of grey light indicated a hidden link to the outside. Walking across the open space we entered the continuing passage beyond, only to reach another, even larger, void, after about twenty-five metres. There was no sign of daylight here, just a vast slope of debris stretching upwards beyond the range of our lamps. Straight on again, we followed the continuing passage, splashing through shallow water for about seventy-five metres to the base of a large chamber, at least forty metres wide, with a steep, sloping wall of slate on the left. Although the top of this third chamber was visible about thirty metres up the sloping wall, there was no obvious way up. The 'Floor 1' base passage went on again, still level, for about fifteen metres to the fourth, and final, chamber, which was almost identical in size and shape to chamber three. At the furthest limit there was a small inlet spattering down the wall, next to a rusted pipe.

We retraced our steps to Chamber Two, and made our way steeply up the rubble slope, gaining at least thirty metres in height, to reach a horizontal terrace at the level of 'Floor 2'. In the chamber wall was the opening to the 'Floor 2' passage, with odd lengths of rail still in-situ. Following this we reached the level floor of a void which soared up, at an angle of about forty-five degrees, to a rectangle of bright daylight, far, far above, but which did not extend downwards to the 'Floor 1' level. Another party

of cavers were making their way up the steep slope above, so we stayed at 'Floor 2' level, and followed the continuing service-passage ahead, into the base of another enormous working. This part of the underground quarry has suffered from major collapses, and consequently we had to make our way over massive fallen blocks to reach the ongoing passage beyond, passing the opening of a descending 'ventilation adit' on the right. Only a short distance further, the passage reached yet another worked-out area, however progress was halted by a massive jumble of fallen rock which blocked the way on. It was possible to squeeze up between huge rocks for a short distance, but the whole area was unstable.

Turning back, we investigated the descending ventilation adit, following an old cable down the steep passage. After about twenty metres the passage terminated on a narrow ledge overlooking the top of the third chamber visited from 'Floor 1'. A wire traverse-line is permanently rigged across the head-wall, and gives access to a horizontal link-passage to the top of the fourth chamber on 'Floor 1'. At the passage end, several anchors in the head-wall have been linked together with rope to form an anchor for use when abseiling into the chamber below.

We returned to the chamber where we had earlier seen the other cavers, and followed their route up the steep wall, using an in-situ hand-line. After gaining about twenty metres in height, the route reaches a wide, horizontal terrace at 'Floor 3' level. The other cavers were resting there, surrounded by candles, and turned out to be a party of youngsters with their adult instructors.

[Apparently a number of local Outdoor Education Centres use Wrysgan with groups of youngsters. From the 'Floor 3' terrace, linking passages run in each direction to the neighbouring workings. Ralph joined the group of youngsters, and headed off through the left side-passage (looking up the slope) to explore their route out to the surface.]

From the terrace, the rubble-slope continued steeply upwards for over sixty metres, towards the daylight window far above. About halfway up, a line of enormous blocks, fallen from the roof, made a barrier across the slope, but this was passed without difficulty, to eventually reach a wide, flat area at 'Floor 6' level. The flat area was brightly lit by the opening in the wall above, and, through an archway to the left, another open space was also illuminated by a similar window to daylight, and through a short horizontal adit giving access to the Barracks area outside. The local sheep seem to use this area as their own special refuge from the weather, and have left a deep layer of droppings everywhere.

Turning right at the 'sheep-walk' at the top of the rubble slope, the 'Floor 6' service-adit led, after forty-five metres, to another chamber with a daylight window above, and on again to yet another, even larger, chamber with a daylight window high above ! There may well have been opportunities in this part of the quarry to find ways down into the lower workings again, beyond the huge collapse on 'Floor 2' level, which we had turned back at earlier, but we turned back and exited at the 'Floor 6' Barracks adit.

Outside were the ruins of three small, slate buildings, and vast areas of slate waste spreading out towards the slope of the hillside, to the north-east. Close by, at the head of a deep gully between two 'tramming-tips', was a patch of vegetation concealing the entrance to one of the two 'Floor 5' adits, although, as it was flooded to a depth of about 0.5 metres, we did not enter it. A little further to the north-east, were the remaining side-walls of a 'drum-house' at the top of a steep incline down to the main slate Dressing Shed, at 'Floor 4' level. Just below the ruined 'drum-house' was the other 'Floor 5' adit entrance.

[This was the exit used by Ralph to rejoin us on the surface, and is apparently the route used by instructed groups.]

Passing a small reservoir with a stone dam and well-constructed feeder, the next feature to the south-west along the cliff-line, was a small waste-tip and a straight, horizontal adit about thirty metres long, leading to a high window into the third 'Floor 6' daylight chamber. On the hillside, just above we found the two open shafts forming the daylight windows seen from the third and fourth 'Floor 6' chambers below. Their unprotected, slippery edges would be really nasty if you were walking across this hillside in poor visibility or darkness.

Sixty metres further along the hillside, an obvious waste tip marked the entrance to another adit, although as it was flooded to a depth of about 0.5 metres, we did not enter it. We moved on, and, about two hundred metres further, we reached the entrance to a 'ventilating adit'. The passage was about two metres square at first, and although it was initially wet, after a short distance it became dry and reduced in size to crawling height, and became a steep descent. Fifty metres from the entrance, the passage turned sharply to the left, and after a short crawl it reached the lip of a pitch into the top of a huge void. There were several anchors in place, but without SRT kit and rope there was no way on. The pitch looked to be at least twenty-five metres deep.

Back outside, we walked on to investigate one further feature, visible in the distance as a small waste tip below the rock outcrop. It turned out to be another wet adit, with water about 0.5 metres deep, so once again we decided to keep our feet dry and save it for another time.

Our return route was back the way we had come, and down the incline to the site of the Dressing Shed. A small building at the side had been partly demolished by a huge boulder which had come down as part of a massive collapse from above the 'Floor 4' adit entrance, apparently blocking it completely. Close-by, there was the open top to another ventilating adit, which went steeply down towards the top of the very first chamber we had visited on 'Floor 1', and which would have been the source of the faint daylight we had seen from below. We explored the Dressing Shed and the surrounding buildings, finding remnants of cutting and drilling machinery, then went across to the top of the major incline where there were fragments of the cast-iron winding equipment, abandoned after it was broken up during attempts to salvage it for scrap. The incline is very impressive, dropping steeply, at first through a tunnel, then down the open hillside to a minor road, visible far below.

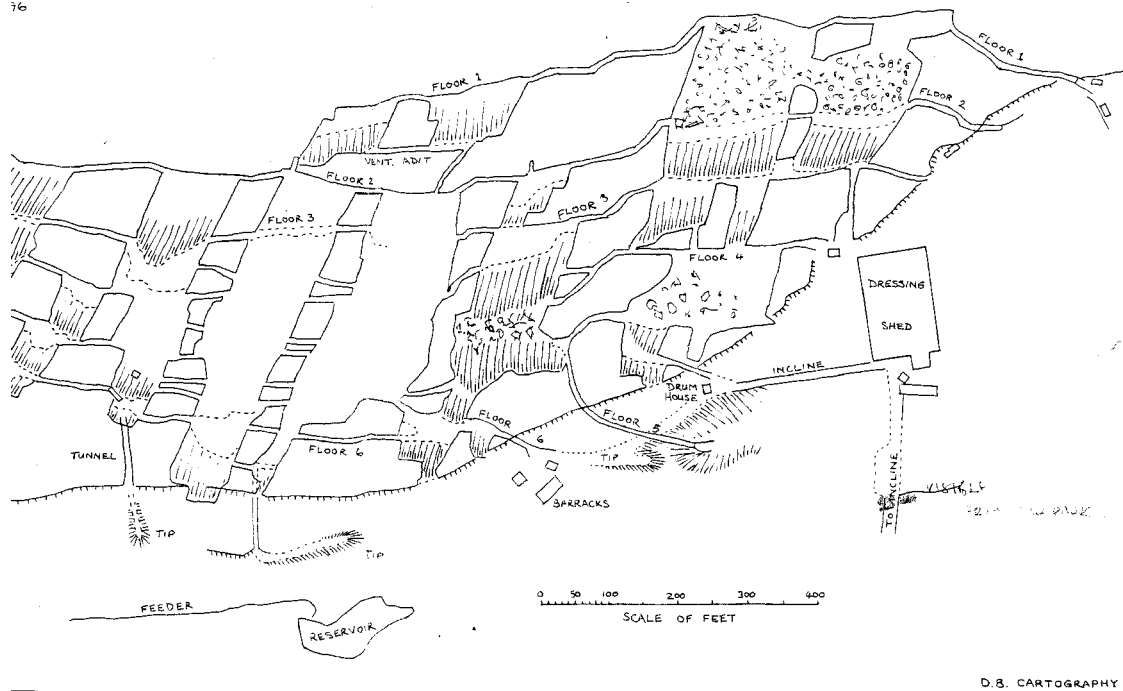
We used an easier path to get back to the car, following the Miners' slate steps down from the Dressing Shed, beside the rock-face, passing the entrance to an open adit, probably to the 'Floor 3' level. The mine plan that we had with us, indicated another adit, leading to the 'Floor 2' level, but we did not see it. We were soon back at the entrance to 'Floor 1', where we had entered the underground quarry, some hours before.

Future trips are planned to the quarries in this area, and in particular we are hoping to attempt the through-trip from Croesor to Rhosydd, involving climbing mountains, SRT and using a dinghy to cross underground lakes !!

Steve Knox 12th October 2005

Note: The survey that we used was a copy, obtained by Ralph, of one compiled and drawn from original mine plans by David Baines, 30-1-96.

WRYSGAN SLATE QUARRY



Rhosydd Quarry to Rhosydd Adit. Through Trip.

The “easiest” climb down into the quarry is towards the northern end of the east side and this is not without interest! In wet weather it could be quite exciting and perhaps worth a rope for protection. Once at the bottom of the quarry head towards the northern end and climb down to the foot of the slope, there is a disconcerting amount of large “fresh” rock at the start of the slope as one passes under the overhanging cliff.

At the foot of the slope a tramway runs along a level. At its right hand extremity there is a major collapse which we later assumed to be at the head of the incline visible from the end of the adit in Rhosydd Mine.

Retrace ones steps a few metres and head down the steeply sloping passage on the right to gain the incline mentioned above- take care, as it’s steep and slippery. The second passage on the left leads to a massive cavern which is gained more easily by continuing to the foot of the incline and heading left. A large flooded passage is reached with an interesting passage leading off on the far side, this could be gained by a very cold swim (or dinghy) or by bolting the far wall after crossing the foot of the slope on the left which requires crossing beneath the major collapse.

From the “lake” head back to where the large tensioning wheel lies at the end of the kilometre adit leading to the surface.

There are two further passages worthy of investigation, one at the southwest corner of the quarry heading west and one at the westerly end of the tramway which we used to gain access to the through trip described.

Thanks must go to Tim and Darren who were the first CCPC members to pioneer the route from the quarry to the Rhosydd adit.

PS. We now have available a survey of the Croesor- Rosydd through trip (not recommended for the faint-hearted) and a pretty good idea of the route from Cwmorthen to Oakley.

Amendments to Constitution.

At our AGM in October a few changes were made to the constitution, briefly these are:

There are 4 classes of membership. Full, associate, temporary and honorary. All new members must join as associates for the first 12 months. **Associate members** cannot vote (but **can** have their say at meetings) and cannot borrow gear unless accompanied by a full member.

Honorary members who do not pay insurance will be termed as “friends” and cannot take part in club activities. (Hopefully this will change in the New Year when a reduced insurance premium may be available)

AGM date changed back to January to bring it in line with the new insurance year.

At meetings one quarter of the voting membership is required for a meeting to be quorate.

The committee have the power to make decisions on behalf of the club as long as the decisions are in line with the constitution and the decision is approved by a majority of the committee.

If anyone would like a copy of the constitution please ask.

Foreign Trips.

If anyone is interested in a “quickie” in France then let Jen know. Areas such as The Jura (Grotte de la Diau etc) Vercor, or Chartrouse can be accessed in a long weekend by car (or fly-drive) or even longer if desired.



You've probably heard by now that Darren came a cropper on his bike on Sunday 23 Oct. Apparently the bike survived without damage but Darren didn't. However he has now been re- assembled and is improving at home. Apparently the bike is not for sale!

Saturday 12 November. DCRO training at Whitehall OEC Buxton. ALL are welcome, this is aimed at those fairly new (or rusty) to the game.

Two SRT training days are being arranged at Ingleboro' Hall, Clapham, Yorks. The plan is to have an “intro” day and a more advanced session Cost £35. If you're interested contact Ralph. The Cave Leader L1 course in Dec. is now full.

Now the bad news- subs for 2006 are due NOW (Oct 1st!) The good news is that they have been REDUCED to £15 and £7.50. Please send John a cheque ASAP.