

Welsh Mines Society

(Member of the National Association of Historical Mining Organizations)



WELSH MINES NEWSLETTER

NEWSLETTER 30

June 1994

1 1994 PROGRAMME

a) **Summer Meet 18/19 June 1994: Forest of Dean** Based on the Littledean House Hotel, Littledean phone 0594 822106 for accommodation etc. {The car park is through the archway}. There are various camping sites in the Forest. This should be a good weekend with ample underground experiences, but you must bring your own gear - helmets, electric lamps etc.

Saturday Meet at 11a.m. at Morse's Level Colliery 639088 on the road from Blakeney to Parkend. We are grateful to Michael Howell and John Hine for the opportunity to visit a working coal-face, but numbers may be limited, so the trip cannot be guaranteed.. Visits to other free-mines in the area will also be available. Lunch is at the Rising Sun Inn, 1/2 mile away 631087.

The afternoon visit is to Bixslade coal iron and stone mines, surface only, meet at Cannop Ponds on the B4234, 607100.

The Evening is at the Littledean House Hotel (food can be obtained from the hotel) and there will be a slides - please bring some - and hopefully I shall also be showing a video on the Cornish mining, published by Graeme Spink, 10, Cardinal Avenue, St Budeaux, Plymouth at £10 and cheap at the price.

Sunday Meet at 10 a.m., Clearwell Caves near Coleford 577082, for an iron mine u/g experience by kind permission of Ray Wright. There should be no limit to numbers. Lunch at the caves. In the afternoon we will visit ancient iron mines etc. and perhaps a goldmine.

Leaders John Hine and David Bick

b) **Autumn Meet 17/18 September 1994 Minera and District**

Saturday Meet at 12 a.m. at Minera Quarry. Follow signs to Minera from the A525 at the west end of Coedpoeth. On reaching Minera village take the right fork to the quarry and Gwynfryn. After 1/2 mile turn left on a "No Through Road" marked for quarry traffic and continue to quarry. Medieval mining area plus later sites. Packed lunch would be required.

The evening is at the Hands Hotel in Llangollen, (left after crossing bridge, or may be approached from east of traffic lights at top of main street) - meet at 7 pm for bar meals. Principal speaker is Bill Slater of the Minera Lead mines, who has been in charge of excavations. B & B at the hotel is a reduced rate of £25 for WMS members.

Sunday Meet at 10 a.m. at Minera Lead Mines (directions from A525 as quarry as above). There will be a conducted tour of the site led by Bill Slater. A contribution of £1 towards costs would be appreciated.

Leader John Bennett

2 NAMHO FIELD MEET 5-8 th August. This is also based in the Forest of Dean. Details from John Hine, the Grottagge, 2 Cullis Lane, Mile End, Coleford, Glos. Please enclose an A4 SAE.

3 **Red Dragon 23/24 April**

Simon Harris reports worthwhile progress on site, though a pretty inclement weather with much rain and hail. The "floor" is now cleared, though its exact level is yet uncertain, and decisions are needed on how best to consolidate the stonework. those present were David Seaborne, Ron Fullagar, George Hall and Simon Harris. The landowner, Mr Wyn Jones was again very helpful in lending a tractor, wheelbarrow and sundry tools, and we anticipate another working party next year to finish the job.

4 **THE GLYN PITS, PONTYPOOL 30th April / 1st May**

With permission of the landowner and Cadw, in glorious weather, a dozen members of the WMS and WMPT did sterling work clearing scrub and tidying up the site, which is now totally transformed and very presentable. (Note-2 pairs of gloves were left behind - apply to DEB) The Dorothea Co. has submitted detailed estimates for various stages of repair to the engines and prices are now awaited for restoring the buildings. Things look promising, and the more publicity the better.

5 **ANGLESEY MINES Plc (N/L 29 item 17)**

John Bennett and I visited the site recently and were appalled at the ruinous and derelict state of the headframe and buildings generally. There now seems little hope that any of those glowing prospects held out to shareholders a few years ago will ever be realised. I have a block of shares for sale - no unreasonable offer refused.

6 **DOE RESEARCH PROJECT**

A report, The Reclamation and Management of Metaliferous Minesites has just been published at £30, available from HMSO. I played some small part in this work which is to form the "bible" for local authorities etc., bent on "restoring" abandoned sites. It has 167 pgs with many colour photos of old mines throughout Britain including Parys Mountain, Snailbeach, Great Orme, Parc, Minera, and Van. The authors have done their best to include IA aspects amongst all the others, but having said this I must admit grave reservations as to the overall effects of throwing public money at old mines, certainly as far as our interests are concerned. As regards mining landscapes, the best treatment is no treatment at all - the integrity of the site remains, instead of ending up like a cross between Stourhead and a theme park, with a mine building here and there popping decoratively out of trees (planted by kind permission of liberal tree planting grants, which of course have to be spent). Still, it has to be said that mainly due to the dedicated work and lobbying of the mining enthusiast, at least something will now be preserved, and even restored (as at Minera), where not many years ago whole landscapes were being destroyed forever. And certainly the Welsh Development Agency is now very sympathetic to Industrial Archaeology and its amenity potential. If you want to borrow a copy of the report, try the inter-library loan service.

7 **BRONZE AGE LEAD MINES?**

According to a recent article, lead beads, or what remained of them, very oxidised, have been found in Scotland dating from 1600 - 2000 BC. Now this opens a Pandora's box of possibilities regarding the age of our earliest lead mines, which I have long suspected is just as early as our copper mines. Indeed, to my mind it is more than likely that sites like Nantyrriera and Copa Hill were in fact worked for lead, and perhaps copper also,. Certainly no firm evidence has ever been forthcoming that copper as opposed to lead was worked at these sites; only that they were active in the Bronze age. Early Mines Research Group, your comments are awaited.

8 BARRACKS (N/L 29 Item 8)

Dr Ivor Brown comments that his experience at Cannock (Staffs) barracks in 1956 was akin to the Wild West, with punch-ups and gunfights. No wonder he left the same day.

9 GOLD IN COAL (N/L 29 Item 16)

Dr Brown supposes the reference to 0.04 grams of gold per ton in South Wales Coal should read 0.04 grains. But no, the former is correct, and we expect mining developments very shortly.

10 NIXON'S VENTILATOR

Dr Brown asks if anyone knows of a model of this, or his "Billy Fair Play" machine - whatever that was. 0924 257137.

11 ACCOLADE

Dr Brown's comments on the last N/L - "well produced and interesting" were much appreciated.

12 D C DAVIES AND FRANK HILLS

Mrs Mary Mills, 24 Humber Road, London SE3 7LT is interested in the connection between Davies and Hills, who owned the Berwyn Phosphate mine and possibly others in Anglesey and Spain. (See Old Metal Mines Part 5 p 42), Hill's manager at East Greenwich was a certain Thomas Davies and Mrs Mills would welcome any information.

13 REGIONALLY IMPORTANT GEOLOGICAL SITES (RIGS)

Peter Cloughton attended a meeting to form a RIGS group for South Dyfed and reports as follows. Please contact him, 0437 532578, if you can help. "The scheme, designed to offer protection, or better access (depending on status) to sites of geological interest, is being promoted by the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) and Wildlife Trusts. A number of groups, tasked with selecting suitable sites, are already active. Whilst the scheme is geologically led it will inevitably overlap with sites of wildlife and mining archaeological value. Where this happens a coordinated approach could ensure a greater level of protection and avoid a clash of interests. CCW have already commissioned a report on potential RIGS and work is well in hand to collate data in a form accessible to planners, museums, schools etc.

There is definitely a role for the mining historian / archaeologist in this scheme and it would be useful for at least one WMS member to be involved with each group to help identify sites where there might be a joint interest."

14 SITUATIONS REQUIRED

David Pelham, minerals geologist with wide experience of small hard rock mines, is available to undertake projects and can be contacted on 0492 532095

15 PRINTER'S FAUX PAS

I recently received a letter addressed to The Welsh Miners Preservation Society, that conjured up wonderful visions of a kind of geriatric association of the "The Old Men" gathered together at some heavenly site - perhaps an old mine tip with glorious views to the west. Let me be the first to apply.

16 PANT Y WRACH COPPER MINE, PORTHMADOC

We are indebted to Harold Morris for this account:

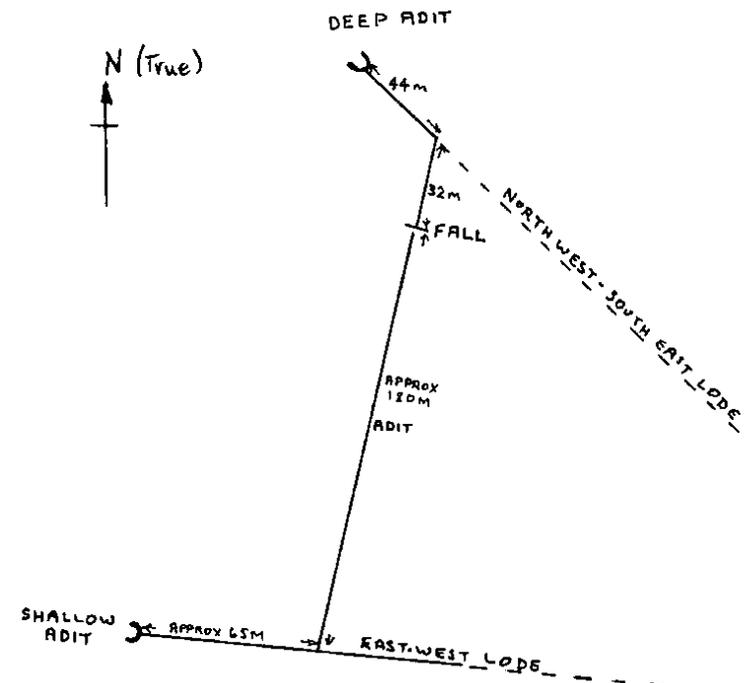
There has been speculation that an adit starting from SH 6174 4044 in the vicinity of the North West / South East Lode might penetrate the hill to the Rhiw Goch side or connect with the East / West lode. The adit was driven SE for about 44 metres, then changing to SSW and continuing for a further 32 metres to a total collapse. Efforts were made to dig this out but with little success.

Attempts were then made to descend the stopes of the EW Lode. One party reached the shallow adit but was unable to continue any distance due to a bad collapse. The portal of this adit is located at SH 6167 4018 but has been covered by a run of debris.

In late 1993 a further party penetrated to the shallow adit and discovered the remains of a jack-roll guarding a deep shaft. Another visit was made just prior to Christmas, when the descent was repeated by a party of 6, and this time 3 of the party descended the jack-roll shaft to a depth of 17 metres, where they, at the limit of the ladder, were able to enter a short stope drive. The stope was seen to continue down to a planked floor, having a further drop below.

In January a well equipped party of 8 completed the descent having reached bottom about 16 metres below the stope drive. It was found that the deep adit connected with these workings, but did not continue along the lode for more than a few metres. Apart from a short rise there was no stopping at this level. The adit was dry for almost 50 metres, and could be seen to continue in a straight line. Not wishing to get wet no attempt was made to wade further along the adit. (Shame -DEB!) The calculated length of the deep adit between the fall and the EW Lode is about 180 metres.

The Shallow adit does not penetrate far into the hill, therefore it would seem that there is no truth in stories of a connection to old levels on the far side.



17 FELINDRE FARCHOG MINES (Pembrokeshire, N/L 29 item 24)

Tony Oldham has explored these enigmatic workings at SN 0955 3877 as follows: see also item 18 below. "We went through the gate nearest the bridge and followed the river on the southern side for about 200 metres downstream. The first mine is indicated by a red stain on the rocks caused by the water coming out. A six foot descent (a rope is useful) leads to a small platform, just above the River level with 2 adits opening out onto it. The first is about 3x3 feet wide and ends after 6 feet. The second is 6x3 feet and ends after 25 feet. There are signs of flooding. The rock is slate and has no signs of mineralisation. They are assumed to be trial levels.

About 50 yards downstream and 25 feet from the river is a third adit. This is 6x3 feet with 3 feet of water and not explored. A little digging could easily lower the water level. There could be another adit a couple of feet upstream that could repay investigation. There appears to be a tramway about 6 feet wide leading to this. A search of the opposite side of the river did not produce any more mines. Also by the first adit there are the remains of a wooden foot bridge, (four heavy timbers, two vertical, two horizontal)"

Note Were there any boreholes seen? DEB

18 MORE FARCHOG

The WMS cardboard box of correspondence has just yielded a further comment from Peter Claughton, this time on the above mine, which he says were thoroughly explored by cavers as long ago as 1976. Ah well! He can supply full details of many local trials for a few shillings, phone 0437 532578.

19 PENNANT MINE ENQUIRY

Rolf von Arx, Buchzelgstr 39, CH-8053 Zurich, Switzerland writes as follows. "I have just come across another Welsh puzzler: a share certificate of the PENNANT VALE SLATE QUARRY AND COPPER MINE COMPANY LIMITED, dated 1872. I have located two Pennants in Wales but neither seem to fit. Could I have any more information on where the above company was active?"

Well, this sounds very much like the slate quarry and copper mine in Cwm Pennant mentioned by C G Stone in the last N/L item 14. Perhaps they could get together.

20 PREHISTORIC MINES AT COPA HILL, CWMYSTWYTH, 1993

We are obliged to Simon Timberlake for these latest details at this ancient copper (or was it lead?) opencast. "Work continued during September 1993 on excavations within the infilled opencast workings. A lightweight mechanical excavator was used to remove the sterile surface layers of infill down to a depth of about 2 metres. As has been expected, a sequence of considerable thickness *in situ* layered peats and peaty silts were exposed as infill within the deeper parts of the working, with wood and moss overlying the mining sediments and worked rockface. The 6x9 metre area opened up revealed an interesting topography at the front of the mine, with two entrance areas and an upstanding rock cut shelf with areas showing working (pounding) with stone tools. As at the Great Orme, it is clear that a number of parallel small veins and veinlets of ore had been worked within the open cut, leaving unworked areas in between, although here stone rather than bone tools had been predominantly used, and the ore was almost certainly chalcopyrite and possibly other sulphides. One small working bench with stone tools and an area of crushing and fireset debris was revealed.

Undoubtedly the most important discoveries of the season were two wooden "launders" made of split and carefully hollowed out tree trunks probably oak. One still appeared to be *in situ*, lying on the rock cut floor at the entrance of the mine. Its excavated length so far is over two

metres, its position suggests that its purpose was to carry water out of the mine, although its diameter is small and it is thus difficult to see how effective it could have been. The condition of the excavated wood is on the whole poor. Samples of this have now been taken for radiocarbon dating." (Note. It is Bronze Age. DEB)

It is planned to return to continue excavating in September 1994.

21 CLWYD / POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

This body is doing splendid work recording all metal mines, to which two bulky reports with maps and plans have been devoted. I can supply copies on request for loan, plus cost of postage.

22 MINING BEFORE POWDER CONFERENCE (25 -27 March)

This weekend in Cumbria was organised by the PDMHS, HMS and IMH & A and very successful it proved. There was even a fine day on which to visit the Coniston Copper Mines. Some 20 papers were read including a number by WMS members, on subjects ranging from the KUTNA HORA mining illustration to coal mining in Tudor times. Several were devoted to Wales and the whole will be published. Details from Lynn Willies, 0629 584322

23 A BOOK ON MINERA (N / L 29, item 33 f)

Nearly all contributions are now in the hands of John Bennett, the editor. George Hall has kindly filled a vacancy at the 11th hour with a chapter on the mining history post 1850. This volume will be an introduction, not a definitive study, for which full scope remains.

24 BOOK FOR SALE

I have a spare copy of W J Lewis Lead Mining in Wales, in good condition. Best offer secures (0531 820650)

25 NEW BOOKS

a) Rhosydd Slate Quarry, Lewis and Denton. This classic definitive work is again in print after many years, available from Jon Knowles, 6 Ferncroft, Hightown, Liversedge, West Yorks. price £11,40 incl. P&P.

b) Honister Slate This is Ian Tyler's third book and takes us back "300 years to the crude start of its history". 200 pages and 60 photos will rivet you from beginning to end. This is a limited edition so place your order now. £14.44 incl. P&P from Caldbeck Mining Museum, Priests' Mill, Caldbeck, Cumbria.

c) The Red Hills Dave Kelly. "The story of Cumberland iron when life was cheap and fatalities plentiful, a fascinating tale to tell" 176 pgs, 91 illustrations. £11.49 incl. P&P, from Red Earth Publications, 7 Silver Street, Marton, Ulverston, Cumbria

d) Ancient Mining Robert Shepherd. Published for the I.M.M. by Chapman and Hall, £65. The blurb describes it as "an important new international study....", but grave suspicions arise after reading in the blurb of "possible Roman sites such as Cym Ystwith, Great Orme and Llanmech" (wherever that is). In fact, this title has been roundly condemned by reviewers, and a great opportunity for much needed work has been squandered. Better to spend the money on a hand bound half calf leather copy of The Old metal mines of Mid-Wales Parts 1-6!

26 NEW ARTICLES & EXTRACTS

a) Papers on Pembrokeshire coal and slate amounting to some 40 pages appear in the Pembrokeshire County History, volume 4, published by the Pembrokeshire Historical Society, Haverfordwest, 1993

b) In "Rural Wales", Autumn 1993 is an article on a flood at Great Orme mines that revealed more ancient workings.

c) Articles on Beach slag, Capt. William Vivian, the local mines, Tom & Jerry engine and Bronze Age smelting in North Wales, also the Mwyndy Iron Co. appear in the Journal of the Great Orme Exploration Society 1993 (2) Copies (£1 +pp) from Don Smith, 26 Carmen Sylva Road, Llandudno, who also wants to learn more of Capt. Vivian.

27 CAPT WILLIAM WILLIAMS OF VAN

Dr Ivor Brown kindly sent me an obituary of William Williams from the Mining World 22 Nov. 1879. Did you know he began at Great Holway mine, thence to Llanrwst, Cwmhesian, Dyfngwm and Nanty (Braces) near Llanidloes? Whilst there, it says he discovered the Wye Valley mines, though George Hall says they were known already. He later managed Penyclun before making the remarkable discovery of the Van mine after 8 years of dogged perserverance.

28 PENRHOS ENGINEHOUSE

This scheduled building near Wrexham (N /L 29 item 33c) as a result of collaboration between Cadw, the WMPT and Clwyd Archaeological Service, is now due for active consolidation this summer. It could be the oldest engine house in the country, and a more deserving project could scarcely be imagined.

29 CAMDWRBACH (N/L 29 item 11)

Capt. Hall, recently returned from prospecting in the Philippines, is now continuing to clear out the adit leading to a supposedly rich vein of ore. Volunteers welcome 0544 231006

30 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks are due to all contributors including Dr Ivor Brown , Peter Claughton, Damian McCurdy, George Hall, Simon Harris, John Hine, John Bennett, Tony Oldham, Harold Morris and Mark Walters.

Dead line for next N/L 5th November 1994.

Note : For the umpteenth time, please send your subscriptions (£2 for one year, £4 for 2 years) to David Roe, 20, Lutterburn Street, Ugborough, Ivybridge, Devon PL21 ONG, not to me.

I am only the editor, thank goodness.

David Bick, Pound House, Newent, Glos. 0531 820650 6th May 1994

31 CHWAREL BLAENYCWM

This excellent account of the above slate mine (in Welsh) is available for one month loan from David Roe for £1.50 to cover P&P.

32 Lost Newsletters

It appears that a number of N/L went missing in the Christmas mailing - especially between the names beginning K and L. If you contact David Roe he will be happy to provide copies to those who are still without. *I believe I have discovered who did not receive the N/L 29 and enclose a copy with my apologies DMR*