

THE LEAD MINES OF WEARDALE (WHIT CAMP 1963)

This is a reprint of an Article written by Mick Melvin in 1963 and included in the White Rose Pothole Club Journal for that year; I have decided not to change the content in any way.

On Whit Sunday a party of Club Members descended Fairy Holes with the Red Rose Cave and Pothole Club, whilst another party descended a few lead mines in the area. members descending the mines were:- M.Melvin (leader), M. Braithwaite, J. Hanslip, S.Dobson S. Day, M. Omerod and J. Rothwell.

HOLE 1.

The first shaft which we laddered was a 35ft. pitch into a chamber with a high rift passage going right, and a hole on the left leading into a large chamber. This hole was left alone as it was considered too dangerous.

After 50ft. the roof in the right hand passage lowered to about 6ft. high, with a deep covering of silt on the floor. We came upon some tools, a long crow-bar with its point 8 inches into the silt, and a shovel which crumbled to the touch. We straddled a hole in the floor and came across some small gauge railway lines, and also found a few candles sticking in the wall. The passage came to a blank wall after 300ft. but we found that there was another passage underneath us, and so returning to the hole in the floor we decided to descend. Mick Omerod climbed down (it was something like eight feet down) and followed the passage for approximately 100ft. but then found that the way was blocked by a roof fall. Therefore we returned to the surface, deladdered the shaft, and made tracks to another mine.

HOLE 2.

We belayed the ladder to a post and descended a 35ft. shaft, which had all but crumbled away. At the bottom of this shaft was a short passage which led us to a boulder choke, so after we had had a careful look around we ascended and went over the hill to a shaft with a big beam across the top.

HOLE 3.

This shaft had been shored all the way down, but the thin boards had rotted away, leaving

the thick cross members in place. Mick Omerod descended first and he informed us of a dead sheep's presence at the bottom of the shaft. The rest of us descended and followed Mick up a high passage. As we proceeded we kept crossing shafts in the floor, and rotting timber was covering the floor to a large extent. After 300ft. the passage took two levels, and on following the lower one we soon came upon water. After wading knee-deep for 100ft. we came to a roof fall where we could all stand clear of the water. From this point the water was crystal clear and about three feet in depth. On the bottom there were piles of broken wood which made wading too dangerous, so we returned to explore the upper level.

One point which springs to mind about this water is that the old miners may have broken into a stream passage of some unknown system which now connects with the far end of the flooded passage. This is doubtful but not impossible as you will see later in this account.

The upper level proved difficult to reach, but each man helped the other and we managed it. A large round passage followed which proved to have one or two small passages running from it, usually running for 75-100ft. then ending abruptly. It was in one of these short passages that we found clog prints, and the marks of heavy cord pants in the mud, (remember that the rest of the mine looked as if it had been flooded at various times) and an old paper bag with an advert on it, which fell to pieces when I tried to pick it up. There were candles sticking from the clay all over this gallery and in another side passage we found what we thought to be a small vein of Blue John stone, although none of us profess to be geologists. This was definitely the most interesting mine in the area and it seemed to us to have been left untouched since the miners left it. If this is the case the existence of the canal was unknown until we found it, and my theory of a stream passage connection cannot be disproved until somebody goes to the end of it.

The other mines which we found in the area were all levels and had mostly been explored by cyclists, hikers, etc. All other mines were very dangerous and I must utter a warning to anyone wishing to descend them.

Mick Melvin (2010)