

JOURNAL OF THE



Issue No. 1, 2009

COVER PHOTOGRAPH

The Great Orme's black Billy goat

AGM 2009

The GOES AGM will take place this year on Saturday 9th May, 2pm at Great Orme Mines Ltd. Further details and nomination forms are included with this Journal.

LLANDUDNO EXTRAVAGANZA

The annual Victorian Extravaganza and Transport Festival takes place this year on the bank holiday weekend of Saturday 2nd to Monday 4th of May.

GOES will be erecting the gazebo on Sunday 3rd May, providing information about the Society to interested passers by.

All help would be greatly appreciated on the day. If you are available, even if only to call by and say hello, GOES will be located next to the entrance to the Ty Gwyn mine on the Promenade.

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An unusual car spotted at the 2008 Extravaganza

A first encounter:

Older members of the GOES fraternity had been much amused in 2006 when Brian Edwards and I 'discovered' the Internal Shaft. Apparently it had often been used as an abseil route to the main tramming level prior to its bottom section being totally blocked by a major rock-fall. However, there was still something quite exceptional waiting to be found here which had avoided detection by all recent explorers. It lay quietly undisturbed and so very close. Our mistake would eventually lead to its discovery; we would it seems have the last laugh. More of this later as the chronology unfolds.

There was a trip to Penmorfa on April 15th 2007. Ali took the opportunity to remove the kayak. It had become redundant since the introduction of the Canadian canoe and now that she had a new hobby it could be put to better use. Brian Edwards and I carried in a small extending ladder to help with a minor project; confirming the link between Rift 2 and 3. Aided by the ladder in Rift 2 we were eventually able to make a visual connection into Rift 3. The rock in this area is very loose and shattered. Fresh collapses have occurred in Rift 2, most noticeably of the slope that leads up to above the truck. The once slack rope which aided easy access is now held taut by debris. A few SRT moves may now be required to reach the higher passageway with the 'stick your head out holes'. On the plus side the fall has revealed a picturesque rock arch.

The sleeper:

On November 11th Steve Lea and I paid a visit. In the main tramming level close to the break-through point we tried to clear more of the mud slope blocking the passageway. Maintaining a narrow drainage channel along one side is becoming something of a constant battle.

Eventually I headed up into Rift 1 to retrieve a rope previously left on the 'Wet Way' section. I was keen to clear the blockage at the foot of the Internal Shaft. Digging from tramming level was proving too awkward and futile, the rope would allow me to get onto the top of the obstruction. Just below the Ice Bridge a short passage opened onto the shaft at half height and was the obvious abseil point. I had been told that it had often been used in the past, prior to the shaft becoming blocked, but despite a good search I was unable to discover any suitable anchors. (What had been used in the past? I still don't know.) Instead I decided to abseil the entire length of the shaft.

Higher up on the Connoisseurs' Traverse a huge 'flying buttress' of rock provided an enormous reliable thread. With the rope in position I was able to drop down crumbling banks of rubble that gradually funnelled into the start of the solid shaft proper. Here, as a precaution, I removed some teetering stones from the edge, in case they were dislodged whilst I was in the firing range. I took care to lay the rope over the smoothest rocks to reduce the risk of abrasion. There seemed to be several fresh scars, the likely source of the rocks now causing the blockage.

Engrossed in my mission I failed to become aware of a faint echo behind me, the stirrings of a slumbering giant, still undisturbed; its time would come.

Happy that the situation was safe enough I preceded into the shaft with its beautifully smooth walls of solid rock set just off vertical. Halfway down I passed the side passage. Below this, the walls are magnificently decorated with mineral staining. As the lowest section is reached the shaft steepens and turns back under itself in a delightful 'hockey stick' fashion. The abseil becomes vertical and then free-hanging to land on the back wall. A few metres further down and the top of the blockage revealed itself.

Breakout:

At the lowest point I soon heard Steve's voice. Encouraged by this I began digging, placing stones at a higher level, using larger rocks to create a series of walls and throwing smaller material behind them. There was more debris to remove than I had anticipated and after thirty minutes I was down in quite a hollow with the walls above getting very tottery, just at the time when my excavation was starting to undermine their foundations. Luckily before the inevitable collapse I unearthed an edge, the start of a roof and saw Steve's flickering light. This only left several larger rocks, the primary cause of the obstruction needing to be removed. This was duly achieved by a strategically placed boot knocking them through the constriction. I was then able to slither through and join Steve in the main tramming adit. Although the crumbling walls meant that the shaft still couldn't be entered safely from below we had succeeded in our initial task of reopening the shaft. At a future date my walls could be dismantled and all material completely removed from the shaft.

Writing on the wall:

On the 25th of May 2008 Brian and I placed some extra bolts and hand-lines in the following locations around Rift 1 on the circuit we normally take visitors to Penmorfa:-

- At the first tricky climb up from the changing area, just above the tramming level. Here the rocks were suspect and it was especially awkward when descending.
- On the walk across the top of the Internal Shaft on the Connoisseurs' Route. Although straightforward, a trip could have catastrophic consequences.
- Higher up in the system at a traverse across a chasm known as 'Gaz's Bag Drop'. Here extra bolts allowed us to extend a safety rope to ensure that nobody could fall back into abyss.



The Stage and Television Today newspaper



The letters OJ and WR inscribed on the wall



Whilst we had the drill I placed some bolts at the end of the passage opening onto the Internal Shaft at half height. Abseiling from here would avoid the loose rubble higher up and allow future explorers to take in the best scenery in safety. The 'traditional ab' was reinstated.

As is so often the case when time is spent in any one place for longer than normal, perhaps when entertaining guests or whilst undertaking a project, something new is discovered. As Brian and I were placing a bolt at the top of the first tricky climb we became aware of initials skilfully engraved into the rock. OJ and WR may well have been miners; would mine explorers have been so artistic? A small blind passage to the side is remarkable for the redness of its rock and the presence of a copy of 'The Stage and Television Today' dated 6th March 1975.

An awareness:

On June 1st whilst preparing to enter Penmorfa I was both surprised and delighted to be presented with a Chairman's gavel by Tom Parry, which he had hand crafted especially for my tenure (See the article on page 9).

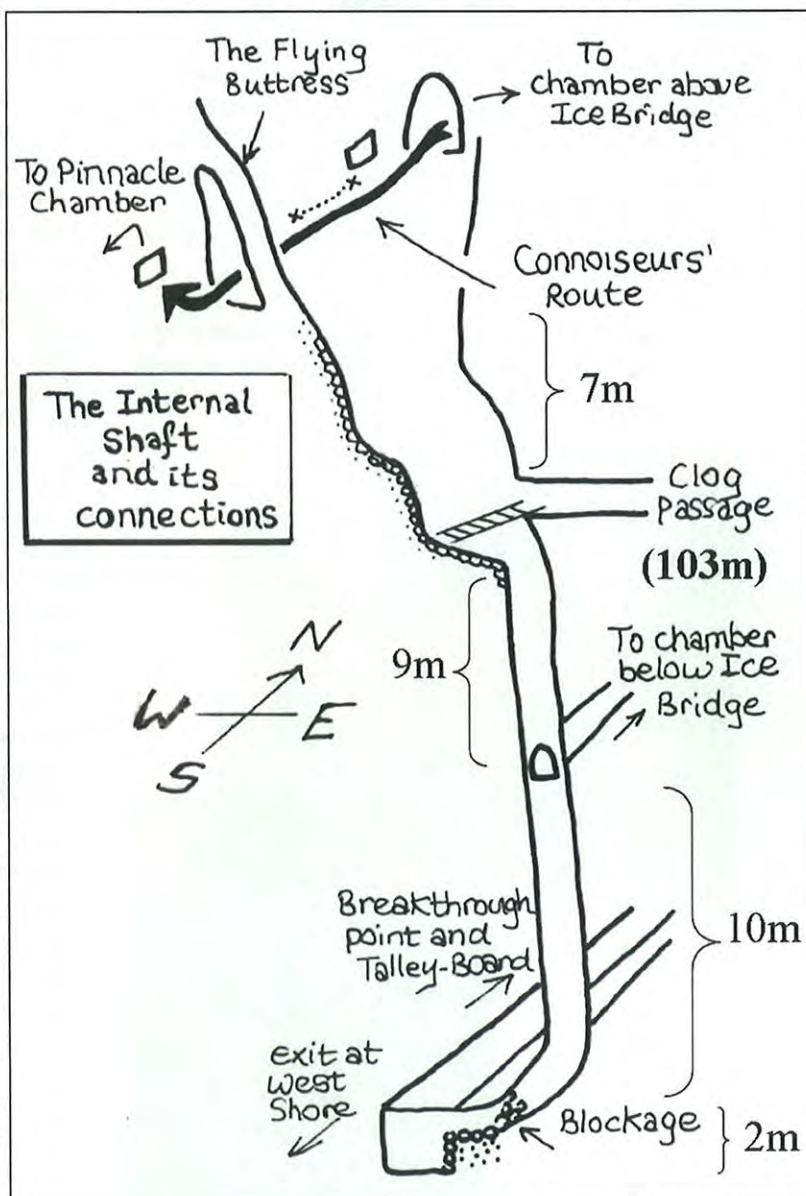
Underground, Steve, Brian and I spent some time continuing to improve access into the base of the Internal Shaft. In the Main Adit we constructed a wall with the largest rocks, behind which we tossed smaller rubble. Eventually, Brian went to place a rope on to our recently bolted 'first tricky climb' whilst I clambered up to the top of the Internal Shaft. I was intent on abseiling to clear more of the rubble that threatened to fall into the shaft and then to reach my tottering walls, which could only safely be dismantled whilst being above them.

Soon I was on the edge of the funnel section above the shaft itself. As I shuffled about, safely tethered, neatly stacking up the rocks or whizzing them into the distance well away from the brink, I became conscious of a hollowness to the place; my movements and the crashing rocks had a reverberation that was unusual. Looking around I saw for the first time the start of a large passageway, recessed in the shadows, out of reach, directly above the shaft. Whilst abseiling, it had been behind me and was easily missed when

watching out for loose rocks and potential rope cutting edges had taken priority. My torch failed to penetrate its depths and the boom emanating back suggested it was of some enormity. Perhaps before the collapse it may have been possible to step into it but now it was inconceivable. Had anyone bolted their way in? I saw no signs of any. There was a good chance that this was an entirely new discovery. I was particularly excited to realise that it was a crosscut, running approximately east, into unknown territory.

I finished the abseil, re-hanging the lower part of the rope on the new bolts in the side passage. I was now able to share my news with the others through the constriction and we discussed the new passageway's potential as we removed the bulk of the remaining rocks from the base of the shaft.

Before we left I had one more task; to check on the orientation and length of the passageway in Rift 2 immediately above Brian's ladder. It confirmed what I had thought, that this passage and the higher Carpenter Series, run above, and continue north of the main tramming level. We already know this to be the case in the Rift 3 workings. The map of Penmorfa needs updating with both these details. But what of that mysterious newly 'disturbed' passageway.



Sketch map of the workings

What wonders could it lead us to and how might it rewrite the map? As we left, we knew we would need answers soon.

Guests help out:

Two weeks later (June 15th) the club played host to a team from the Adit Now Mining History Society. The venue was Penmorfa, our additional security measures, bolts and ropes being put to good use. As well as general exploration several of the guests were especially interested in taking photographs and so were guided to suitable locations. The use of open shutters, multi-strobe flashes and strategically placed people resulted in some stunning pictures.

(Register with www.aditnow.co.uk to see these. This web site also has hundreds of photos of many other mines in the UK).

The new passage was of course mentioned, and Gaz couldn't resist a look. Scrambling down loose scree in a parallel hole it was possible to reach the funnel area without abseiling. As we gazed out across the drop at the tantalizingly close tunnel he had to admit that he couldn't recall ever seeing it before.

A plan was quickly hatched to get the huge, heavy ladder from the neighbouring chamber just above the Ice Bridge. We had a responsibility to our guests, but their tour was largely over and by now they were as interested in our discovery as we were. Helped by the Adit Now team the ladder was hauled up to the Connoisseurs' Traverse and then carefully lowered down towards the funnel area using the abseil rope. Within the restricted space Gaz and I wrestled with the long ladder taking care not to drop it or fall into the void ourselves. Eventually one end was manipulated into the mouth of the tunnel, the ladder lying almost horizontally across the shaft, in reliable footings.

With Gaz steadying the ladder I crawled across, wrapping a sling around my stairway just in case. Safely in the tunnel I unclipped, improved the placement of the ladder and held on to it as Gaz potted over to join me.



Dave at the entrance to Clog Passage



Gaz crawls into Clog Passage

The awakening:

Wandering down the passageway it was clearly something special; with its roomy proportions disappearing into the distance and its engaging echo encouraging us to explore further, but it was the abundance of clog prints strewn along the floor that stunned us.



Clog prints cover the floor

Intoxicated by the moment we sauntered along, keeping left to preserve the prints as best we could. 'Can't remember having been here before' 'This is something new' Gaz was rambling. He staggered over to the right-hand side and I followed. We walked for over a minute down the long lost cross-cut, the clog prints and the passage continuing into a totally new section of rock. 'Where the hell is it going Gaz? We will be arriving at Vivian Shaft at this rate' I quipped. Our pace quickened and we were getting slightly delirious by the time we reached the first feature a 3m section of wooden roof beams and support pillars. After a short stop we ploughed on in high spirits expectant of workings, we were truly mortified to arrive at a dead end. There was nothing else. All our hopes of something new, of a big breakthrough, came crashing down. Ambling back to the supported section we observed that the large rocks above looked stacked rather than to have fallen. This would have required a considerable effort. We pondered on why it was constructed. Had the tunnel broken into workings that needed walling, perhaps due to an ownership dispute? This idea was all we had left and we would be back to check its viability.

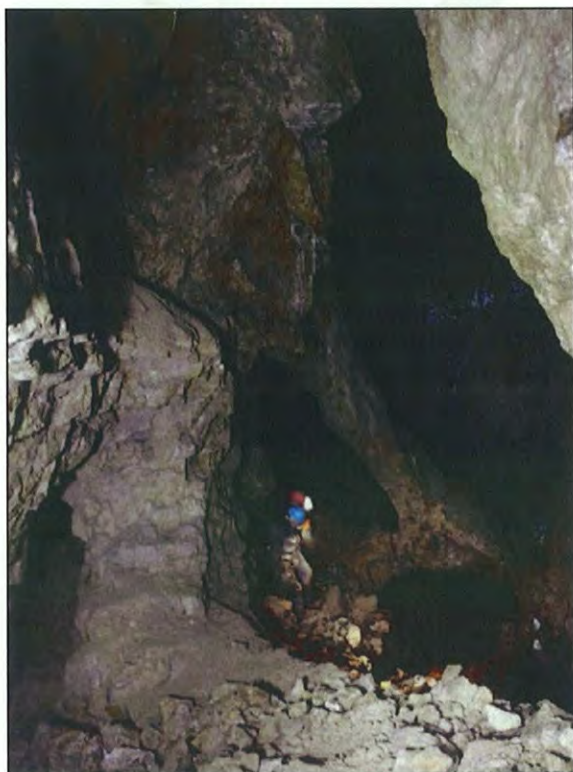
As we walked back we took care to exactly retrace our trail of freshly disturbed mud. The clog prints that remained were pristine, fragile and beautiful. On our next visit we would need to tape them off to maintain their integrity for the future. Soon out and back with the others we discussed our findings and shared our disappointment in such an abrupt end. There was plenty to talk about as we made our way down through the system and out to West Shore.

Spirit of place:

The efforts of the Adit Now team would produce some excellent pictures of Penmorfa, some of which illustrate this text. One of the most notable was taken by Helen Wilkinson. It shows the Flying Buttress, that huge thread belay above the Internal Shaft. The buttress appears to be the limb of a large primate, pointing directly at our newly discovered passageway. Is it just a trick of the light on rock irregularities, or, could it be the manifestation of a disturbed entity, a guardian who has slumbered undisturbed for so long? In Shamanic lore the God of Wisdom is sometimes portrayed as a baboon. He waits to judge us and to listen to the appeals of our soul before we can pass into the after life. The spirit of Penmorfa sends us a message; it is wise to look after the places we explore or we may have to accept the consequences later!



Pinnacle chamber by Helen Wilkinson



The spirit of Penmorfa by Helen Wilkinson

A bridge too far:

We were back the following weekend (June 22nd), Brian Gaz and myself. I was first into 'Clog Passage' (as it had become known) and quickly taped off the precious prints before the others arrived. Our mission was to investigate the roof above those wooden beams. It was an intriguing feature of the tunnel and our only hope of finding a route into further workings.



Gaz inspects the woodwork

With the help of Gaz's knee I managed to get into an awkward bridging position below one end of the roof beams. Using my ice axe I was able to start removing some of the rocks that had apparently been deliberately placed there together with the sandy infill that glued them together. Gaz and Brian stood watching the hazardous operation, clear of the projectiles.



Projectiles!



Dave digs above the woodwork

I was stretching ever further, in increasing pain from my half dislocating hips, and was thankful to eventually squat on the first of the cleared beams which I hoped was strong enough to support me. I couldn't weigh more than the rocks surely. After more trundling and scraping the situation was still unclear. There didn't appear to be any loose material above.

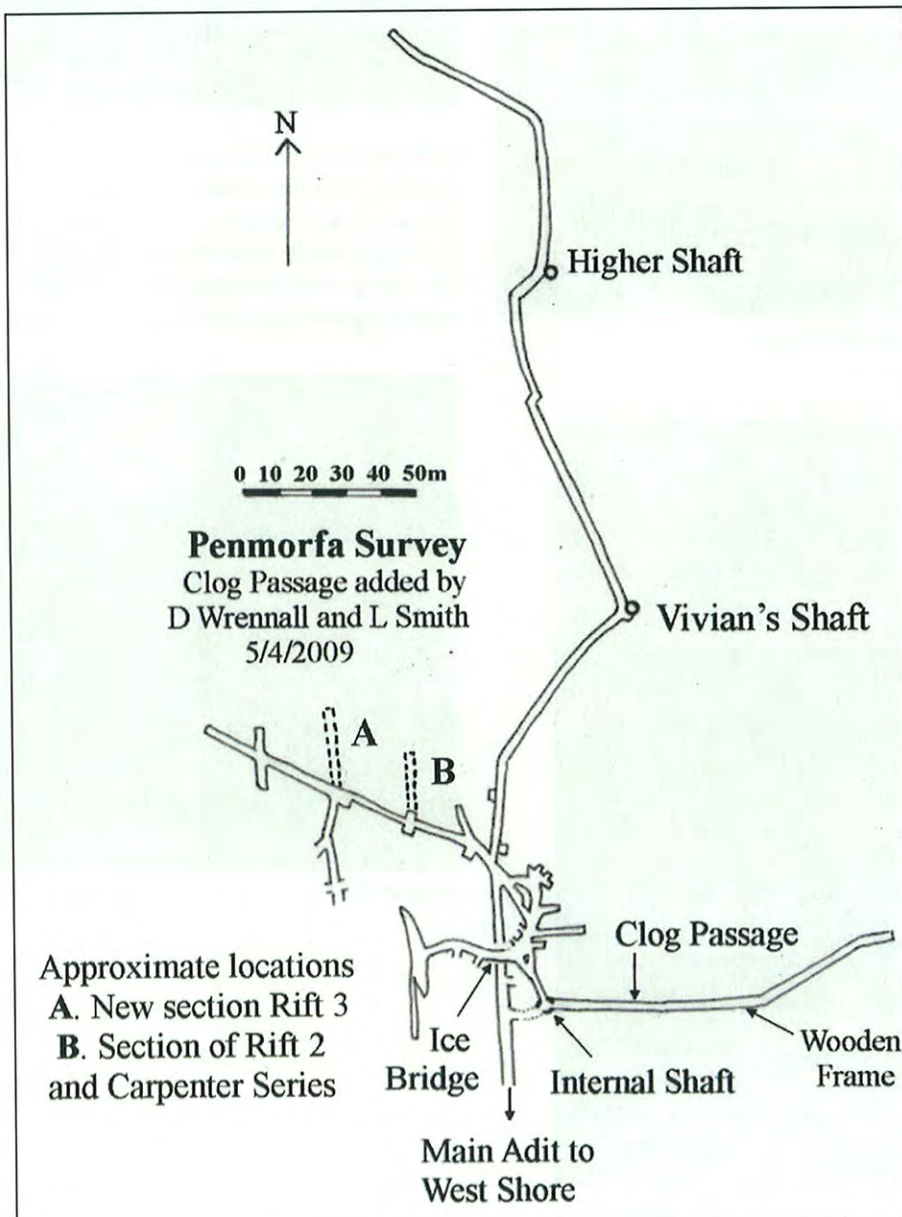
Perhaps the roof had been the source of a sand flow that had needed blocking. If this was the case, maybe over time the flow would re-establish itself. The rationale behind the construction of such an elaborate structure still puzzled us, as we again took leave of Clog Passage and made our way back across the ladder.

Latest News:

On the 5th of April 2009 Leslie Smith, on his first trip into Penmorfa, helped me complete an accurate survey of Clog Passage. There was no sign of any sand flow. Additional work was undertaken to protect the clog prints. An abseil down the Internal Shaft allowed us to take some precise measurements.

Together with Steve Lea we then continued excavating rubble from the base of the shaft. Although more digging is still required it can now be safely entered from below.

David Wrennall, April 2009



MASONIC GRAVE

A photograph of a large, light-colored stone monument in a cemetery. The monument has a tall, rectangular upper section with a circular emblem at the top and a wider, lower section. Hebrew text is inscribed on the upper section. The monument is surrounded by other graves and is set against a backdrop of a grassy hill and trees.

שר השם שם
 יצחק ויצחק
 רחל שרה
 בשאר רשע
 מרדכי ורחל
 רחל שרה
 שרה ויצחק
 שר ויצחק
 רחל שרה

JUL 30 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13



 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13

There are two ways, at least, of combining and using these characters for the purposes of secret correspondence. One method is to call the first sign, $\lrcorner$ a; the same, with a point, $\lrcorner\cdot$ b, etc. Another is to apply them, in their regular course, to the first half of the alphabet, $\lrcorner$ a, $\lrcorner\cdot$ b, and so on. to m; after which, repeat them with a dot, beginning with $\lrcorner\cdot$ n, $\lrcorner\cdot\cdot$ o, etc., to $\lrcorner\cdot\cdot\cdot$ z.

a b c d e f g h i j k l m

n o p q r s t u v w x y z

J U L C O E F G H I J K L M
 a b c d e f g h i j k l m
 N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z
 n o p q r s t u v w x y z

A JL 7L >> Δ' > < Λ Π ▽ ▽ ▽ ▽ ▽ etc.
 &c &c &c w c ' ' Λ . . , , : : ?

Using this, the inscription translates as a quote from Dylan Thomas's *Under Milk Wood*:

This cypher didn't seem to work for the translation of the other side of the stone, but the last 2 lines appear to spell out 'THE BEST GREET STONE'

Apparently the Freemasons use a variation on this cypher, similar also to the well known schoolboy 'Pigpen Cypher', which would explain the inclusion of the carved Square and Compass symbol.

The grave's mysterious appearance was finally resolved when it came to light that the plot was bought by a Freemason and his wife living in Manchester. He is a stonemason by trade, and carved the memorial himself. It was erected in 2002, and the grave is currently empty waiting for the time when they will eventually be laid to rest beneath it.

9

A WINTER'S TALE

Dave Wrennall's message flashed through my mind as I stood above the foaming torrent, watching as the fast flowing mountain stream cascaded down the rock to disappear into the black gaping maw of the earth. 'No, you won't need a wetsuit, it's only about wellie depth' was his reply to my email query! I think even Dave was a trifle surprised at the volume of water which disappeared down that black hole, certainly nothing like he'd encountered on previous trips. But then it was the middle of November and we were above Blaenau Ffestiniog, a place noted for its generous rainfall. Hmm, I thought, and I don't think I was the only one!



Dave enters the mine



Brian abseiling into the 'wellie depth' torrent

Dave had been planning this trip for some time and it was great to see the strong team which Gaz had managed to drum up for today's off Orme adventure. Leaving the cars at the top of the Crimea, our team of ten comprising both GOES members and old friends set off in grand style, following Dave across the boggy ground, up and over the ridge and into the valley beyond. This was further than I'd imagined we'd need to trek and surprisingly I couldn't see any tell-tale spoil tips which would disclose our venue for the day. Suddenly I noticed the group had come to a halt and all attention was focussed on a river which suddenly dived below ground, a quite common occurrence in the Dales where they are known as swallet holes, but not in slate country, this was obviously man made.

Without further ado, Dave rigged a rope to a sturdy iron bar and abseiled down into the darkness below; we watched expectantly. He was soon back saying all was well and we readied ourselves for what looked like a good wetting! One by one the team entered the stream and abseiled into the darkness, their progress marked only by the light from their helmet lamps, dimly visible through the spray. I hung back, watching intently as each person gingerly made their way below, but now it was my turn! It turned out that it wasn't too bad, the rocks were a little slippery but there were plenty of foot placements and I made good progress. Finally underground and at the bottom of the cataract my mind once more turned to Dave's email reply 'only wellie depth!' he'd written. A slight understatement I thought as I stood waist deep in freezing water!

I was soon joined by Dave, who as last man down, retrieved the rope as he finished his abseil. The river flowed onwards in a man-made tunnel 8-10 feet wide and about 8 foot high, at last we actually were in water which was below the tops of my wellies. 'See, I told you it was', said Dave smugly. I ignored him as I tried to empty the water out of my boots. The floor was very uneven and we stumbled frequently as we hurried onwards, attempting to catch up with others. After several hundred metres the river disappeared to our right through a hole in the side wall and the passageway became quite dry. 'Under normal summer conditions', said Dave 'it might be possible to follow the water course'. 'But not today' I thought! Soon we caught up with the others who'd stopped to examine what appeared to be an inclined shaft disappearing to surface. Dave quickly climbed up into the shaft, using a series of rusted chains hanging from above. Our group waited below expectantly but after a brief inspection higher up he reappeared saying that some protection would be advisable before venturing higher. We climbed down the wooden coffer dam which had diverted the stream from its' original route and continued onwards for some distance. Suddenly we turned a corner and in the distance we could see the proverbial light at the end of the tunnel, 'Not the end of the trip', said Dave, 'just a portal.' We looked out and watched the traffic as it descended from the Crimea.

Back into the tunnel we then descended an inclined shaft into the depths below. 'To your left at the bottom', said Dave, 'there are a couple of worked chambers, but be careful, the roofs are iffy', needless to say I followed the passage to the right! In the distance I suddenly became aware of the sound of rushing water once more and further on there was that same river once again, flowing noisily from a passage to our right. We entered the water once again and continued a short distance to where it finally cascaded out of the tunnel and into daylight, plunging down a narrow ravine into the valley below.



Daylight, but not the end of the trip

Some, thinking this was the end of the trip scrambled out into the daylight, but Dave, who was following some distance behind having been examining the iffy chambers, called them back. 'As far down as we go, but not the end!' he advised.

We retraced our steps to where we had re-entered the water and followed it upstream into a new tunnel. 'The adventure isn't over yet', said Dave, as we ploughed our way against the strong flow. In the distance we could hear the roar of yet more waterfalls. Another wetting I thought. Eventually our lights picked out the foaming water cascading from above. Dave quickly made his way up the side of the tumbling torrent and secured a rope which he then threw down. The pale rope end danced a frenzied jig in the frothing water as we desperately tried to locate it in the spray laden air. 'There it is!' I heard someone shout, their voice barely audible above the roaring water, 'but it's too short!' We looked on in dismay. We could barely see Dave at the top of the cataract and voice contact was impossible. Suddenly Ben detached himself from the group and made his way up the side of the torrent before reaching out to grab the elusive rope end firmly before disappearing up into the spray to join Dave.



Ben grabbing the elusive rope. Looks like that water is cold.

The rest of us stood about waiting for someone else to make a move, but no-one did! In the thundering roar I heard someone shout 'I'm going back!' and one by one we dejectedly retraced our steps. I was last to leave, but I felt cheated and returned to the falls. Through the spray I could see the light and dim outline of someone still waiting above. With communication impossible and not being able to see whether the rope had been removed or not, I reluctantly turned and followed the others. Making a brief inspection of the worked chambers first, I ascended the incline before following the others out into the daylight. A short walk across the hillside and we rejoined Dave and Ben who had emerged from a higher adit.

In fine spirits despite being a little damp, we made our way back up the valley to the cars. A quick change and it was on to the pub for a welcome pint and a good chat. Who was it that said 'You don't have to be mad to be a member of GOES, but it certainly helps'!

Brian Edwards, March 2009

THE CHAIRMAN'S GAVEL

The Great Orme Exploration Society always presents the newly appointed Chairman with a gavel as a badge of office. The wooden gavel is usually of the mallet type consisting of a rounded head set at ninety degrees to the shaft. Last year, however, it was felt that a different and more radical approach should be adopted and that the gavel should be in the form of a mason's maul.

Great consideration is always given to the choice of the various timbers used in the gavel's construction. The new Chairman, Dave Wrennall, had carried out extensive linguistic research and concluded that the appropriate timber for any article concerned with the Great Orme should contain a substantial amount of elm. His learned paper on the subject was published on page 10 of the last journal, entitled 'La Société Pour l'Exploration du Grand Orme'.



Consequently the gavel head was turned from a small block of this timber. The fact that the block was rather small might have influenced the subsequent shape of the finished article!

In keeping with tradition, an old ash rung from a Coastguard rope ladder was used for the shaft. HM Coastguard, not the most radical of organisations, continued to use wooden rung rope ladders long after all other rescue services had adopted abseiling as a more efficient and safe way of descending cliffs.

The sound board and base was turned from a small block of mahogany which had been in a heap of shavings under the lathe for many years. It is said that a use will be found for anything which is kept long enough!

And that is how the 2008 gavel came about.

Tom Parry, Summer 2008

SUMMER WALKS 2009

All walks start at 7pm and are usually gentle strolls which last approximately 2 hours. Sturdy footwear is recommended. Below is a list of the proposed walks, but all are subject to confirmation. Please check the community news section in the North Wales Weekly News, which will provide full details of the walk taking place and the arranged meeting place. If the weather is poor, it is very likely that the walk will be postponed until a later date. If you have any queries, please contact Ali Davies on 01492 877960

Date:	Walk:	Meeting place:
28th May	Bishops Quarry, Pant y Ffridd and the Great Orme's new Nature Reserve.	Summit car park (Pay and Display)
4th June	Happy Valley and Elephants Cave.	Ski Slope car park
11th June	Walk along the West Shore beach, visiting the remains of the shipwrecked 'Flying Foam'.	West Shore boating lake
18th June	Walk over Mynydd Marian at Llysfaen.	Castle Inn car park
25th June	Search for the remains of tree stumps on the beach.	Paddling Pool on Llandudno Promenade
2nd July	Explore the gunsites.	End of Llys Helig Road. Please arrive before 7.15 pm to ensure access through the gate.
9th July	Bryn Pydew area.	Village Hall at Bryn Pydew
16th July	Walk to the summit of the Little Orme	Somerfield Car Park
23rd July	Ffynnon Lletyfadog, Deer leap and Hafnant area	New parking area above St Tudno's Church
30th July	Walk around Pwllcrochan Woods	Parking area on Pwllcrochan Avenue
6th August	Up through Haulfre Gardens via Cwlach Road, across the golf course and back down the tram tracks.	Plas Road
13th August	Walk around Conwy's Castle walls.	Benarth Road
20th August	Circuit past Ffynnon Powell, Pink Farm, Romans and Treweeks Mines.	New parking area above St Tudno's Church
27th August	Craig Rofft, the old quarry workings and back past Pink Farm	Ski Slope car park



"MAES Y FACRELL". A NEW NATIONAL NATURE RESERVE

The Countryside Council for Wales have just announced that, Maes y Facrell, a 5-hectare (12.4 acre) site on the Great Orme, has just been designated as a National Nature Reserve. The land, formerly part of Pyllau Farm, is predominantly rough pasture, with a small wooded area, and a section of nineteenth century mining spoil.

The whole area has been newly fenced, a water supply installed, mining depressions have been fenced off, and a small 'man shaft' sealed with a grating for bat access. Two gates afford public entry to the site. The area is said to capture all the varied habitats of the Orme in a small area.

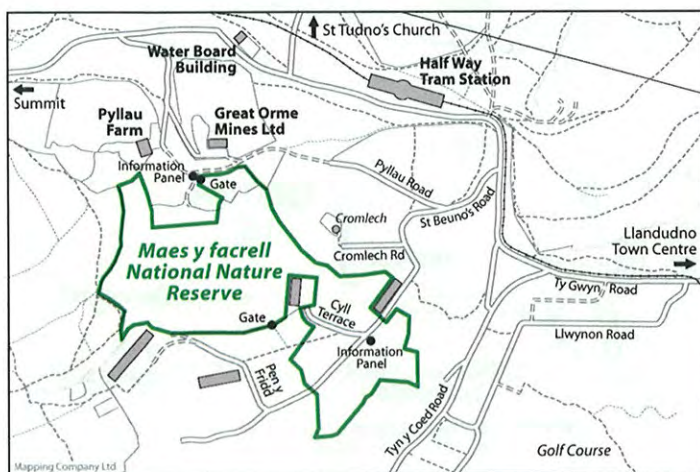
At present, the site, which has not been grazed regularly for the past few years, is covered in coarse grasses. These tend to smother the smaller flowering plants, and in consequence are detrimental to the development of the varied flora, which the site is capable of supporting. To overcome this problem the CCW has introduced eight Welsh mountain ponies to graze the reserve. They appear to have settled in happily and are hard at work removing the coarse grasses. When the coarse

growth has been grazed away sheep will be introduced to maintain the low grass level. In the meantime the ponies blend well into the landscape and certainly enhance the area. No doubt their popularity will rival that of the goats amongst photographers.

Although the site is open to the public, it may be necessary to strike a balance between access, and conservation. As the rough pasture land is difficult to walk upon the terrain will probably assist in this. It is hoped that only those with a specific interest in the varied plants and insects will be prepared to traverse the rough ground.

Two information panels have been erected to mark the site. It remains to be seen what their effect on visitor numbers will be.

Tom Parry, February 2009



ROAMING IN ROMANS - HIGHER HOPES

Making connections:

It doesn't seem that long ago since I first chiselled my way through 'the squeeze' into the 'Is it Owens?' extension to Romans, but shockingly it was November 1999; the discovery of this isolated corridor being reported in Journal No1 2000. Since then, the passageway has had only a few visits. It was extended twice:-

On March 12th 2000, we dug through the pile of collapsed infill which was blocking progress southward. To the north the tunnel ends in solid rock, drill marks indicate the passage was worked from the south and so we knew there must have been a route through at one time. Unfortunately we soon found ourselves at another impasse; a huge fallen block and more rubble, and

On November 7th 2004, we excavated a tight metre long tunnel below the left side of the block. With most of its weight still on rubble and its left edge jammed up against the passage wall, the boulder seemed secure enough. I volunteered myself. On the other side of the constriction lay tantalising darkness, but unfortunately, it proved to be only a very small cavity surrounded by extremely shattered rock, a frightening place. There was just enough room to turn around and escape.

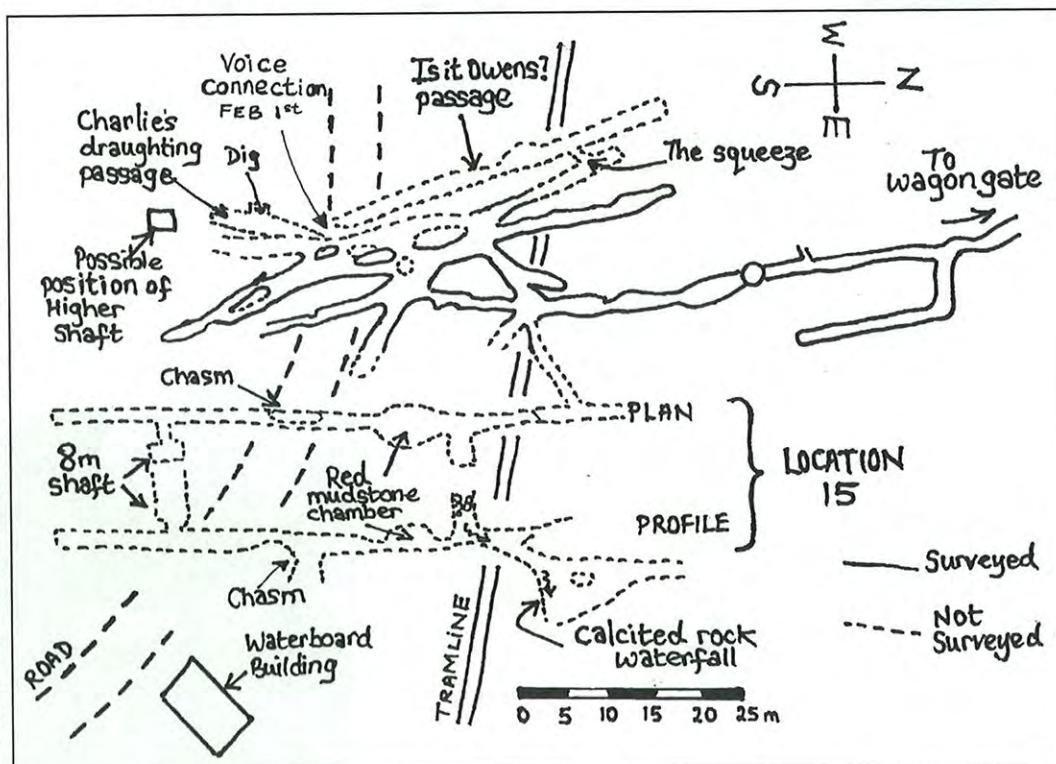
During our trip on February 1st 2009, whilst showing a group of newcomers to GOES around Romans, I took the opportunity to test a theory; could a voice connection be made between the cavity beyond the block and the main section above 'clogs'? Soon I was scurrying through the squeeze and rushing along the tunnel to slither under the large boulder. Once there, conversation with Brian and Charlie proved easy enough although no light was discernable through the chaos of broken rock. The crawl had been tighter than I had anticipated and I got very flustered attempting to reverse out. I was forced to complete the crawl and tumble turn as before.

Wooden struts support the side wall



At this point I watched the supporting rubble within the crawl crumbling in front of me, and needed some deep breaths to regain my composure. Thankfully I survived the squirm back through and got back to the team.

Whilst Charlie was showing me the pile of rocks through which my voice had been heard he detected a flow of air emanating from a tiny passage nearby. It led into yet another heavily fractured area of rock. There was definitely a discernable breeze. (On surface the temperature had been close to freezing with a strong easterly wind.) Gaz was called over and was excited by the discovery but concerned about the poor rock. In one spot wooden struts set at an angle supported part of the sidewall.



He thought a length of scaffolding would be needed to make it safe. Looking at the roof prior to this I thought more than one piece might be desirable.



Fractured rock

That night I referred to Andy Lewis' plans. Overlapping the 115-124m AOD transparency which includes the area of Romans we had been in, and the 106-112m AOD plan which shows some of the Owens system, one thing stood out. From Charlie's draughting tunnel Higher Shaft may be just 10m away.

The top of Higher Shaft is now landscaped and lies somewhere between the Waterboard building and The Great Orme Copper Mine. It ran 450ft all the way down to Penmorfa's tramming level. Today it is thought to be largely full of spoil or collapsed and is rarely encountered underground.

On the same trip another link was found in the Duncan James section of Romans between the lower section of Gallery B, which I had accessed through the tight crawl, and the higher, regular route which Brian and Ali had reached via the ladder. From one of the excavated cavities, I was able to talk to them easily through a slot in the roof which was filled with rubble. They were just entering the narrowest part of their crawl. After some effort we were able to see the faint glint of each other's lights. At the point of contact, I was stood on a mound of loose infill which had probably arrived from the higher tunnel at one time.

A change of priorities:

A month later equipped with a copy of Andy Lewis' plan of the area, some scaffold pole, hacksaw and ice axe, Gaz, Brian and myself went back into Romans in the hope of finding Higher Shaft. In the event, our courage or perhaps foolishness proved enough to get us under the shattered roof of Charlie's draughting passage, after I had built a support pillar, and beyond the tilted wooden struts. The tunnel itself quickly ended. The fresh air was definitely coming from a small cavity immediately below the woodwork intended to hold up the large rock, already half detached from the wall. I now recognised it as somewhere I had been before and recalled moving a boulder, now lying on its side, which had seemed almost like a door hiding the hollow below.

Re-reading my 'Is it Owens?' Article I see I had written:

"The lower reaches of the Romans system offered numerous possibilities for further discoveries; you could probably dig anywhere and find something new. But it was the hope of pushing into the Owens system just to the west and some 10 metres lower that was keeping us focused. A slightly draughting passage led into very dangerous ground and the removal of rubble from an infilled stope was becoming increasingly difficult, a breakthrough was looking less likely."

The 'slightly draughting passage leading into dangerous ground' was definitely the passage we were now investigating.

Sliding below the detaching rock and down into the somewhat safer cavity I was able to start excavating some of the infill. The best hope and apparent source of the breeze was under a timber beam supporting packed rubble. It was very cramped and rather awkward passing the rocks up to Gaz to fling into the far tunnel. We were making some progress when the pillar I had constructed earlier suddenly collapsed and part of the roof fell down blocking our way out! Brian was called to help extricate us. Priorities changed and we thought it prudent to leave the area.

With some good roof supports and a reasonable team, the dig may have some merit for the future. Higher Shaft must be close and with a concerted effort perhaps even reachable but don't hold your breath.

Location 15

A new level:

With time on our hands I suggested finding a calcited stone waterfall which I had once visited with Ali and Tony some ten years ago. I was pleasantly surprised to find it on my first attempt after crawling up a nearby passage. It lay in a roomy gallery just 20 metres or so from the regular access corridor. Although there was less water than I remembered, the 5m off white calcite cascade still looked impressive. Apparently, neither Gaz nor Brian had seen it before.

The water disappears into the floor and on my previous visit we had attempted an excavation, but I don't remember climbing the fall. Perhaps the volume of water at the time had put me off. Now it was the obvious thing to do and I was soon at the top. Whilst the others waited below I explored my new surroundings.

The calcited stone waterfall

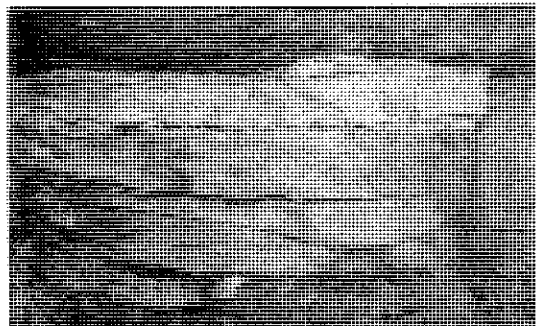


The calcited floor, liberally covered in mudstone pieces recently fallen off the colourful roof, gradually gained in height. It soon reached an impasse where the water flowed out of a narrow vertical working, crammed full of encrusted rocks. Nearby however there was a short crawl leading into a low, circular, red mudstone chamber, containing lots of fallen blocks. It looked blind but I went in to check it out.

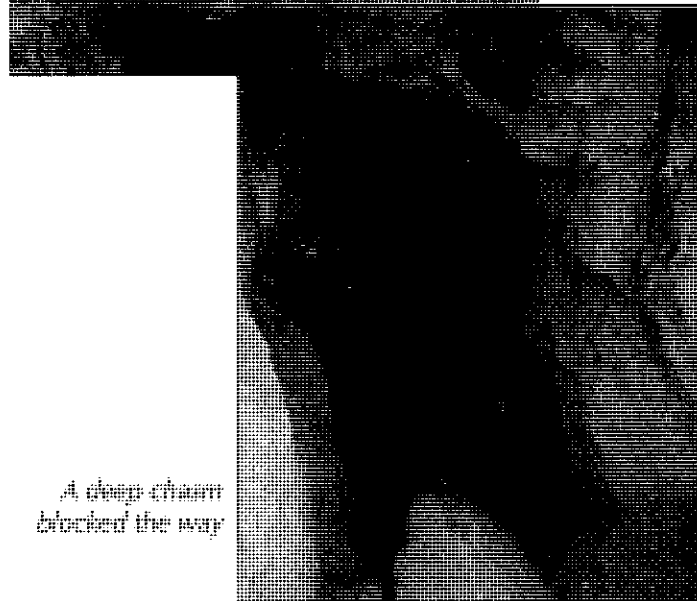


Mudstone recently fallen off the colourful roof

Over a slight rise I found a slot under a fabulously multi-layered biscuit of detaching mudstone, through which I gained a large passageway continuing southwards. A deep chasm suddenly blocked the way. With hands on one side and feet on the other I cautiously traversed the abyss to clamber over some timbers and into another gallery.



Fabulously
multi-
layered
blowout



A deep chasm
blocked the way

I soon encountered a thin metal pipe lying at the foot of a side passage. It led to a stunning square cut shaft, some 20ft high. Around the top of the shaft were some timbers but I was unable to determine if any tunnels led off. The main passage ran another 10m southwards before coming to an abrupt end.

I went back, keen to inform the team of my discoveries, roughly measuring as I travelled and noticing the occasional flakes of green paint for the first time. The others were anxious to take a look. Gaz climbed up the waterfall to join me. At this point we decided that a rope might be advisable, if only to get down safely. Brian was dispatched to collect

one together with the length of scaffolding. In the meanwhile, Gaz went off with my ice axe intending to improve the foot placements on the traverse whilst I tidied the edge of loose rubble. Gaz returned to announce that there was nothing but sloping rock beneath the top layer of grot. Bolting would be required to safeguard things. The scaffolding pole was eventually jammed across an alcove above the fall and the rope secured. Gaz and I descended. We made our way out of Romans pleased with our new area and determined to return soon with a drill and more rope.

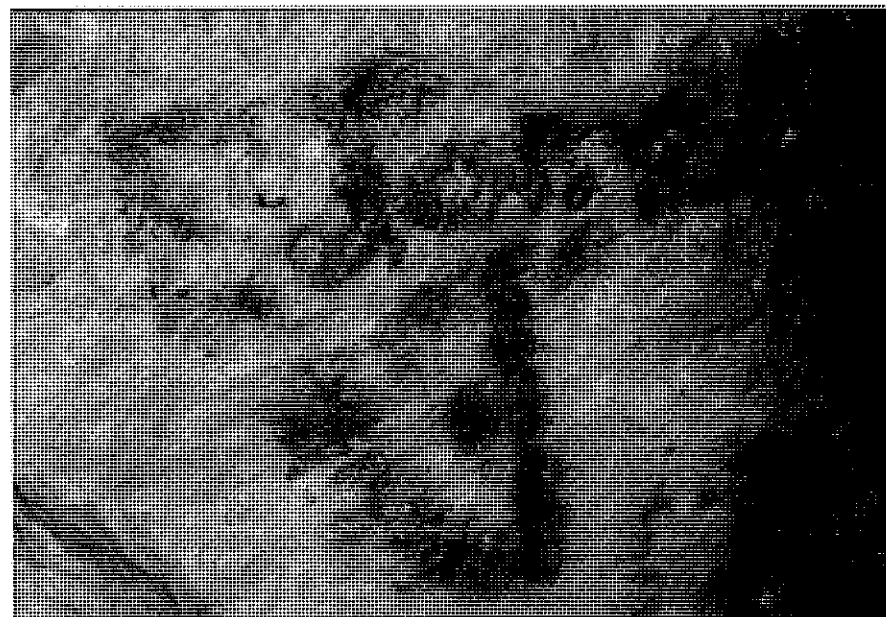
A familiar story:

That evening I referred to Andy Lewis' thesis. The new area definitely wasn't on any survey, but a Location 15 was labelled and had the following description:

"Routes here link in with other south and south-east trending mineral veins. Many are at a higher elevation than the main level from 'Wagon Gate', and eventually link through a passageway with a collapsed mudstone roof to a shaftway rising to about 8m. These upper workings are predominantly recent and contain lengths of pumping pipe, two clay pipes and unusual initials of the miners written in candle soot on the ceiling of the working. Investigation within this little visited area may prove worthwhile for identifying new evidence for early activity, although a certain amount of clearance will be necessary to provide a safe route for access."

Less frequented places do get rediscovered from time to time and our 'new level' was just such an example. Worse was to follow. Dave Flowers replied to an e-mail I sent him about our exploits. It was to provide me with an answer as to what the slivers of green paint had been:

"Seem to recall the waterfall area. Calcited wall of deads. Tony Davies, Ali and I dragged the green ladder from the wagon gate area there and went up the shaft. We put the ladder on some kind of ledge or shelf. It was a bit short and I had a real struggle getting back on it to descend. Very interesting area at the top. Think there's meant to be a miner's name written in candle soot, but we never saw it. Think there are a few bits and bobs left up there as well. Definitely didn't go down the chasm!!"



I e-mailed Andy, who lives in Galena, Illinois USA, to ask him about his exploration of the area. I was especially interested in the 8m shaft and the chasm:

"We free climbed the shaft from what I remember, may have used a rope to bring up the others. That's where we saw the candle soot names and initials. One of them 'E Jones' was really obvious so it became known as the E Jones workings. I also remember being able to hear the trams above us, so I presume the shaft extended to surface. From what I recall it was run-in. We only visited the area once so never got down the chasm."

Smoke writing

I was now much wiser about Location 15 and its history. It looked as though an ascent of the 8m shaft would be worthwhile, especially as it hadn't had many visits. The soot writing and other artefacts needed photographing, possibly for the first time, and there could be more to unearth with a little digging. But it was the excavation downwards that I was most curious about. Apparently, it hadn't been explored and, hopefully, there would be further workings to be found there.

Recent developments:

On March 8th 2009

- A team took a scaffold pole to the 8m shaft but only got halfway up.
 - Dave Flowers descended the chasm. It was only 10m deep and run-in. Nice crystals and ball of clay found.
 - Chasm traverse bolted and rope left in place.
- Waterfall rope bolted.

On March 29th 2009

- Gaz, Charlie, Brian and I climbed the 8m shaft.
- Bolts were placed to secure a rope which was left in place.
- Photographs were taken of: smoke writing, kibble, winch, clog prints, metal pipe work and numerous other artefacts.
- Workings above were run-in and calcited.
- Trams were heard overhead.
- A dig was started along an in-filled tunnel heading north
- An accurate survey was made using tape and compass of the upper tunnels, the shaft and the approach from the waterfall.

David Wrennall, March 2009



Kibble, Pipe and Beam



Winding Gear

EARLY DAYS OF GOES

In 1985 as the fledgling society was forming, exploration underground was very different than today, in fact very different to even 1987. The learning curve was steep with many unexpected turns and twists - literally! Back then, as with any new group or club, enthusiasm ran high; it was the major driving force in the exploration of the Orme. Caution was further down the list. For the record, the main reason for the formation of GOES was to gain access to the Ty Gwyn Mine. To persuade the council to give us permission to burrow into the promenade gardens opposite the Belmont Hotel, we needed an appropriate and responsible name for our gang of explorers.

Once we gained access to the Ty Gwyn Mine and its extensive set of drainage levels, and realised there were no workings above sea level - they were all flooded - we set our sights on other targets. The principal points of interest were the shafts on Bryniau Poethion and the Penmorfa adit. In those days both Roman and Treweek shafts were fitted with large metal gratings with heavy, awkward-to-lift hatches. The safest and least visible way, as we had no access permission, was to enter these under cover of darkness. A typical evening trip into these workings entailed waiting for the daylight to fade so the entrance hatch could be left open. Even then there was always the fear someone might throw rocks down the shaft or even untie the rope. Fortunately, nothing like that ever happened. Several hours were spent exploring the labyrinthine workings, with the crew often emerging after midnight, sometimes to starry skies, but often to driving rain or even snow. In those days SRT (single rope technique) was unheard of; instead we used electron ladders and safety lines. This system made getting in and out rather time-consuming, especially on visitor trips when up to ten or twelve folks were going under. I forget the number of times we spent hauling weakened and complaining bodies out of Romans. I will always remember the ascent of Roman Shaft by Richard Burton, then owner of the ill-conceived and fated caving supply shop at Black Gate. By a combination of SRT, laddering and chimneying with much cursing and heavy breathing, after 20 minutes he finally surfaced.

Soon Richard had recuperated and disappeared to his car. Before long he arrived back with a bottle of champagne and glasses. We all celebrated our evening escapade.



Trip into Vivian's Shaft in late 1987. From left: Billy Davies, Steve Davies, Duke, Nick Jowett, Phil Smith (in hole) and Les Smith.

Those were pioneering days or so we thought, treading in the footsteps of Duncan James and Billy Davies, or Billy Cave or Billy Dog as he was also known. We made many new

discoveries during those times, like the pair of clogs in the Roman workings, the cat skeleton in the deep and extensive workings off Treweek's Shaft. That skeleton later turned out to be directly adjacent to Vivian's Shaft. In those days Vivian's was an unsafe-looking depression surrounded by a six-foot-high fence. Prior to that it had been enclosed by a turret-like stone wall which eventually collapsed, blocking the opening. A former owner of Pyllau Farm, Will Williams, told me that prior to the collapse flocks of bats would circle the shaft and disappear into the workings. Vivian's Shaft was not accessed until the reclamation project survey work in late 1987.



Miner's clogs in Roman shaft workings, soon after they were found there - probably 1984. Note the ball of clay supporting the heel of one clog.

Trips to the deep workings before 1988 were long and arduous tasks, as we were limited by the number of ladders we had and the length of rope. Access was always by Roman Shaft and then via the Wagon Gate to Treweek's. As we could not afford Oldham lights we used carbide lamps or little stinkies. Their distinctive smell was not to everyone's liking, but I found them to have a homely character and never had too much problem with them - except on ladder climbs with dripping water from above. On one occasion while laddering out of Treweek's to the Wagon Gate, my lamp was extinguished by water sprinkling down. There was no other option except to continue climbing in total darkness until the top of the ladder was reached and then relight the flame once in the safety of the level.

Notable finds underground included the 'E Jones' chamber off the Clay Passage in the Roman workings, where old miners had written their names and initials on the ceiling with candle soot. Other discoveries were numerous mining tools and artefacts, including powder horns and straw fuse canisters and personal belongings such as clay pipes. Probably more than anything, the items of most interest to me were the stone hammers and bone tools. These added to the mounting evidence that certain workings were far older than previously thought. They were of prehistoric origin, dating back (as we know now, using carbon 14 dating) to the Bronze Age, a period between 1800-600BCE.

Those early years were formative times. At first the element of exploration was paramount, almost a race to be the first to claim discovery of a new area. Initially, any artefacts such as miners' tools or personal items such as clay pipes were seized

immediately, regarded as the spoils of exploration. Many items ended up on someone's mantelpiece or cupboard, or were forgotten and possibly later discarded. However, gradually we began to appreciate what we had; this wealth of history and prehistory could not be underestimated. Before long, we learnt to respect what we found underground and leave it in place where it originally lay – 'maintaining the context', a term I later became familiar with. Instead of collecting artefacts we began to record them with photographs, drawings and surveys. Our understanding of 'context' was beginning to develop; far better to leave the artefact where it was, so that someone at a later date could appreciate it in its natural setting. Very soon this became the adopted policy of GOES and led to the development of the society's rules and regulations. I recall the NAMHO adage: 'take only pictures, leave only footprints'. But even that was difficult. For example, in the Ty Gwyn when we first entered there were certain sections of clay floor literally covered with miners' clog prints. These were duly taped off, but often the enthusiasm to see what lay ahead got the better of some and inevitably areas began to be damaged or destroyed. But, I hope some of those prints may remain to this day. After a while we realised a complete underground landscape existed, one that needed to be preserved. Unfortunately this was not always appreciated by everyone, as I am sure it is today and always will be from now on. However, one must also be philosophical; is it best for no one to see these items or better to allow access and so gain a glimpse of the vast history that lies beneath our feet?

Now I would like to describe the early days of exploration circa 1985-86 in the workings off the Penmorfa adit. I recall, as some of the older members must do, meeting in the Rhoslan Pub (now a private house) in the West Shore. Typically there were at least ten of us in some combination of the following: Billy Davies, Phil Quigley, Don Smith, Edric Roberts, Tom Parry, Steve Davies, Phil, Bob, Martin and Les Smith, Duncan Scott, Huw Tudno Williams, Marcus Elliot, Geoff David, Chris and Nick Jowett, Richard Burton and yours truly. We would gather in the pub on a Sunday at midday, and consume a minimum of two pints each. Then at about 2 p.m. we headed for the 'Gents' where we struggled into our wetsuits and overalls. After a while the publican and Ivocals became quite used to this ceremony and wished us well on our trip. We then plodded through the West Shore, experiencing stares of surprise from passers-by, and soon arrived at the Penmorfa where we placed our helmets and lamps on. In those early days there was no gate, so all and sundry could enter as they pleased.

At the entrance we assembled, and certain members fortified themselves with 'carry outs' of canned beer from the Rhoslan and occasionally bottles of rice wine made by Phil Quigley. When suitably refreshed we ventured forth down the stone-lined adit. In those days the Mudslide was aptly named; often we had to spend some time excavating the mud from the narrowest point. On occasions it completely sealed the opening! There was always the fear the mud would flow back and block the way out.

With the prospect of chest-high water on the other side, that extra pint at the bar made all the difference, both on the way in and on the way out. Once we were moving through the chilling water there was no stopping and soon enough we reached the first workings just before the 1842 breakthrough point. By now the water had shallowed to ankle deep. At the Y junction we headed up over the 'Ice Bridge' journeying higher and higher through the 'Hanging Mawr' chamber and onwards to a myriad of passages that led to many known and then unknown

workings. For a time there was a trip every Sunday afternoon into the Penmorfa. On one occasion we were joined by Bill Oliver, our oldest member, who must have been in his mid 70's. But he took the whole trip in his stride with no problems with the Mudslide, waist-deep water or climbing around the higher workings. I remember my first visit to 'Santa's' with Billy Davies. This was an area where white and blue stained calcite flowstone coated the walls. It had been christened Santa's because it was discovered in late December back in the late 1970's when these workings were being rediscovered by the old GOES – then Great Orme Cave and Mine Exploration Society.



Night-time view looking down Tyn-y-fron Shaft just after the capping had collapsed on Friday 13 December 1985. From left: Huw Tudno Williams, Nick Jowett, Duncan James and Billy Davies.

It was not unusual to even have a few extra 'cans' of beer while in the workings. But this would soon change. On one particular trip a slightly inebriated Billy over-ambitiously tried to chimney his way up one of the rifts off the cross-cut. Very soon loud shouts and a clattering noise were heard and Billy was found groaning and cursing at the base of the rift. He was obviously hurt with possible broken bones. Fortunately he was able to walk; most of the pain was in his shoulder and to ease it he was given more of Phil's now famous rice wine. Then began the trip out, taking much longer than normal, as Billy was helped along by members taking turns to support him, and also by further swigs of the now dwindling rice wine. As you can imagine the Mudslide was particularly painful for Billy to negotiate. But we did get him out with no further problems and he ended up in Llandudno Hospital. There the doctor said they would have to cut-away his wetsuit. This procedure he refused and still experiencing the numbing effects of the wine decided to painfully struggle to remove it in one piece himself. That rice wine was particularly powerful stuff! Incidentally, the doctor could not administer any pain killers until the effects of the alcohol had dissipated.

Happily, Billy made a complete recovery and new sets of rules and regulations were put in place. So ended our drinking before a trip under. From then on drinking would always come after.

Footnote:

To any member thinking of writing an article for the journal: don't give up yet; it can be done. I started this one eight years ago and only now finished.

Andy Lewis, April 2009

Towards the end of 2008 the legendary collapsed adit of Porth-yr-Helyg was visited on three consecutive weekends. Site of the infamous trapping and subsequent rescue of Billy Davies in 1976, the tunnel entrance was then blown up to prevent further access. In 2002, GOES excavated down to reach a solid section of the passageway only to be immediately confronted by a blockage consisting of rubble and slurry falling out of the roof.

Some doubts exist as to whether this new impasse represented an area that was purposely blasted but, one thing was for sure, anything we dug out was very soon replaced by material from above. A shake-hole on the surface suggested that there might be a 10m column of loose rubble in the roof. Interest in the project waned.

On November 23rd 2008, Steve, Brian, Ali and I returned to Porth-yr-Helyg. It's in a magnificent situation next to the sea and was a refreshing change of venue. I had been speculating on whether I might be able to 'wall' through the collapse, support the rocks above and thereby minimise the amount of excavation required.

We had a good session of digging and hauling, with many buckets of extracted material being hauled to surface on a sledge. Larger stones were neatly stacked down each side of the tunnel. In the end a huge vertical rock was unearthed together with a nice section of ginged stonework forming the right-hand wall and at its base flowed clear water. I hadn't done any walling but the huge rock was a natural support and the alcove between it and the ginging looked promising. We returned to our vehicles just in time to escape a car rally which had been organized around the Marine Drive, much to the relief of several perplexed marshals.



Stonework along the right wall

On November 30th, Gaz brought with him a large selection of wooden off-cuts, thinking they might prove useful as supports. He joined me at the sharp end, Steve and Brian did the sledging, too much of it by all accounts! Sadly, the promising alcove had disappeared under a mountain of slop, so we began to clear it. As work progressed the vertical rock became unstable and slowly fell into a tilted position against the wall. Our attention then turned to the space exposed by its demise, up and to the left. The heavily shattered roof and hanging rubble clearly weren't very stable, but with a rake we were able to reach further than we might otherwise have risked. Eventually, we unearthed what I considered to be a back wall of solid rock.

I was hopeful that an intact passageway would exist immediately below it. In my excitement, I put fears about the roof aside, squirmed to the furthest point and attempted to dig down. I was convinced a breakthrough was imminent but the others were restless. It was time to go.



Excavation left of fallen rock

On the 7th of December, I was really looking forward to walking along the lost adit into undisturbed workings. Unfortunately, during the week, all our hard work had been undone by a major roof fall. Gaz and I started clearing it again, Steve and Brian sledged stoically and Charlie and Joe helped. Eventually our efforts reopened most of the cavity excavated the previous week. It was then that there began a noise like 'heavy rain'; something was 'pouring' above. It preceded a total collapse of our rubble roof by only a few seconds but it was sufficient warning. Then, there was the secondary movement of material higher up in the column and quieter echoes continuing all the way to surface. We were back to square one again.



Dave and Gaz emerge

For the rest of the session we went back to digging along the ginging right of the tilted rock. Perhaps a crawl might be forced through between them? Although initially promising, when we left it was getting increasingly constricted and less likely.

We never did use the Gaz's off-cuts. How I wish I had spent some time constructing two stone walls with a timber roof on the day we found that back wall. The subsequent collapse wouldn't have mattered then. I had missed a golden opportunity.

Everyone was of the opinion that any future excavations needed to be more methodical with a solid framework, possibly of scaffold, being installed at every stage. Each small advance would then be permanent, the diggers and the sledging team wouldn't become disillusioned and the secrets of Porth-yr-Helyg's adit might finally reveal themselves.

David Wrennall, March 2009