Plymouth Caving Group

Newsletter and Journal
May 2016



Formations in Bakers Pit

Issue Number 161

Editorial

Once again I seem to always be pleading for articles. As none have been forthcoming despite numerous PCG trips, this Newsletter is entirely made up of articles regarding underground visits I have made in the last few months to Dudley Canal Tunnel, in Nenthead and in Italy. So, if another Newsletter is wanted the rest of you had better come up with something.

There is still time to join the trip that Lydia is organising for us to the Vercors. This is a stunningly beautiful part of France with some excellent caves. Hopefully, this will also generate some articles for a future Newsletter.

As well as the normal Tuesday evening trips, further trips are planned to return to Mendip, go to the Llangattock Escarpment in South Wales and North Wales. This is all in addition to France. So there is plenty going on and plenty to fill the pages of the Newsletter, if you provide the articles and photos. It would be good for more of you to get involved in deciding the trips and leading them.

Anyway, do continue to enjoy your trips underground.

David Jean

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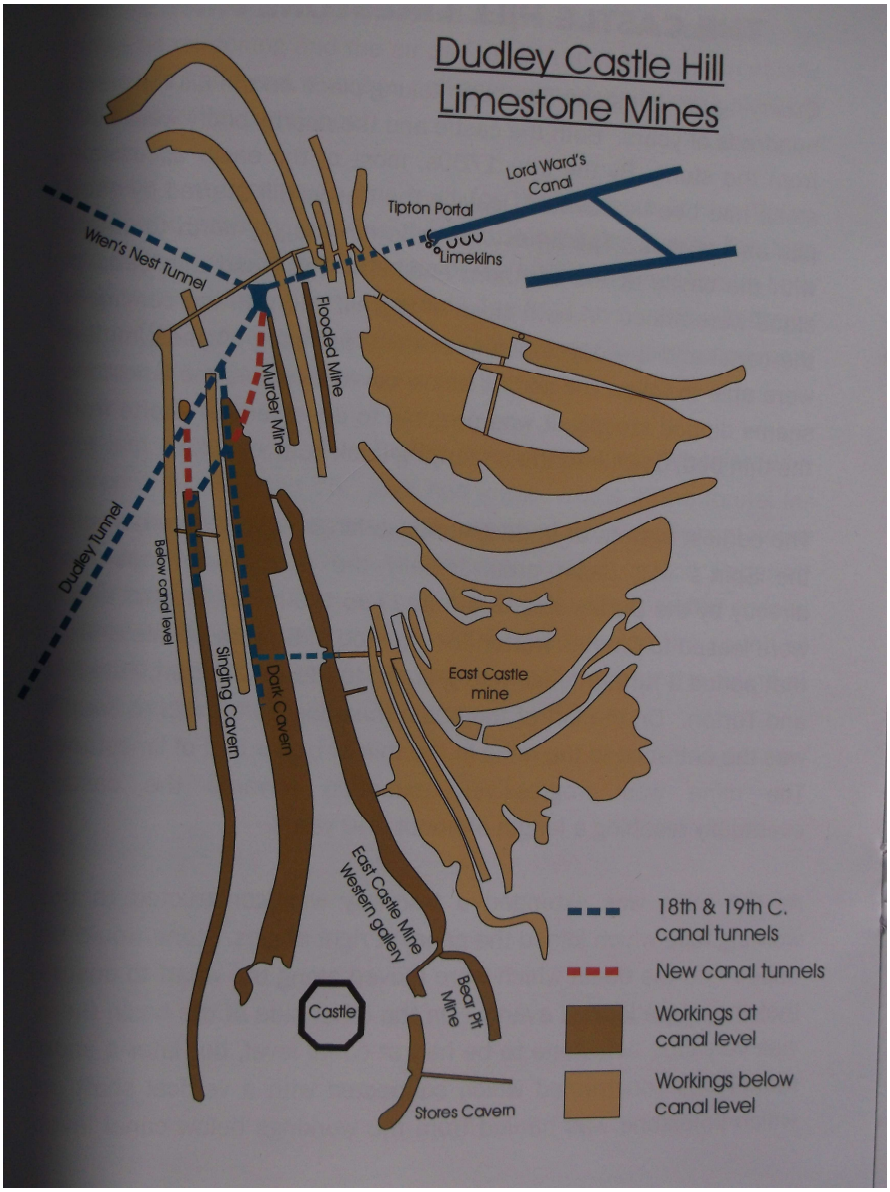
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Dudley Canal Tunnels

Since coming back from the last North Wales trip I have visited the Black Country Museum three times and on two of those occasions I have taken a barge trip into the Dudley Canal Tunnels. Lord Dudley's estates were rich in deposits of coal, iron ore and limestone and this is immortalised in the present Black Country Museum with its drift mine experience and various workshops.

So, Lord Dudley proposed to build a canal from his own estates to link up with the Birmingham to Wolverhampton Canal some two miles to the north. Dudley's canal would intersect with this one at a place called Tipton. There were a lot of politics involved between the two companies but eventually Dudley's canal was built as Lord Ward's Canal which now runs alongside the museum. In 1784 proposals were made to link the Dudley Canal with Lord

Ward's Canal by building a tunnel through Dudley Hill. The tunnel was to be 2,862 yards long and the canal would have a width, at water level, of 9 feet and a height of 7 feet. There being no towpath through the tunnel barges had to be legged through.



The tunnel intersected a number of limestone formations and this led to working the limestones underground and the construction of other tunnels and wharfs to facilitate this.

The modern day barge trip takes you into a fraction of these tunnels through the Tipton Portal and into Dark and Singing Caverns before returning along a part of the Dudley Canal itself.

Entering the Tipton Portal the trip continues through Lord Ward's Tunnel into Shirts Mill Basin which is now opened up but was once an underground loading area that served the mines.


Tipton Portal and Lord Ward's Tunnel

The tunnel continues to Castle Mill Basin which, like Shirts Mill, was once underground but is now open to the sky. Bypassing Dark Cavern which has been sealed due to major roof falls the trip continues into Singing Cavern where massive limestone pillars support the roof and the limestone workings. After a short audio visual the 1984 tunnel back to the Dudley Canal tunnel and then back to the Tipton Portal.


Some of the limestone formations in the tunnels



Lydia legging the barge through the tunnel. She had nominated Alex for the job but the bargeman got her to do it. Motto: Keep quiet!



Lord Ward's Canal and the Black Country Museum

Nenthead

This trip was to be a much larger group visiting the lead mines of Nenthead in Cumbria but in the end it was just Richard and myself who joined Tracey and Dan in Cumbria after travelling up via Yorkshire to see the Flying Scotsman.

We arrived at Nenthead well after dark and called in to meet up with Tracey and Dan at the bunkhouse where they were staying to plan the next couple of days before continuing to Alston and our hotel for the next three nights.

Next day was bright and sunny as we went back to the bunkhouse on the banks of the South Tyne River to meet up with the other two. We were soon at the mines themselves. Nenthead, although in Cumbria, is also within a stones throw of both Durham and Northumberland. The mines here largely

produced lead and silver. The mines finally closed in 1961 but today part of the site is maintained as a heritage centre and a lot of lottery cash has been pumped into the area.



A general view of the site with the village of Nenthead between the trees



Preserved waterwheels. Is this the Morwellham of the north?

I wasn't going into the first mine so I sat it out in the car as the other three got changed and set off downstream towards the mine entrance. A few minutes later I looked up and they were on the way back but only to cross the stream via a wooden footbridge to the bank where the entrance was. This time they were gone for the morning.

After lunch we headed for Rampghill where I was to join them. This was an interesting mine and, like them all, a bit stoopy in places which doesn't always suit me these days but the tunnel was well constructed as we waded through. The entrances to the Nenthead Mines are interesting as they have a hinge system.


Richard in a less stoopy part of Rampghill

It was a most interesting place but my light was playing up so Dan gave me his. While Richard and Tracey raced on to the horse whim I went with Dan to the whisky tree before exiting the mine.


The horse whim in Rampghill

I know I wouldn't have made it to the horse whim as it was much further on and not as straightforward as what we had already completed.



The whisky tree is a collection of old whisky bottles balanced on the rocks

Leaving Tracey and Dan to continue their pottering around we went over the county border into Durham to Killhope Mine which is now established as a tourist mine and is famous for its red squirrels although they must have still been asleep when we got there.



The last Killhope tour of the day.

We had to be careful here as that evening we had been invited by Tracey and Dan to join all the other good and respected of the mining community at a dinner in another nearby hotel. However, we needed something to keep us

going and Killhope did a really nice carrot cake which went down well with a cup of tea.

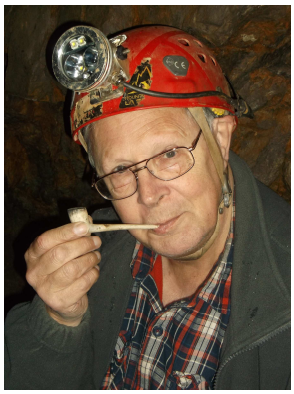
That evening was really nice and it was good to meet up with a few people from NAMHO that I hadn't seen for a while and to look at the mineral collection in the hotel's geology room. I shan't mention the chemical formula for lead Richard!

Next day we were bright and early to meet up with Tracey and Dan again. This time they had arranged for us to visit Carrs Mine which is occasionally opened up for public visits.


Dan, Tracey and Richard at the entrance to Carrs

I was now using a spare light borrowed from Richard and at the end of the tourist bit I stopped while the other three continued on.


Richard using the skills he's picked up on his Mining Engineering degree course in Carrs


I'm sure I picked up something nasty from that pipe!



We have to thank Tracey and Dan for making us so welcome and sorting out things for us (especially me) to do. Dan told me that over the two days I had covered over a mile underground and, like dogs off a leash, I know the other three covered a lot more than that.

Proposed Trip to France

Lydia has organised a club trip to the Vercors area of south-east France. The Vercors is really just a plateau surrounded by mountains and contains many excellent caves as well as mountain walks. Lydia is planning for us all to stay in a gite from June 25th to July 2nd with a day or so either side for travel. This is a part of France that I haven't been to for over 30 years so it will definitely bring back memories for me. I am going a little earlier to arrive at the Vercors via northern Spain and the Pyrenees along with Bernard, Dan Church and Richard. If anyone is interested please let Lydia know. It won't be very expensive and there is still time to go.


Me with Mon Petite Pony at the Grotte Gournier, Vercors

Getting away from the sun in Italy

I have just come back from a holiday at Lake Garda, Italy. A chance to dose up on vitamin D! On my first full day there I went for a boat and bus trip all around the lake. Arriving by boat at Sirmione, a peninsula on the southern shore of the lake, I noticed a sign pointing to Grotte di Catullo. Catullus was a Roman poet. First, though I needed an ice cream and a quick visit to the local medieval castle. Then, still licking my delicious Italian ice cream I set off up the road and out of town towards the point where there were some Roman ruins and the grotto which, by all accounts, produced thermal water from a spring. Arriving at the ruins, which were a bit overgrown I found that there were a load of Italian sixth formers. Passing them I tramped through the ruins towards the grotto and nearly tripped over a copulating couple from the sixth form party. Hastily bidding them arriverderci I retraced my steps so never found the thermal grotto. Still, an excuse to go back.

I had more luck a couple of days later back in Riva where I was staying. A waiter at the hotel told me of a nearby cave with a waterfall thundering through it. It was on the outskirts of town he told me. This was the Cascata del Varone, a mere three kilometres up a hill out of the town. Ever resourceful I noticed a bus stop and, at the cost of 1€, I sped up the hill to the cascata.

Oh no, there were more sixth formers finding out about the local geology which created the waterfall and the cave. They soon twigged that I seemed to know about such things and started asking me questions in Italian. They soon discovered that my Italian was, at best, piccolo and started in English. Discovering I was from Plymouth we got Plymouth Argyle out of the way and then we sorted out the geology. It was lunch time and they wanted to share their sandwiches with me but I declined even though they told me that their mums had made them and the sandwiches were good.

My explanation to the students was that Lake Tenno situated in a col between the mountains high above Riva del Garda started to lose its water underground after an earthquake. The water seeping away from the lake

eventually broke through to the surface to form a stream called Magnone. Above Varone the stream flowed onto the limestone and started to create the cave with its underground waterfall which falls for some 100 metres through the cave to eventually exit and flow on down to Lake Garda.



The waterfall plunging into the cave at Varone



Inside the cave, the waterfall nears the bottom

Exiting the cave I was pretty wet but soon dried off in the sunshine.

A few days later I discovered that an old road that followed the western shore of the lake had been replaced by a modern road a few metres above the lake

surface. The old road, much higher up, ran through 7 tunnels for 10 kilometres, and had been closed since 1990. Today this was a cycle path and pedestrian route climbing up out of Riva towards the Valle di Ledro. The route is ever upwards but with magnificent views of Lake Garda and Monte Baldo on the eastern shore of the lake. The tunnels are unlit and many have been fortified. To make the walk worthwhile there is a bar at the end where the asphalt road to Ledro passes. After welcome refreshment it is soon time to retrace your steps back through the tunnels to Riva but at least it was all downhill now.



View back to Riva from the first tunnel



The fourth tunnel. Between the tunnels the paths were quite narrow hugging the cliffs.



The path hugging the cliff between tunnels high above Lake Garda