

BACHEIDDON MINE EXPLORED By ROY FELLOWS 1996

The centre of the mine is situated at SN 837971, and is very close to the mountain road from Llanidloes to Machynlleth, and the workings actually pass under the road. The obvious sign of mining activity is an open gunnis just south of the road; this is now filled with scrap motor cars and other rubbish.

Slightly further to the south and down hill there is an open level heading north. To the north of the road there are two other levels heading towards the workings from the other direction, another upper level and a deep adit, both are run in. The deep adit is very conspicuous by its very large amount of spoil; this would indicate very extensive underground workings. David Bick mentions a 50 HP horizontal engine pumping via flat rods through the deep adit. I feel that it is highly likely that there must be some of this equipment left in situ underground. This was part of the incentive for the project. On the other side of this valley are the workings of Rhoswydol, this concern worked Bacheiddon up to 1863, when the mine was closed.

The open level is a cross cut, about 20 yards to a lode stoped out to the left of the level to depth, and another 20 yards or so to the main lode, seen on the surface in the form of the gunnis. This area is very unstable with rusty car axles hanging from the roof and a steep slope of rubble to the edge of a drop to unknown depths. West along this lode is another possible route down, however again large amounts of loose rock make this too dangerous to attempt. Returning back along the level I decided to go for the first, or south lode. Here was a pitch with a mass of loose rock on the right, however by a bit of clearance work, and a bit of 'bombing' I was able to establish a reasonable route by placing bolts on the left, (footwall) side. The pitch was 12 ft to a ledge, then a further free hanging descent of just under 30 feet to a steep rubble slope. At the bottom of the rubble slope a further descent of about 25 feet down a drystone lined shaft, reminiscent of the north Pennines. This shaft is probably free climbable, but should be considered dangerous due to the slope of loose rock down to it. I should remark in passing that this mine is best explored in dry weather. The entrance cross cut varies from bone dry to thigh deep wading, dependant on the weather, and in wet weather water runs down the various pitches and tends to act upon the masses of loose rock which prevail in this mine.

Be warned!.

This second pitch is in a stope with solid roof and two further winzes, gained after more scrambling up and down rubble slopes. One is blocked at the top but one at the end is open, however there was a large boulder balanced on the edge. At a later date I destroyed this with a sledge hammer, so as to provide an alternative route to the one I am about to describe.

The drystone winze was descended after placing a bolt at its head, in the footwall. At the bottom, another short rubble slope under some very rotten timber supporting tons of deads. Here the way on was blocked by a very large boulder, but with a gap of a few inches at the one end. I tried to enlarge this with the aforementioned sledge hammer, but to no avail. I therefore elected to dig underneath it. This squeeze is very tight and is actually worse than it looks. Be advised that I am 39 inch chest. Rescue from beyond this point would be impossible. The squeeze leads directly into a very steep rubble slope, a handline here is mandatory. I placed a rebelay bolt just above the boulder for this purpose. Without a rope there is no way anyone will get back through the squeeze, or indeed up or down the slope in relative safety.

At the bottom of the slope is a short pitch of about 20 feet, (rebelay to sound stemples). A rebelay here is essential.

At the bottom I found a cross cut heading north, chest deep in water. The south lode continued about another 15 yards or so after climbing over a bank of deads. The watered cross cut went for about 20 yards or so passing a blind heading on the left. Just past a hopper with mass of boulders above, I reaches the main lode. Because of all the water I thought that I had reached the deep adit, but this was not so. The water had built up behind a collapse, to within a few inches of the roof. A way through was soon cleared producing a rush of water which poured down a shaft a few feet beyond. Crawling through, I found myself in a large stope, which haded up in the direction I had just come from. To the left (west) a steep slope of rubbish from the surface openworks. There was the carcass of a dead sheep, and even a dead rat. To the right (east) the stope ended a few feet past the rubble pile. The pitch in front of me was much too dangerous to descend being overhung with rubble and junk from above.

I should like to end with a few comments.

A disappointing feature of the workings gained was almost complete absence of artefacts, just a few bits of ironwork, and a rusty tin was all that I found. Also, a curious feature of the underground workings is the fact that while the south lode (the one descended) is very ochreous, the one to the north has a complete absence of this material. Another point is the question of where the upper adit on the north side enters the workings. I saw no sign of this underground, although it appears to be on the same random as the upper adit on the south. I feel that it must come in further to the east, probably into the area of workings filled with old cars. The upper south adit probably represents the first level driven, then at a later date the two northern levels were put in by the Rhoswydol people for easier tramping to their dressing floors.

Also, the large amount of spoil at the deep adit does not seem to me to relate to the scale of the workings as explored. It is possible that the north lode has stopes from the level that I reached right down to deep adit. I think that this is unlikely. A considerable amount of material was probably removed from the underground shaft, and exploratory drives to east and west.

Finally, although the pitches are novice standard in terms of depth, the whole mine is very unstable, particularly in wet weather. It should therefore be explored with the greatest of care. I am very doubtful about whether the deep adit could be gained even after a lot of clearance work to secure the final pitch.

I would expect the pitch to be blocked some way down. Also I feel that the deep adit is probably watered to above the roof level. After my explorations I went down the other valley to the site of the deep adit to check on the amount of water leaving the workings, remember I had released quite a torrent. However the water leaving the adit was just the usual trickle, so water must be backed up to quite a depth.

