

PARYS UNDERGROUND GROUP

NOTES FOR VISITING CAVING/MINING GROUPS

About the mine

Modern mining commenced in 1768. There were two mines, The Parys Mine and the Mona Mine with separate sets of buildings and a boundary between the summit windmill and the Parys mine entrance. Initial work was by shallow shafts and bell pits which were later collapsed in to form the Great and Hillside Opencasts. Deep mining began before 1790 and eventually reached a depth of 900ft., well below sea level. Both mines were gravity drained to the Parys 45 fathom level by the Joint Drainage Adit, and this provided the only underground connection between the two. Although Gwen's shaft in Parys Mine is 150fm. (900ft) deep everything below the 45fm. level was pumped and is now flooded.

By the end of underground working there were over 100 shafts scattered across the mountain. All haulage and pumping was by these shafts, and some were also laddered for access – Michael Faraday gives an interesting account of coming up one of these in 1819. There were also a few footways, and it is the Parys footway we use for access. These descends sub-vertically by ladders and stone steps.

The accessible Parys levels are at 10, 16, 20, 30 and 45fm. with some stopes extending 90ft. between levels. Much of the mine is in good rock, but parts are timbered. These sections suffer frequent collapse and present us with ongoing problems.

In several places on the 16fm. level 18/19th century miners broke into the bottom of Bronze Age workings. Although all trace of these workings on the surface is now buried under massive tips we have several radiocarbon dates from underground, all of which date to around 1900bc. As such it is one of the few proven Broze Age mining sites known in Britain.

The mine is exceptionally acid with some pools having a pH value of around 2-2.5. These conditions are poor for the preservation of bone or metal artefacts, but are suitable for some specialised bacteria which leave characteristic snottites as a waste product. For the mineralogist there are a number of unusual minerals - antlerite, pisanite, basaluminite and jarosite for example. Parys Mountain is also the world type site for anglesite although all of this seems to have gone.

The Trip

We will take experienced underground groups pretty much anywhere in the mine, although a four hour trip isn't long enough to visit everywhere. If you have a particular interest (e.g. mineralogy) let us know and we will try to organise the trip appropriately, and if possible even ensure a specialist is available to guide you. Although one guide can manage a group of up to 10, progress is slow, so we try to keep groups down to five or six. Let us know how roughly many people will be coming so we can make arrangements beforehand.

Clothing and Equipment

The mine is fairly dry, but the lower levels are very muddy. A caving suit or overalls will be fine. There are often pools of water up to a foot or so deep in the passages so bring wellies. We strongly recommend the use of rubber gloves. There are some opportunities to get into waist deep water if you want, but these are not an essential part of the experience. The trip through Parys to Mona involves about 150m of passage waist deep in water, then a short section of passage where accumulation of material on the floor means that you have to crouch, getting wet to chest height. There is no SRT. Cows tails are barely needed, we do clip non-caving visitors to a handline for a short section of false floor, but this is as much for the caving experience as for safety.

The trip on 30fm to see the wheel barrow (our best artefact) involves a two stage climb up a muddy slope. There is a handline with loops on the lower 25ft. On the upper 50ft. there are two ropes, one with hand loops, the other without knots for those who wish to use a jammer. I believe that all experienced individuals should look after their own safety, and therefore leave it up to you to make your own choice of using the handloops and/or protecting yourself with a jammer. Because of the time taken to visit the wheelbarrow is only practical with small groups – say 4 or 5 people.

The mine water is acid. In places it can be as low as pH 2 – 2.5. As you will be aware acid is not good for nylon equipment, or aluminium alloys. Although you are unlikely to get it in anything this acid we recommend that you wash or soak your safety critical kit in tap water as soon as possible afterwards to minimise any risk of damage. One electron ladder suffered irreparable deterioration through not being washed promptly after use.

Insurance

We have an absolute requirement, for the protection of our Club Committee and our landowner (Anglesey Mining PLC), that all visitors have third-party **CAVING** insurance, either with the BCA, the DCA or with a private insurer who insures specifically for caving/mine exploration. Current BCA membership cards are ideal proof, but knowing how long they take to come out, a BCA list, or a personal guarantee by the leader that all members of the group have appropriate cover will suffice. Anyone with a commercial insurance policy should bring a copy as proof that it specifically covers caving/mine exploration. Anyone who does not have insurance can join PUG as a temporary member on the day of the visit. This provides 17 days BCA insurance cover and costs £10.00

Other Notes

You are welcome to take photographs (except for commercial purposes, which would require permission from Anglesey Mining and ourselves). We have a policy to not permitting mineral collection. Please leave your geology hammers at home. *(Note: Much of the mountain top is covered by geological or biological SSSI and/or Scheduled Monument status which precludes any disturbance or collection on the surface too).*

Meet

Meet in the public car park at the top of the mountain, beside the B5111 (Amlwch to Rhosybol/Llanerchymedd road). Grid Ref: SH438906. This is also the starting point of the surface Heritage Trail (car park sign refers to this), which is worth looking around if you have time. We look forward to seeing you.