

Memoirs of the West Cumbria Mine Research Group

Collated by Roy Fellows 2007

Part 3: Rampgill Mine

Foreword

The West Cumbria Mine Research Group were very active in the 1980s and early 1990s at Nenthead , and everything was written up in their journal. As I feel strongly that this valuable information should be freely available to all, I have digitalised my copies of the journal so as to be easily available for distribution, particularly as downloads from the popular websites.

I have reproduced everything as it was originally published; only attempting to correct mistakes of spelling and grammar plus adding little notations of my own as appropriate.

There is also quite a lot of what one can only describe as ‘irrelevant chat’ that many will find annoying. Basically, everyone will have their own style of writing, and I have no doubt that my own is not to everyone’s liking!

However, the fact remains that what is reproduced here should be a valuable resource to both mine explorers and historical researchers.

The groups explorations in Rampgill were nowhere near as comprehensive as in Brownley Hill or Smallcleaugh, the activities mainly relate to exploratiuons in the Scaleburn mine following the discovery of the horse gin.

This has been reproduced by scanning and O.C.R. so please excuse any errors.

Roy Fellows July 2007



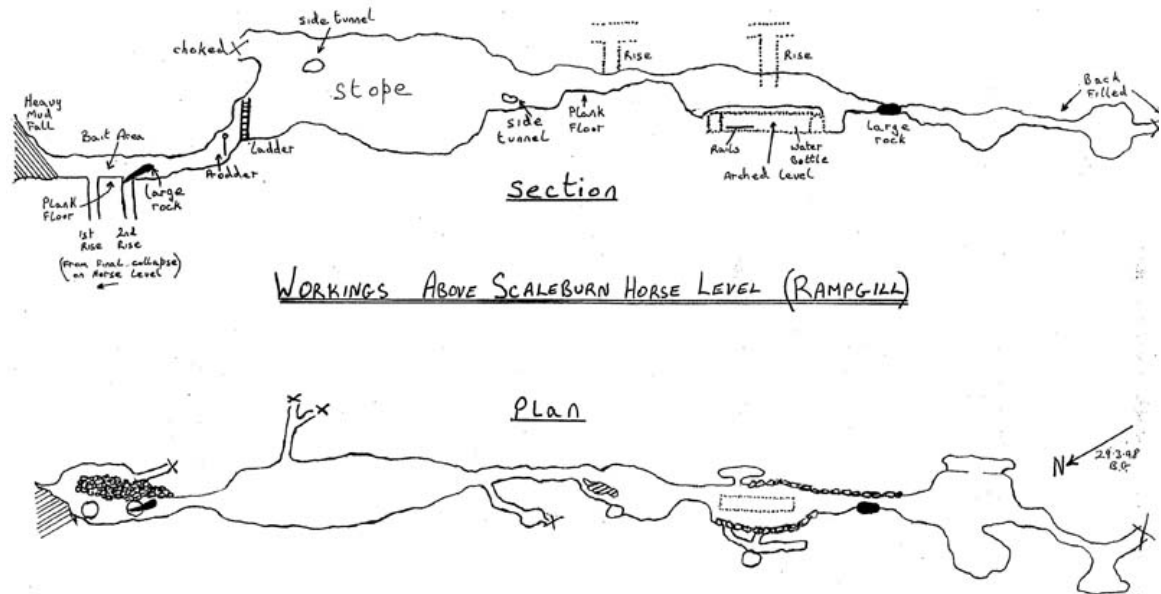
After being unable to swell the numbers any, the 3 of us met up in the car-park and set off into Rampgill. The intention of the meet was to may-pole various rises along the Scaleburn vein, one in particular owed Ian after an unfortunate incident nearly knocked him out of the top of it. Eventually reaching the steps we ascended to the high level, dropped down Lawson's sump and continued in-by, past gin junction and through a couple of digs. We climbed up at a point where a single timber is bridged across the level roof, resting on a length of rail with more timber crosswise holding a lot of deads. Above a slope of muck on the right is a rise that we were going to look at. Once the rise foot was climbed into we found that there was no floor to sit the maypole on.

Leaning over and looking up it some material is hanging in it about 15 feet up, and it may in fact be completely blocked.

Collecting up the poles we continued inbye until we entered the thigh deep water near the end of the level. The forth rise from the end of the block looked a possibility, appearing to go both ways so we assembled the maypole. This proved difficult due to a lack of footholds in the rise to lift the maypole. This was eventually solved by wedging the steel pole a-cross the rise and I ascended the left rise on the out-bye side.

Some loose rock at the top was tidied up and I got off onto a slope of muck and rock. Moving up this, things didn't look promising, a heavy fall of mud through a hole in the roof almost filled the place. However to the left and below the fall foot was an opening which seemed to go. I shouted down to Ian who came up and we entered this small drift at right angles to the Horse level. A few yards along this it went left and right. To the right (ie outbye) a climb down a wall of deads lead to a forehead, in-bye from the junction went about 40 yards through limestone to a block. At one point a length of fish-bellied rail was being used as a stemple overhead. We went back to the maypole and looked across to the other side of the rise. This was a few feet lower than where we were, not being able to make out a definite way on we had to descend, re-position the maypole and I went to check. A couple of feet in from the top was a four foot wall of deads in a state of collapse with a very heavy stemple above on which was sitting cross timbers and deads. I still couldn't make out if there was a way at the back of the collapse, to the right. On putting my weight on the wall, I wasn't particularly happy about the way it moved. Carefully getting up it and crawling under the stemple I discovered there was no way on anyway, again stuff coming through a hole in the roof being the problem. I descended and we moved further in-bye to the next rise. Standing about in the deep water was chilling so I tried to get up on the bank at the level side a bit and Ian and I had some bait. Kirsten got on with the rise. Placing a pole on the bank gave enough height for her to ascend into a small working with again no way on.

The last 2 rises from the collapse are both 25 feet, however the second from the end has a large rock perched across its top (This was the rise that had cost Ian several stitches). The 1st rise from the end looked a better proposition for the maypole, timber sheltering at roof height gave a hardy perch for lifting the maypole to add other sections. Ian climbed onto this and we got the pole built, then he continued on up to the rise top. Kirsten, then myself, followed. We were hoping to be able to go in-bye and get beyond the collapse, but this was dashed immediately. A heavy fall of mud and rock just beyond the rise pit paid to that. However out-bye from the rise top saved the day and gave us a lot of exploration. The floor between the two rises was planked and getting past the large rock was tricky but climbing on up beyond we found a Nenthead ladder leaning against the wall, and also a metal prodder type tool. These were at the beginning of a high narrow slope, perhaps 25 feet high and 15 feet wide, a couple of side tunnels were left for later as we found another planked floor, then Ian forced a way through a narrow section which led into an interesting area A slope of muck and deads led down to a section of arching, nearly buried now the floor was built up over this u~ but the other end, 10 -12 yards away, was completely open Chmbmg down the rock wall we got into the level, at the far end a stack of rails are lying. We had a search for clay-pipes, no luck, and then Ian found a metal water bottle complete with wooden stopper. This short section of arching here seemed out of place, perhaps No 4 rise is somewhere under here? Climbing back up, a fall blocked the way, a large rock having come down with some very soft shale. I dug through this and slid through into further workings, on the left a step up to a 'window' led into another small area. The way on was backfilled, but Ian excavated his way on into a working, a way up on the right was now choked. A possible continuation at the far end is completely backfilled and would need some work to clear a way. We began our return with one or two more things still to look at.



Back to the area above the arched level a hole on one side led into a small working, another on the opposite side had a rise in it which appeared to go both ways but un-climbable without an aid. Up the rubble slope beyond the arching a wide rise was looked at - (wide because the walls are falling off). I tried to find some way up but its in shale and I slid down as it gave way, this rise also looks interesting, going both ways. Back to the slope, Kirsten crawled along a side tunnel, partly backfilled, to a chamber with the way on choked. Ian climbed up into another in the opposite wall which led to a Y junction, again choked. From here he could see that a hole at the top of slope end appeared blocked.

Returning to the access rise-top a pack of deads on the right could be walked round, where we found a bait area. The wooden plank off the seat lies rotten on the floor, but the rock supports for each end can be seen. A little further round is a pair of clogs in nice condition with some old rope lying with them. Candle mud balls dot the wall, a stopper off a water bottle turned up and Ian really rounded the day off by finding a clay pipe bowl in a small vug. (This read T.W. on the back of the bowl). On this high note we descended the maypole and made out way out. My car was in a good mood this time and I made it home O.K.

Bill Griffin

Rampgill Mine,-Nenthead.

6th October 1996

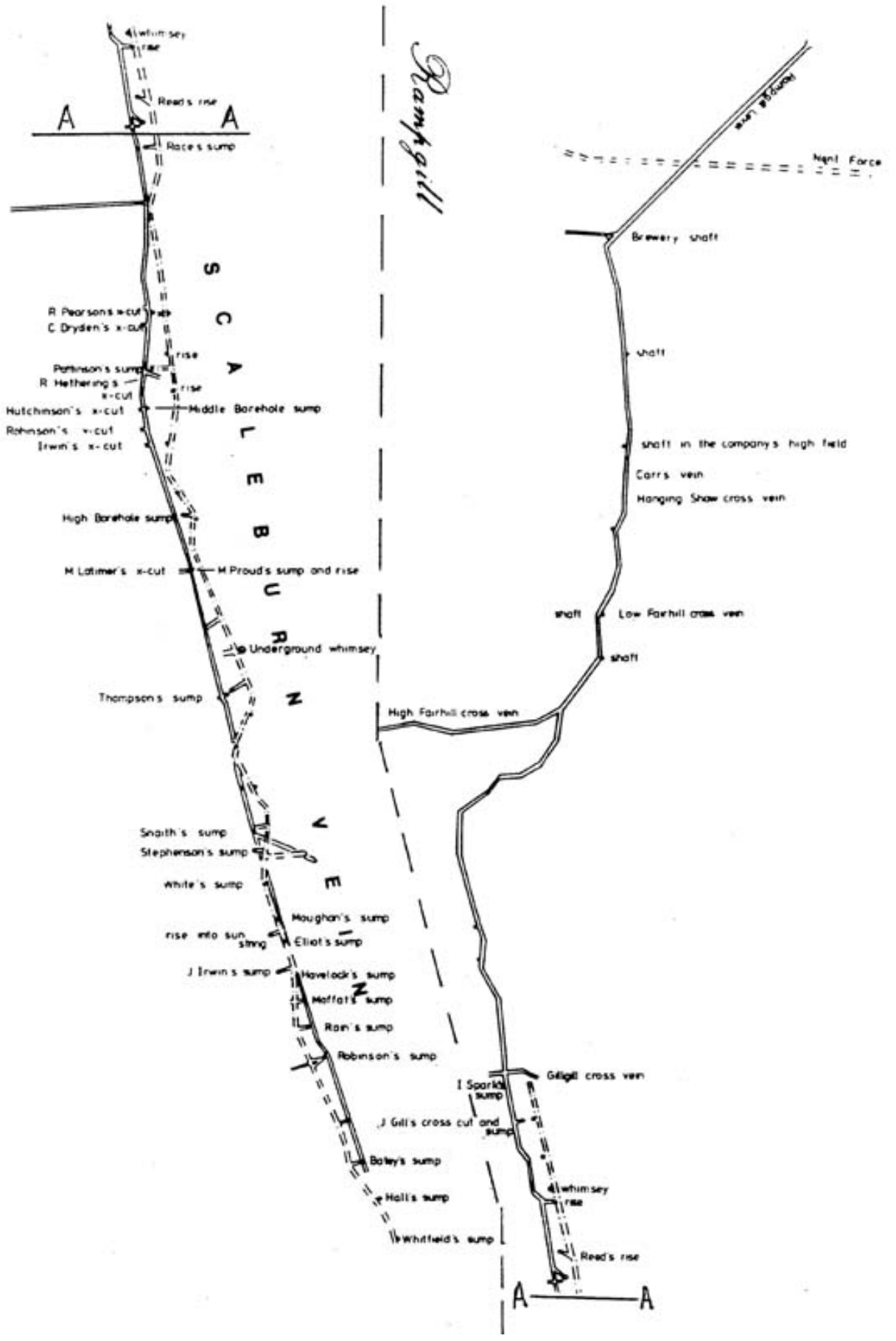
Having had a brief look at this mine previously, we decided on a return visit to check out more.

Heading inbye, past the Brewery Shaft junction, we came to a rise on the left. Climbing this, we explored various workings, a couple of times the way on were blocked, but alternative ways were discovered, until eventually no more progress could be made due to a collapse.

Continuing up the Horse Level along Scaleburn Vein, we arrived at the steps, and ascended through the impressive arching, emerging into a wider area at the top. A date and initials (CB, JP, 1795) were spotted on the RH wall at eye-level.

Heading NE through sound level, we quickly reached a level on the left, watered to ankle depth; following this led us eventually to a drowned sump. This was very sound, and a large working could be seen below, through the clear water. (It would make a great dive for Noel!)

Back to the main level, 25 yards on, we came to a junction to the right. This led to a chamber, and we looked down about 6 feet onto a collapsed sump.



Inbye again on the main level, a junction on the left had holes in the floor in a couple of places, and a blocked sump on the right. However another short junction to a sump was interesting in that we discovered a date. This was to the right of the sump-top, 2ft above floor level, and read:- (1805 IT, IP, RW, T, TL, IV, IE.)

Pushing further along the side-level, we spotted a winder off a jackroll at a sump-top (blocked), and then came to a rise which was running water but looked interesting.

Eventually, we came to a collapse which was crawled over and down, into a short length of level leading to a sump which appeared to be open; a long ladder leaning against the wall at the bottom, but well out of reach.

Returning to the main level, we pressed on, coming to a wide area with a large diameter sump to the left. This must have been a busy place at one time, as the back wall was absolutely covered in carved dates and initials. Some noted were:- (1800 RH, 1793, 1799, HW RH, IH 1799 EF.) Also, unusually, a full name (DOBSON 1790) To the right of the level is a stope with a heavy stemple in above.

Continuing inbye, there are initials and a date (1795) on the left of the level, and further still, some old timbers are lying opposite an entrance to a blocked sump. On the wall next to the timbers is carved (1830 JR, MR, FR. A family company?)

About 20 yards further on, a rise on the right, 12ft high, was almost climbed, but was too wide.

Further on, a short level to a blocked sump, has initials (IT) above the entrance. (There's that man again!)

About 50 yards further inbye, we were stopped by a complete collapse, the level by now being in the plate.

Rampgill

13th October 1996

Kevin and I returned to the Scaleburn Vein with Bob Johnstone (a new member, but a very experienced caver) to continue our exploration of the Horse Level beyond the collapse just inbye of the steps.

Calf-depth water led to a staggered crossroads; to the left led to a sump, but the RH branch went some distance, eventually being blocked by a collapse of coal-like material.

Further on, a junction in the arching has a set of points still in the rails, but turning left here, was a real eye-opener. The passage quickly opens into a large cavern, at the back of which is a horse-gin lying on its side. This is in good condition, and ideal for some superb photos. The cast-iron top of the gin has been fractured, apparently by the miners when its use was no longer required. A large timber, spiked to the roof, has the top bearing still in situ. This was cast in two halves, being bolted together, the strange thing is that the horsegin's destruction would have needed these bolts removed to release the top bearing, and send it crashing down.

(No, the timber must have partially collapsed under its own weight and come out of the top bearing. RF)

Why did they bother to bolt it back together again? Another thing is the height of the cavern compared to the gin; when the top bearing was released to allow the gin to fall, the winding drum at the top would have snagged on the roof, and jammed it in at an angle. Whatever happened, it is now on its side, and several rope lines can be seen marked into the wood of the drum.

Some yards away is the winding shaft, its top spanned by rails pegged into the rock as protection against anyone falling down it! Deep water can be seen at the bottom, perhaps 50ft below. There is no sign of where the winding wheel may have been situated, as directly above the shaft is what seems to be the foot of a rise, arched closed by the yellow rock.

Climbing up beyond the shaft, a level in limestone leads to the foot of a manway/hopper. Some timber and debris lies here, but it's an impressive rise, and deserves to be maypoled.

Back to the Horse Level just inbye of the junction, a hole in the floor reveals an understope which would need tackle to drop into.

We continued on, crawling through various digs and exploring upper flats workings, finding gelignite, lead coated fuse and a full box of detonators along with printed instructions for setting charges in English and Welsh.

At one point, a junction to the left led to a sump, the top of which was "fenced-off" by two rails spanning the level. A note left here by Ian Hebson, warns of bad air down the sump.

It was a struggle getting through two drums set in a dig on the Horse Level, but there was much to explore beyond. We even found group members John & Robert Lawson, Roy Fellows and Robert Bunting, flying the flag down here. (A plastic Union Jack with their names on, as a record of their opening this new area.)

On ringing John about this find, I discovered they were the guys who re-opened this length of the Horse Level. They certainly put some work into it. (This area had also been discovered by CATMHS, as they had a meet in there on the 17th of October. - Ed)

Bill Griffin.

Rampgill

8th December 1996

Returning to the Scaleburn Vein for more exploration and a video-shoot, we began by following a level behind the horse-gin chamber. This appears to run parallel to the horse level, but at a slightly higher horizon. Access was mostly crawling until we reached a small working, with a way-on now blocked. Having continued as far as we could, we returned to the chamber.

We had a search about here, and found a kibble hook, possibly used with the gin and nearby sump, and also a metal roller probably used as a rope-guide, which still ran freely in its mounting. Both artefacts were left displayed on the gin.

Several wooden wedges were found in a cavity, purpose unknown, and as we headed inbye, identical ones were found further on.

Looking for ways up we hadn't done, we found a rise out of the level roof; the arching ended a few yards further inbye, so we climbed up there and got to the top of the rise. Walking further outbye, we climbed about 8ft up a hole, and discovered a wooden ore chute in situ on a slope from a higher working. It seemed this may have fed a further chute (now gone) to drop the ore down to the Horse Level.

Further inbye, a large stemple spanned the level above our heads, one end supported on a rail across a gap in the arching. The stemple was supporting timbers holding back a large amount of deads, above the RH side of the Horse Level. Ascending into the working above, we moved outbye up an incline of fallen material to a hole on the right. Here, a wall of deads was hanging without a base, holding back more deads; however, we managed to get into the hole without disturbing anything. A flat-out crawl brought us to a very small hole, through which we could see sound level beyond. Clawing away at the tight packed mud and rock, we eventually opened up enough to slide in. We immediately found a clog in poor condition, then followed the low level to a forehead.

Returning to the incline, we climbed higher up, from where we could see a way-on higher up higher up again, but impossible to reach without gear. We could see in the roof of this higher level, a rise lined with yellow rock. I would estimate the top of this rise to be even above the height of the manway/hopper at the horse gin cavern. Disappointed that we couldn't get further in this area, we returned to the Horse Level and continued inbye.

Eventually, coming to un-arched level for some distance, we climbed up onto the arching where it began again. We could look up some distance, and decided to try to get there. A climb on the inbye side got us into arched level, which we followed to a collapse of deads. Crawling over this, we were in a 4ft gap between two walls of deads, which we climbed. These had once been planked over at the top,

but the middle of the planks were gone, with only the ends left on each side. Once up, we went through a "porthole" in the limestone and into a flat working. Heading inbye, through partly back-filled level, we eventually came to a junction where a lot of material had come down from a rise working; this had blocked the outbye side, but inbye has a way on, but would need an electron. The rise seemed to have a level off it part way up, and I reckoned the metal ladder previously found down a sump would get us in, although getting it here would be an effort.

Returning to the porthole, we could see a way-on looking outbye, which, when we got to it, we found we were able to look down to the start of our climb. This new level led into more workings, a few yards along which we found a nice set of artefacts on the left. These included three metal water bottles, detonator boxes, a double-ended shot-hole scraper, and sundry other tins. Also here, was a metal spike like those which support the arching in the level we climbed into. The four flats on the spike came to a point, but on two opposite corners, they were cut with diagonal grooves (for grip?).

Time was by now running short so we decided to head out. This proved rather difficult; we got down the walls of deads and along the level O.K., but once again the climb down to the Horse Level saw us with a problem. After trying several times, we eventually linked cow-tails, and I was able to support Kevin while he stretched a foot out for a good hold, from where he climbed

down. He then found a long length of timber and propped it up towards me. I could just get a toe to this, but it was enough to then reach the good foot-hold and get down. Relieved, we then made our way out.

Rampgill

15th December 1996

The following week we went for the metal ladder from the sump on the High Level. This proved to be made of steel and heavy; it took some getting to the rise inbye from the water bottles previously discovered. Anyway, we offered it up the rise to the level and it proved too short to get in! However, we could see that it appeared to go, and this made us even more determined to get in! I was able to acquire an 8ft wooden ladder during the week and this was taken through to Nenthead and down to the rise. Once here, we lashed the wooden ladder onto the top of the metal one, gaining enough height for me to climb into the level. Big Deal, it only goes about 20ft!

We were able to use the wooden ladders elsewhere on the Horse Level, although once again they only gave us enough height for enticing glimpses into areas we couldn't reach. At one point, a break in the arching had two walls of yellow stone rising high above the Horse Level, several feet apart. Each wall had holes let into them, opposite each other, presumably once spanned by timber. From the top of the ladder, arched level could be seen going off at right-angles to the Horse Level. At another of these high walls above the level, there is a large stemple sitting diagonally across the level. Here, we put the metal ladder up, and the top just reached a small projection in the rock face; the wooden ladder was sat on this, and braced across to the opposite side of the level. The top of this ladder just reached the top of the wall. Kevin got up onto the wooden ladder, while I held the bottom of it from the metal one. His weight seemed to help jam the ladder in, so he went up. He reached the top of the yellow wall O.K., but saw that set back from it about 1V was another wall of limestone deads, with the way on above this. I had a look, and the second wall was about 4ft high, but the ladder situation was too precarious to get off with this second wall to get up as well. As usual, time ran out and we made our way out to day, or rather darkness as it was then.

Rampgill Mine, Nenthead

Sunday, 9th November 1997

A four-man team (DKB, Bill, and Mike Me. joined by Simon Bowes on his first trip) appeared through the mist, to meet at Rampgill car-park, and as nobody else had arrived by 10.30, we made our way into Rampgill to retrieve the maypoles from their hiding place, before moving inbye along the Scaleburn Vein, to the rise we had planned to ascend. This rise was the last open one before the stepped incline up to the High Level, and appeared to be 25-30ft high and 10ft in diameter.

We duly arrived, and as a first step, jammed the shorter steel pole across the shaft, for Bill to clamber onto, thus enabling us to assemble the remaining three 10ft aluminium poles up the shaft.

This done, Mike offered to ascend, but, when near the top, and after a little "gardening" to remove shale-piles on the shaft-top, he determined that the pole was placed such that safe ground could not be reached, so he descended, the pole was re-positioned, and Bill took his place.

Bill found that the pole now allowed him to access a cross-cut level around ten metres to a partially blocked junction with a low level running parallel to the Horse Level below. The RH side was only around 3ft high and quickly became choked with debris, so he returned to find the LH branch almost totally blocked by a fall from above on the corner. What looked like a pack-wall across the level was immediately beyond this fall. Opposite the entrance cross-cut, an apparent continuation was back-filled to the roof

Bill directed his energies to clearing the fall, and discovered that it was from a ladder-way, partially blocked by fallen debris. He asked us to look for a probe to help clear the debris, and Mike and I found a metal bar at the fall in the Horse Level, beyond the steps, and also a Steel pipe from the sump-top reached from the High Level above. These were sent up, but, feeling that help was required, Bill sought assistance, and I duly ascended to join him. We quickly removed the base material, but in doing so, allowed suspended stuff to fall. I advised Mike to take Simon inbye to see the incline and graffiti, while Bill and I tackled the new fall, and, after moving a respectable amount of rock, mud, and smashed wooden ladders and stemples, we eventually cleared it again sufficiently to be able to look up. This look revealed a rise of around 15-20ft, the back wall being boarded and stemped to the top, with broken rock visible through a hole, suggesting that there was an ore-chute beyond the partition. Due to material still suspended in the corners which we could not reach with our probes, we decided to leave this for gravity to handle, with a view to returning in the future.

The consensus between Bill and I was that this could not be the outbye continuation of the High Level above the steps, due to the outbye branch being only 3ft high, but what baffled us, was, if there was a chute beyond the partition, where did the contents then go, inbye, or down our entry rise; and if the latter, how was it moved along the cross-cut? If there is no chute beyond the partition, what did they do with the waste from a level that required installed ladders and a timbered rise? Anyway, it seemed to warrant a return trip in the future.

We dismantled the maypole, and moved the steel pole to the sump-top from the High Level, where we had lunch before removing the camouflaged trap-door, and fitting the electron to descend into the Horse Level beyond the fall.

The sump had a note in the top, warning of the danger of damaging the support timbering, and when Bill descended, he found that the bottom steel support had been supplemented with wedges. Everyone descended without problem, despite the awkward hang of the ladder, and we headed inbye to the Horse Gin, where a little photography was done, before a quick poke around nearby workings, and a re-ascend of the sump. The sump was hidden again, and we moved inbye along the High Level to view and photograph the graffiti covered wall at the sump-top, and the also on the level-wall in between.

Following this, we moved outbye and turned left to Whisky Bottle Corner, turning left again into Rampgill Vein.

After viewing the Engine Shaft on the way, we reached the NORPEX door, and while the lads assembled a maypole into the rise at the cross-roads, I took the RH level, looking for another way on. This level climbed through small workings, and crawls, up over a 10ft packwall, to finally end in a short level and a deep, narrow sump, maybe 50ft deep. I returned to the others, to find that, using two poles, Bill had ascended to a blind 8ft heading, with no way on.

Returning to the junction outbye of the Engine Shaft, we turned left, past a string in the left, to a high string just beyond. This was the maypole ascent Howard and I had looked at previously, but now it looked daunting, the pitch being 40-50ft up in a working perhaps 15ft wide. I climbed up the inbye end, and into a level, which sloped up beyond to a 10ft rise at the top, but on scaling it, there was only a small working, so I returned to the others. Bill had reached the level, and from there we assessed possibilities, but concluded that steel poles would be necessary, and even then, some bracing would be needed, and possibly lashing it in position. The conjectured level mouth, up just under the roof, headed back towards the main Horse Level, and the water flowing from it, had stained the wall a yellow-ochre

colour all the way down. Whether it is a level or just a natural water-bearing fissure, can only be found out by scaling it! Anybody game?

Collecting the maypoles together, we moved outbye: to store the sections in their new hiding place, Mike and Bill noticing on the way out, that a stone-lined rise above the Rampgill Level, of maybe 40ft, appeared to have a level running inbye from it. We left this for another trip, and, after concealing the poles, we made our way out to surface.

Although we had not managed the second of our two intended maypole ascents, we had done the first, and intended to return to it, and as Bill so nicely put it, "tied up a loose end" near the NORPEX door. (They say mimicry is the sincerest form of flattery. I'm sure somebody else used to use that phrase?) We had also discovered other possibilities of further exploration.

Dave Banks

(The NORPEX door has since been cut away by persons unknown. Since that time the workings beyond have been systematically stripped of artefacts including an old newspaper cover "Burtons: another link in the chain" which I had spent about an hour piecing together on a wooden board so that I could go back and photograph it. RF)

Rampgill Mine, Nenthead

Wednesday 30th December 1997

This trip was set up to show Carol Rothery the Horse Gin, which would give Joe a chance of some photography also, and Kev and I had plans to ascend a couple of rises previously spotted.

We picked up the poles on the way to Rampgill Vein and looked at a large rise above the Horse Level, lined with yellow stone, and just before J. Irwins Crosscut.

As it rises, this curves back over inbye, consequently the top of the pole was a few feet from the side, and as we already had three poles on, adding another would simply move it further out because of the slope. I climbed up for a look, but if there is a level at the top of the slope, it appears to have collapsed. Getting off the ladder at this point, to scramble up the slope would be possible (but suicidal), but I felt was not worth the risk. The outbye side of the rise is vertical and continues up beyond where I was, but was out of maypole reach, and it was difficult to make out.

Back down, and a few yards outbye, a small hole above the arching rose up at an angle. I got into this, and dug my way through collapsed shale, but only got to the back of the rise wall.

We dismantled the maypole, and headed off to Scaleburn Vein, where we all descended the electron, and moved on to the Horse Gin, where Joe took several photos.

(Note - The final metal strut on the sump is no longer doing its job, so be aware that the descent may become unstable)

(To true, it's since collapsed, however at this time, 2007, entry is still possible but dangerous. RF)

After some time in the Gin Chamber, we moved inbye as far as the Union Flag. There is a rise a few yards before this that had looked interesting, so we got busy with the maypole again. There is a level part way up, but when Kev got into it, it turned out to be just a very small working, although he did find the bowl of a clay pipe. At the rise-top, an arched level could be seen leading off, but three poles were too short, and another couldn't be added because the maypole hit the roof before another section could be added. We eventually got the maypole foot onto a ledge that gave the desired height, and again Kev went up. He told us he got into a small flat working, where he found several dozen detonators, but nothing else. As there was no way off to anything else, no-one joined him for a look, and he came back down.

Returning along the level, the drums proved a little difficult for Joe, until a novel feet-first method solved the problem, and we all made our way out.

(Members should note that the second drum has been cut and squeezed so as to fit through the first, and as well as being tighter, is out of line, making the exit up and to the left to get out. -Ed.)

Bill Griffin

Rampgill Mine

Sunday, 20 June 2001.

Having collected Dave Groves and Allan Procter at Florence Mine, we then picked up Craig Norman at Cockermouth roundabout, and headed east towards Nenthead.

Arriving at Rampgill car-park, we reported in to the Heritage Centre shop, that five of us were entering Rainpgill and should be out by five. We learnt that the Trust intends to fit new gates to levels under their control, and that consultations were taking place with NAMHO member groups. I pointed out that we were not in NAMHO any longer, and she agreed that she would make sure we were contacted. The main reason being that NPHT intend to lock the gates, with keys being given only to recognised groups.

(This never happened. I don't think that we need solutions to non-existent problems anyway RF)

Having given up waiting for Chris Moore to join us, we got geared up and entered the mine, stopping off at Brewery Shaft to show them the shaft fittings, and explain the functions. Having also looked at the sluice from the Horse Level, we then moved inbye with me in the lead.

As I moved forward, I noticed little froth bubble patches flowing out, a sign of somebody in front of us, and sure enough, soon came across Chris sitting on some rubble in the level, waiting for us. He had entered when we were chatting with the lady in the shop!

Introductions over, we made our way to the junction, where we took the LH arm on Scaleburn Vein. The timbering in the short stoped sections, and the stone-arching were pointed out to show the two types of working and support were achieved, as well as the short drives and rises along it.

Finally we reached the spiral manway, and entered the High Level, where the first miner's graffiti was pointed out.

Explaining the principle of the left-hand rule, I then took them down the first level, which is fairly unimpressive apart from ending in a small chamber with a flooded sump in line with the level. Here, I sat across the entrance to the chamber and had each look over me at the sump, pointing out that, if care is not taken, the mud churned up in the level, could mask the sump under the water, and the unwary walk straight into it. I explained that in-line sumps were rare; the normal procedure being to site the chamber to one side of the level, and often with a low wall to prevent water from the level entering the sump during its sinking.

Returning to the High Level, I took them along the next LH level, which meanders off down Scaleburn Cross Vein until, after a set of fairly tight crawls, it reaches the funnel shaped sump that descends via a sub-level to Brownley Hill Mine.

Here, although it might have been possible to skirt the funnel, I felt it best not to do so, as, to my knowledge the main level went nowhere, and the lip of the funnel was a lot more eroded than it had been on my last visit. We duly made our way back along the level, and began checking the left-hand levels as we went.

The first one reached, had a dry sump on the RH side, and ended with a flooded sump, also to the left. I did notice that the graffiti at the top of the sump actually said "M.ION" and not "MI" and "ON", as originally thought. Ion being a Westmorland surname.

The next level on the left had originally had "stink-damp" or hydrogen sulphide in it, and had been barred with timbers across it. After explaining the associated problems of the anaesthetising of the sense of smell, the remaining timbers were removed and the level entered, but no smell was detected. The sump was shown, and the rest of the level checked up to the forehead with Craig, before returning to the others, who had moved off to the High Level for lunch.

Having eaten, Craig and Allan joined me to view the 1775 graffiti, and on to the sump with the large graffiti covered back wall, and stope opposite. Further inbye, we encountered a climbing rise, which I could not recall from last time, before reaching the 1830 graffiti near the timbers on the LH side of the level.

Here, I went on about thirty yards to a small chamber in the level, where a low level went off the right, but realising the others had not followed, I returned to them. What was funny, was that they had found another set of initials and an 1830, above and inbye of the other set. They were the same initials, possibly a family team, as they were all the same second initial, but were better cut than the other ones.

Returning to the others, we persuaded Dave to come back and look at the 1775 date, for a photo session, before moving outbye back onto the Horse Level, and another photo shoot beside the secondary iron mineralization cascade.

Back at the junction, we turned left along High Fairhill Cross Vein to the Whisky Bottle Corner, where a whole collection of whisky bottles are now on show, before moving off down Rampgill Vein.

Part way along here, lights appeared in front of us, and a party of four came past, three in yellow cave rescue suits, and carrying long rakes. A gruff "Hello," was all we got, in what was thought to be north-east accents. The only time we have previously had such a subdued response, was when coming across NORPEX diggers, and again as they were leaving the mine. For this reason, and because of the rakes, and where they were coming from, we concluded that these too were NORPEX.

Reaching Rampgill Vein Engine Shaft, the area was viewed, before moving off up to the TJunction on Rampgill Cross Vein, and the famous Steel Door installed by NORPEX.

Some time was spent here, discussing the door and its operation, before I took the RH level up into the stopes with Craig in tow, to show him the sump in the side level at the top. When there, we noticed that the rim of the sump was now cut with rope grooves, and that the RH wall had two 8mm anchors in it, so somebody had been down in the last eighteen months. I wonder what they found?

Just outbye of this area, at the foot of the pack-wall climb, there was a collection of galena, recently extracted from the vein above, still gleaming in the rubble on the floor.

We returned to the others, who had stopped at the understope about half way up, and we all made our way out, taking the next LH level to continue our exploration.

This led through two vein-workings or "strings" and on into a whole series of junctions, with levels on the Sun Vein and 2 d

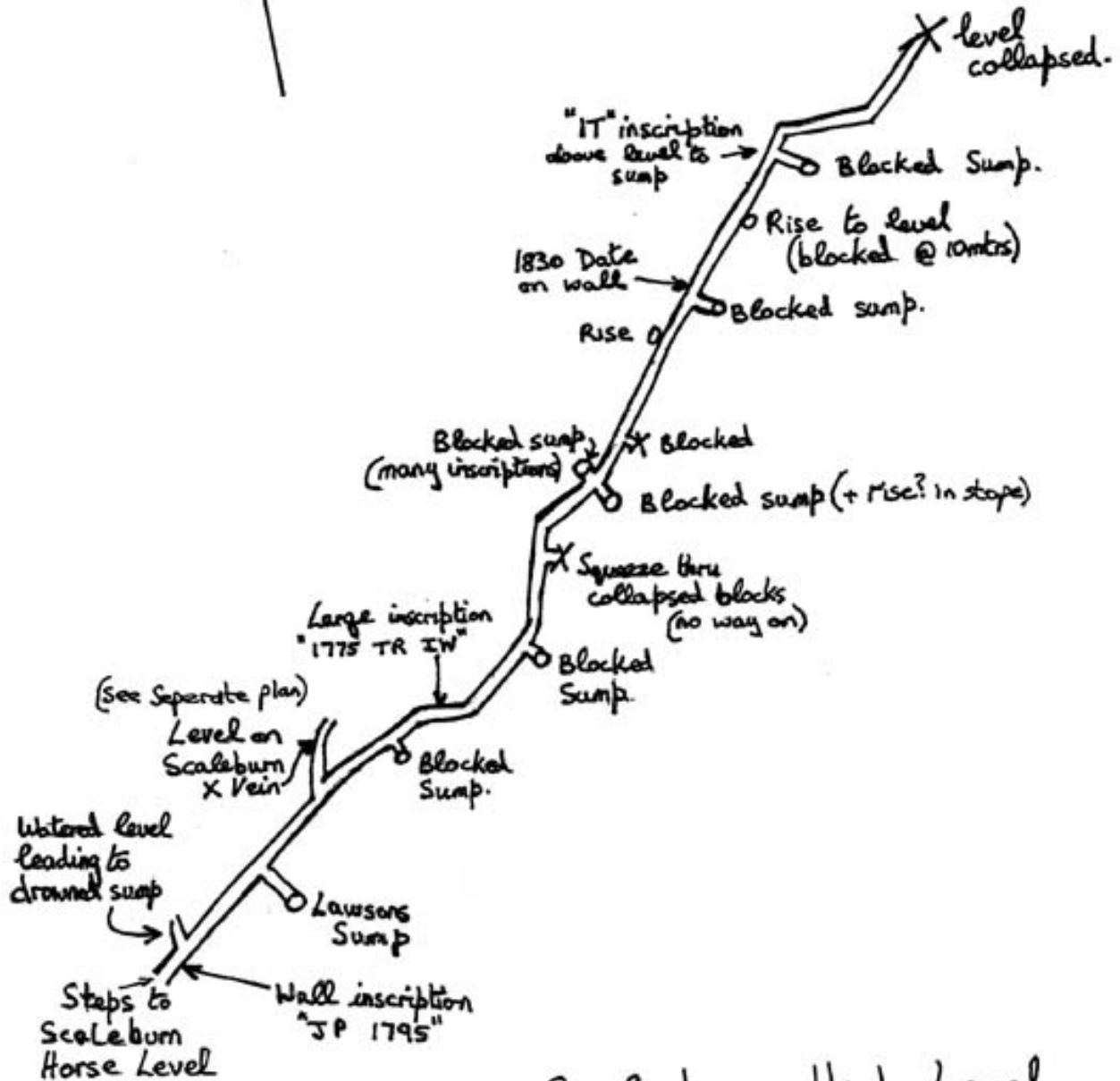
Sun Vein, some with manways and hoppers from stopes above.

There looked to be plenty there to fill another trip, and as we were starting to loose our focus a little, I thought it more sensible to leave this area until the next time.

We had also intended to brave the waist-deep water in Hangingshaw's Level, but for the same reasons, didn't, and duly made our way out to day.

(Note - a subsequent conversation with Bill Griffin, revealed that he had been through the Sun Vein system of junctions, past the Crosscut, and he believes to where it meets Rampgill Vein. Here he found fireworks, which he believes may have been used by the diggers to try and determine if their dig had reached the other side of the now-blocked level.)

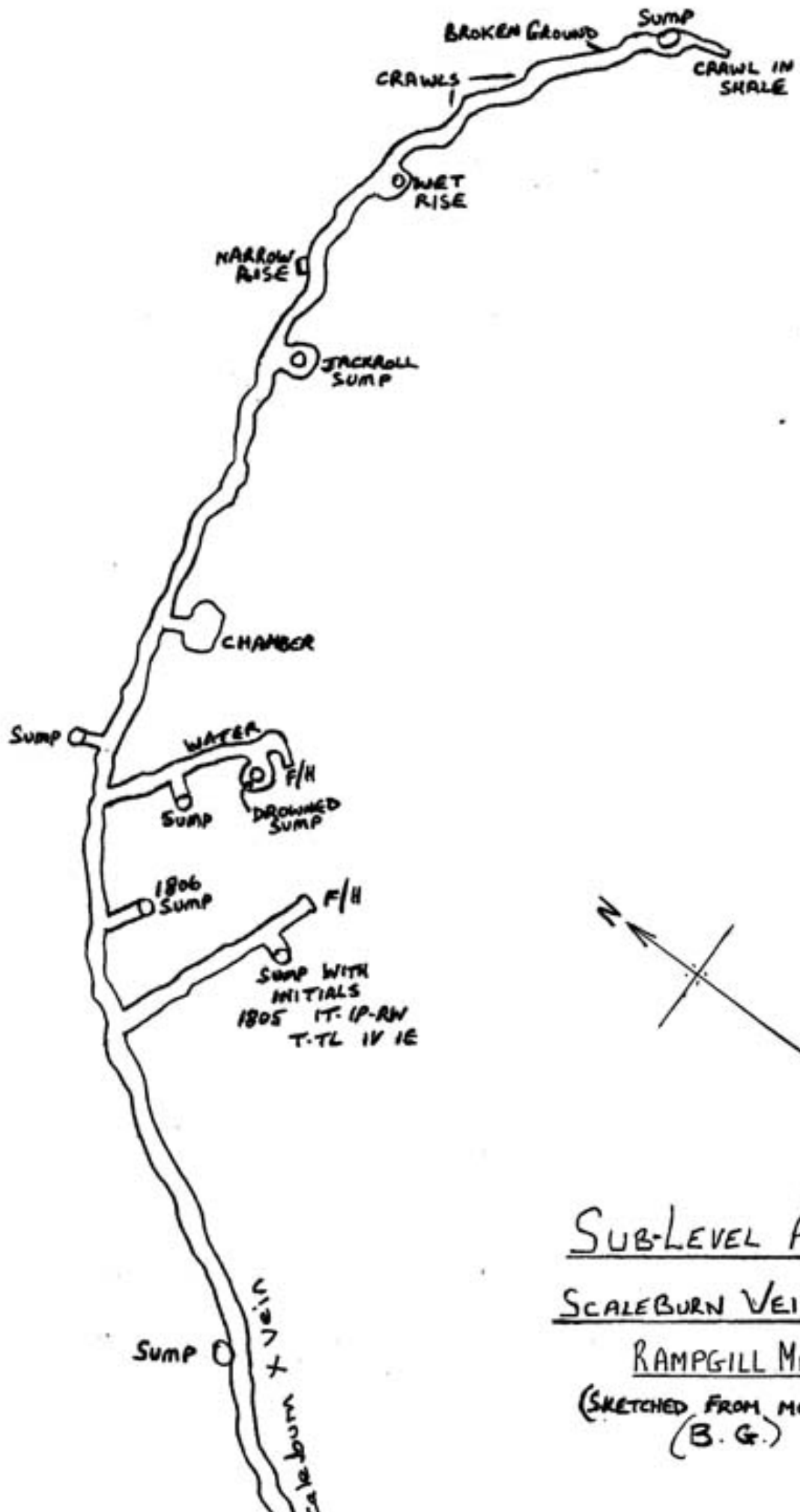
DKB



Scaleburn High Level

(B.G.)

SCALE - 1cm = 1.5mtrs approx.



SUB-LEVEL ABOVE
SCALEBURN VEIN H.L.
RAMPGILL MINE.
 (SKETCHED FROM MEMORY)
 (B. G.)