

Kentmere Quarries – March 2008-03-30

I had previously visited some of the lower quarries at in Kentmere, namely those of Steelrigg and Jumb in September 2007 – though this trip was merely introductory, and was mainly undertaken as a chance for me to get a general feel of the place. However, having gained a little more knowledge since my last visit, I felt that it was about time I returned to these isolated and largely forgotten about slate workings.

A small description

Like many of Cumbria's slate workings, the workings at Kentmere and on the nearby shoulders of Ill Bell and Kentmere Pike work a band of green volcanic slate, more difficult to split than the more commonly referred to mud stone slates, but of a sustainable quality and of immense hardness. The slate has been worked in three ways:

Open quarrying: this has been undertaken at Jumb, Steel Rigg, Cauldron and Rainsbarrow Cove quarries.

Cave working: This is a rather old method, probably at some stage undertaken at most of the workings – however more recent open quarrying and the occasional collapse appears to have obliterated all but one of these on Rainsbarrow Crag.

Close-head working: This method was undertaken at Jumb and Steel Rigg quarries, possibly also at Tongue Scar Quarry, though the debris on the quarry-floor which is presumably as a result of a collapse could have been from either an underground close-head or an ancient cave working.

Our route:



After driving up from the village of Kentmere, walking along a badly surfaced footpath, crossing a bridge thinking that it would quicken things, only to end up in a swamp like field; we eventually reached the bottom of the tip from the large cave working on Rainsbarrow crag, which looked very inviting when viewed from the opposite side of the valley.

After the usual problems of climbing over walls and fences we reached the bottom of a large grassy sledging track – which we followed at an excessive gradient for some distance. After a while the track seemed to disappear beneath the quarry's tip, thus we had to make our own way up to the main bank of the quarry. After a stupidly steep final bit we reached the bank, where the maintained invite from the working loomed before us.

So – after having a short drink we entered; climbing over some dangerously large boulders that had fallen since the mine's closure. Once inside, we traced the workings down to a large open area, presumably the working face abandoned at closure. From here a short climb of perhaps 15 ft brought me to a 2nd floor from where my dad Allan stood. I could then look out of the larger of the cave entrances, from which Allan had entered – gazing upon the open barrens of Kentmere Pike, on which I noticed where two more quarries evidently excavated into a steep ravine, a typical method of this area. I bit back a note to visit these at some point, and through the zoom of a Fiji finepix F650 I could even see a waterfall going through the quarry!



We soon left this small but interesting cave working, to continue our transversing around Rainsbarrow crag to where we would meet another quarry. I haven't as of yet identified this small working, but it is but a small quarry, probably not worth the steep ascent from the valley floor, which has in situation several tracks, possibly sledging tracks, a few building remains and a quarry, or perhaps it might be a chamber of some kind which has collapsed??

Anyhow... we continued our ascent from here up to another quarry in a most isolated position in Rainsbarrow Cove. This quarry looked completely open, though there's always a possibility that excavations could reveal a level or collapsed cave working that isn't currently known about. The quarries themselves were shallow, one of which was filled with rubbish implying that it may have once been a small cave working that collapsed due to its extremely

close proximity to the surface. Perhaps the most interesting relics were those of some barrack like buildings, some still with timbers laying across their doorways.

Having looked around the site for interesting plant life, we continued our ascent to an even higher quarry with no obvious track leading to it. This loomed several hundred feet above us, and was clearly a quarry of pretty old origins.

So – we ascended, pausing about ½ way up to take a look at what appeared to be a small quarry or perhaps cave working that had been filled in with rid from above over the years. We wouldn't have known it was there if it wasn't for the mainly buried building which sat beside it. Soon after this which reached what might have been a sledging track, not only because it looked quite basic, but also because no human would have been crazy enough to take a cart or similar up such a steep and trechorous slope. Unfortunately the prize was a little dissapointing, and consisted of a tiny quarry, again possibly once a cave working that sat within a small gully. The remains of two simple, shelter like building could also be seen, though maybe not enough to sleep in. Maybe if this quarry was working at the same time as the one we had just visited, the workers from this quarry would have slept down in the other quarry's barracks. Also the fact that there was no obvious tipping point was curious, and it appeared that the waste was randomly dumped over the edge, presumably using wheel barrows or the alike. The prize of this quarry for me was definatly the fantastic clear view across Kentmere reservoir, Kentmere Pike and Ill Bell.

As we made our descent down to the valley a little time was given to have a look for minerals in the opencut of the Rainsbarrow Crag cpper trial, which proved quite successfull in terms of colourfull copper oxides.

Our last stop for the day was Steel Rigg Quarry, where we visited the quarry's bottom adit that had obviously been blocked up somehow, so much so that it wasn't even possible to get into it without a tight squeeze into freezing cold water, so we thought that we'd leave it... Furthermore – we still had time for a small visit to the main quarry itself.

Obviously, judging by the shape of the tips, and the evidence of old tramway lines for tipping – the quarry was a very organised once, unlike most of the others that we'd visited today, however no equipment or buildings remained, in fact the most we found was a very old nail! However, on further inspection of the quarry itself, we discovered a deep pit at the eastern end, with a tunnel coming off it heading in an easterly direction about ½ way down. I couldn't work out whether the vertical and flat rockfaces on each side of the pit were the vertical bedding blane, or the vertical cleavage plain; anyhow – whatever it was it reminded me of the tops of some of the chambers found around Corris, where the bedding plane is truely vertical!

I descended towards the tunnel, which ended up just being a short level of about 10 yards long leading to a collapse – or more likely to an infill from the tips above. Having taken a photo, I returned to the entrance of the tunnel, looking down further into the pit to where I could see an opening. Visible slabs of rock not too far inside, indicated that this was an underground close-head, though I would obviously need rope assistance with me to get it (which I didn't have at the time). I later discovered that this opening was mentioned in a CATMHS newsletter, which spoke of the chamber as largely filled with rubbish; and whilst in there the explorers tried to gain entry to the bottom floor of the quarry (one with flooded adit), but due to the unstable ground in the chamber – this attempt was abandoned.

Nevertheless – a further look might uncover something new?

So we began the long trod back to the car.