Memoirs of the West Cumbria Mine Research Group  
Collated by Roy Fellows 2007  

Part 1: Brownley Hill 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. Some of what is here will not be to some peoples liking as there is a lot of references to mineral collecting, and a lot more controversial, the removal of artefacts. I do have to state that I do not find this to my own liking; however this was necessity to populate their museum at Florence. 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.

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Roy Fellows July 2007

SOME EXPLORATIONS IN BROWNLEY HILL MINE 1988-1992

By John Lawson

Introduction

We have felt for some time that members might be interested in some of the exploration that we carried out prior to joining the Group in 1990. Much of what is recorded here has not been reported elsewhere, and in this first article it helps to paint the background picture of Brownley Hill mine prior to the major explorations carried out by the Group in 1989.

Our first contact with WCMRG occurred in March 1989, when we were attempting to repair a collapse in the stone-arching of the Horse Level entrance. (We had been scouting and travelling a route to Jug Shaft via the North Middle Vein and the B.H. High Level since March 1988, and also discovered the stopes on Guddamgill Vein, so were loath to lose the entrance.) It was then that we met the infamous Dave Banks, who obligingly let us continue with our work without offering a hand!

We barrowed out large amounts of debris and cemented up the arching, returning the following week with Dave and John Sargent, to place blocks in the base of the fall, stabilising it up to the present day, although some work could be done to the inbye side of it. (The NMRS refunded us the cost of the cement later) We then took the two Sargents into the area we had first seen on the 27th November 1988.

27th November 1988

On this day, Robert and I passed the Engine Sump, ignored the right turning on Wellgill Cross Vein, and took the RH branch down the Guddamgill Burn Cross Vein (see Plan 1). The passageway rapidly encounters deepening water, the first blockage giving knee-deep water, and the second (in spite of several hours digging at it), waist deep water. This is the point where Wellgill Cross Vein meets the Guddamgill Burn Cross Vein. After this the water level fails so that at the junction of Guddamgill Vein with the GBX vein, the water is only ankle-deep. It doesn't last, and quickly after the first blockage on the LH passageway (Guddamgill Vein), the water level is back up to waist deep. (This Horse Level is blocked 120 metres from the junction -we have tried digging it in the past, but it appears to be a major job.)

We were going to examine the rises in the level (not shown on the usual Brownley Hill plan), but clearly shown on a photocopy of a tracing I had discovered in the Cumbria Record Office, Carlisle, as entering a Spelter working. (Plan 2) This plan also “fitted” exactly, another plan I had found in the CRO (Plan 1), so the examination of these rises seemed imperative.

We found three rises in the level; the first looked to be totally blocked, but the second was covered with rotten timber, which, when prodded with a steel bar, came down. We put the short ladder up it and Robert went on a brief recce. He shouted that inbye was a sump, beyond which a slope led on to a large stope. Outby the sump was crossed by planks which led to another sump. I replaced him in the stope and crossed the planks to the sump, (presumably the first rise from the level) which I chimneayed across, finding that it had run in. Returning inbye, I looked at the sump and slope beyond, and realised that this was the third rise, and closest to the fall in the Horse Level. I felt that we could scale this slope into the stope, we would be able to by-pass the fall and re-enter the Horse Level, and be on our way to Guddamgill Flats!!
The slope and stope were not accessible from where we were, so the obvious thing was to break through the concrete-blocked arching which sealed this rise from the Horse Level.

As we were 3/4 of a mile from the portal we would need help in moving our long ladder and tackle to this point before we tried an entry.

Having left the mine elated with what we had found, I later rang Jez Cooper of Nenthead (who then worked in Blagill Colliery) for a good companion to join us.

**Sunday 4th December 1988**

The three of us took two sections of our 34ft ladder as far as the rise, where I tested the security of the blocks. They were fairly secure, so Robert and Jez went off to find a rail to prod them with, while I tried another block, and after a little wriggling got it to fall out. The next one to it had to be pried out with the metre steel chisel, and each block removed, deposited debris into the level. When the others returned we examined the hole created, and erected one ladder into the hole and saw the slope found the previous week.

Jez was amazed at all this, because he thought we had found it by sheer good fortune. The slope looked very loose, but we managed to climb it and erected the ladder, which I climbed while the others steadied the ladder. The top was difficult as the ladder was resting on debris which peeled off at an alarming rate. We were in a large stope, one of the biggest in Alston Moor. It wasn't so much the height, but the great width of the Vein here, which contributes to the sense of enormity. The others quickly joined me.

Ahead was a stack of wood, just before what appeared to be the remains of the top of a rise, possibly in line with the fall below in the Horse Level. There appeared to be no easy way on, so Jez used a ledge on the LH side to pass the sump. I threw debris and wood into the hole to lift the floor a little, and got Jez to stick a rail into the side, before we descended and proceeded inbye.

**Horse Level.** There appeared to be no easy way on, so Jez used a ledge on the LH side to pass the sump. I threw debris and wood into the hole to lift the floor a little, and got Jez to stick a rail into the side, before we descended and proceeded inbye.

The next obstacle to progress was another sump, which at one time had been a hopper/manway, but a rather precarious stone wall was all that was left. Jez said he could cross it, but we were not so sure, so we went back for the ladders, using one to span to the wall, and the other from the wall to the far side, which I was elected to traverse first.

After crossing the "chasm" we climbed a slope of deads, on the RH side of which was a sublevel, blocked after 8ft. Nearby we found the top of a trap-door. At the top of the slope was a wall of deads we called "Hadrian’s Wall", with at the RH side a sump containing a ladder going down, and a rise above, from which water fell. Further inbye a sump a stone-arched level went back into the sump previously described and was full of clog-prints.

Up until now there were very few rails in the stope, but they became more common, and further inbye we came across a sump spanned by rails that we thought would lead to Guddamgill Horse Level, later christened “Suicide Sump”. Further inbye the stope became even wider, and another stone-arched level was found in the RH side. This had a wooden ladder at its entrance and ran 25 metres to a complete blockage caused by an enormous boulder having come through the roof. The end of the stope was a large slope of deads, with a high ledge in the RH wall, which we found went nowhere. We removed the ladder for use as one half of a bridge at the chasm, the other half being our ladder, which was a help in getting up from the waist-deep water in the Horse Level.

We left the mine extremely pleased with our discovery, entering the largest stope on Alston Moor (to date), and assuming that one of the sumps would lead back to the Guddamgill Horse Level and on through the hill to Allendale.

**Sunday, 8th January 1989**

Following our finds of December last, it seemed to me we should improve our access to it, by installing an iron ladder which we could leave in situ. From the previous summer in Weardale, we knew of two iron ladders in an abandoned mine, which we could transfer, and these were retrieved in mid-December and renovated at home.

I spent a fair part of Christmas de-rusting and painting the ladders, (while many of you were boozing and forgetting about mines) before making sure the ladders would fit together. The ladders were very heavy and I devised a bungee strap as a sort of independent suspension for carrying them, or at least that was the theory!

Robert and I donned full caving gear and carried them round the streets one night, (it was like a George Formby film) and although heavy they seemed manageable.

So, on the Sunday we carried the ladders into the mine, of one of the straps breaking on the way in, until we reached the rise. We stabilised the slope with the blocks removed, and old barrow way boards were used as steps, until we had a base for the ladder.

With great difficulty we fitted one ladder onto the top of the other by Jez climbing up the first ladder and using a rope to lift the second into place. (Just brilliant!)

AS the top was loose, we placed an iron hoop into the floor, and tied the ladder to it, together with pieces of steel banged into the pack to steady ft. Finally we made a cover for the hole in the arching from the timber, and left the mine.

**Sunday, 22nd January 1980**

The aim of this trip was to descend the sumps in the stope, and for this I wore a full wet suit.

We entered as normal, carrying one section of our long ladder, using ft to cross the chasm, and began to look at the first sump. We accessed this from the outbye side by removing the deads preventing access, and used a rail from the Horse Level to descend 20ft to a pile of decaying filth which had fallen from the rise above. A Nenthead ladder was in the shaft but collapsed on touch. At the bottom of the ocherous debris, a blocked cross-cut ran at right angles to the vein, presumably once connecting the shaft to the Horse Level.
As water dripped constantly from the rise, I was pleased to have worn the wet-suit, although I emerged like something from the black lagoon.

We moved to the next sump which was flanked by a pile of unstable deads containing rotten timber, some of which fell down the shaft during attempts to stabilise it.

We left the mine, having decided that a cover would be necessary to protect anyone descending the sump.

**Sunday, 12th February 1989**

The same three entered the mine, carrying the ladder, but on reaching the chasm we realised we had forgotten the saw, and Jez volunteered to return to the Land-Rover for it. Robert and I crossed the chasm and were looking at how to cover the shaft, when Jez returned.

We pulled out rails from the floor and drove them into the pack, and cut short sections from them to span the original ones to form a cover, using V. M. boards to cover them on the outbye side of the shaft.

During rebuilding of the deads, due to the fact that the shaft was sunk through deads and the deads suspended above it, the whole lot started to move, and I felt myself going with them! Luckily Robert grabbed my belt and held me while the debris deposited itself down the shaft. Hence the name "suicide sump".

Once sure that the top was safe, we fitted a 30ft electron and I descended the shaft, which was calcited in places from water failing, to find a large pile of debris at the bottom, which was soft and grungy. Outbye, the arching was clearly visible below the water, but on the inbye side looked a little more promising, so Jez joined me as back-up. I plunged into the water up to the chest into the first section of about 50 yards which was not arched, but after this the air-gap below the roof was only two or three inches.

So investment of time, materials and effort in an attempt to reach Guddamgill Flats all thwarted by water! We vowed to return in drier conditions.

We did return with John and Dave Sargent, as mentioned in the introduction, mainly for photographic and familiarisation purposes, and later with PDMHS on Wednesday, 9th August, which will be the subject of a further report. Suffice to say, we returned to Suicide sump", which I descended with Dave Warriner, the water level was the same, but this time we crawled along the space above the arching for about 50 yards until the hole became too small, and water was coming up through the arching. On this occasion we used two electrons belayed from the stope as climbing the debris slope at the sump foot was difficult.
Plan 3

Composite plan with earlier mine plan showing cross on B.H. Horse Level.

Plan 1

Thistleher Aug 1851

Low level

[Diagram showing various entities and directions]
Part 2: Introduction.

This article details some of the Brownley, Hill explorations carried out by us during the period 1988 - 1992.

My personal interest in mines and mining history began in 1960, when I joined PDMHS. A few years after this, I met Michael Smith and Michael Luff, who helped to show me how mine exploration was carried out at that time. After moving to Scotland in 1974 I kept in touch with them and other PDMHS members by joining them in an annual August meeting in Nenthead, but frequently at other times also.

Early in 1988, Mike Luff rang me to tell me that he knew how to access Brownley Hill High Level, which led to Jug Vein, and that he would show us the way. Since Jug Vein was the source of Alstonite, I couldn't wait to get started! (At this stage I firmly believed that access via the Horse Level to Jug Vein was completely blocked- little did I know!)
13.03.88

Mike Luff and John Stott were staying at Cherry Tree Cottage, so we drove over to see them, had a bit of a crack, and then met them just below the Welgill Shaft. John had apparently been told to the way to the High Level during one of his drinking spells, and Paul Foster (commonly known as Torchy), had drawn him a plan of how to get there, on the back of a beer-mat. (The usual place for a mine-plan!). We set off, up the Horse Level, past the Gin Foot shaft, and into Welgill Cross Vein. The way then was to take the first turning on the right past the Jane Foot Flats; this is Brownley Hill Middle Vein.

We ascended and soon came across a fairly deep hole in the floor, (where we had turned back in our exploration of 1979), where someone had now spiked the sump, and it was crossed fairly easily. A little further on, we came to a hole in the floor with rails going across it. The rail looked weak, water dripped from everywhere, so we roped up, and crossed it.

The next two hours were spent looking for the elusive rise to the High Level. We knew that an SRT rope hung in it, but try as we might; the beer-mat plan seemed to bear no relationship to what we saw! (Perhaps it was too drunk!) Eventually, when we were just about to call it a day, Mike Luff spotted the elusive rope. (In view of the similar problems WCMRG members had a year later (2), we hadn't done too badly.) At that time none of our group could use SRT gear, so the plan was to come back with a large party in August, to climb the rise using a scaffolding pole.

07.08.88

The McPherson's maypole is probably the most substantial ever made! It consequently weighs a ton, even though it is made from Aluminium. However it has an advantage, it doesn't bend too much, and a fact I was glad of, since they volunteered me to be first one up the pole! I ascended, and on reaching the top re-rigged the rise for electron ascent. Once the party were up, we were surprised to find the High Level was knee-deep in water! We had studied the V.M. Brownley Hill plan (3) before visiting the mine, and knew had to turn right at the top, and take the second turning on the left.

(A top of the rise is the date '1799 Mar,' which probably reflects the Brownley Hill Co trying the Great Limestone on the Moss Cross Vein. At this stage the Horse Level random was not driven under here (4), and so presumably the workings would be tried by the method condemned by that author, John Hilton (loc cit p123) where he states "a practice which prevails very much to the detriment of the Lessees is that of pumping water instead of driving up levels, and in no one instance is this more top be seen that at Brownley hill and Broomsberry."

Later in his report (op cit 110) he implores them to begin the driving up of the Brownley Hill Horse Level along Moss Cross Vein to cut the Brownley Hill Vein—"It's a thing I have long recommended."

We then passed the first sump on the right going outbye, followed by a second, containing a wheel which looked like that from a wheelbarrow. Another sump followed, just after a roof fall, which looked very wet and contained an old ladder.

We continued on, passing the branch to Brownley Hill Vein, and on to the Jug Vein X-Cut, we didn't know the date of driving this level but it was certainly driven by 1834, and may have been driven by 1778 since Hilton refers to Jugg Vein, which, although being "good in the Plate, was left for want of air". (6) (This level in fact begins as a worked vein, before veering off as a cross-cut - Ed).

We ascended and soon came across a fairly deep hole in the floor, (where we had turned back in our exploration of 1979), where someone had now spiked the sump, and it was crossed fairly easily. A little further on, we came to a hole in the floor with rails going across it. The rail looked weak, water dripped from everywhere, so we roped up, and crossed it.

We retraced our steps and vowed to return, but as far as I am aware the PDMHS party never did!

09-08-89

Robert and I took a group of PDMHS members into the large stope on Gudamgill Moss Vein (1). Amongst those present on this trip were David Warriner, Mike Luff, Norman Birkett, John McNeil, John McPherson, and John Stutt.

After leaving the stope we turned left following the Moss Cross Vein, going towards Rampgill. Immediately, Mike Luff recognised that this area had changed somewhat from when he was last there. The air was better, and obviously circulating, and some group had clearly dug one of the falls on the Horse Level. In order to reduce the depth of water even more, we spent an hour or so moving rubble, before entering the partially flooded level.

The water level was never much less than waist deep for long periods of time, and whilst going through obviously stoped ground on the Moss Cross Vein, eventually (after 360yds) a cross-cut in limestone was reached; this led to Scaleburn Cross Vein, where an old ladder rose off to old workings. (The X-cut itself is about 100yds long) We continued on, after negotiating very clayey sections (silt washed down from above - Ed), until after another 370yds a T-junction was reached. Following the right-hand rule, we continued on the branch for about 180 yds until a blockage was reached. (The passageway continues west down here for at least a further 180yds until the 1831 forehead is reached. We now know that this X-cut was driven to look for a continuation of Smallcleugh X- Vein.)

Continuing back on the main level towards Rampgill, more deep water was encountered, such that it was easier for me to swim than to wade or walk through the water! Eventually after another 190yds, a final terminal blockage was reached. A dig was out of the question, the water was too deep, and to get timber etc. here would be a major job. Where exactly were we? We knew that Scaleburn or Rampgill Cross Vein level had been driven from 1808 onwards, eventually meeting the former (Scaleburn) vein in 1818. (7)

(7) (Little more was done on Rampgill X Vein until August 1991, see later in this account)

24-09-89 and 12-11-89

On these two days we spent time improving the route to Jug Vein, extra rails were placed in the sumps on BH Middle Vein, debris cleaned from various parts of the Horse Level to improve access, and also the rope in the High Level was re-belayed to a rail which we took up there from the Horse Level. The High Level itself was also cleared of debris close to the rise from BHMV, and also near the sump that contained...
the rotten ladder and the two sumps on Brownley Hill Sun Vein. After all this work we felt we could invite our friends, George, Norman, et al to accompany us to Jug Vein.

07-01.90 (and 15-10-89)

A large party of me, George and Kevin Farr, Norman Thompson, John Salmon, myself and Robert Lawson took ladders and 100ft of SRT rope along via the rise on BHM Vein into the High Level. We turned left at the foot of Grahams' Sump, through narrow workings on Jug Vein. Here I was able to force through the debris at the base of Peats Sump into fluorspar workings on Jug Vein. (I had previously tried this on 15th October, but this time I was successful) The exploration of this stretch of Jug has been reported previously by Noel. (8) Sufficient to say that on the 7th of January we reached the main BH Horse Level only to not recognise it! We retraced our steps having also visited the large flat that straddles Jug Vein. (Again reported in the journal) (9) Emerging late at night, and on the 15th October to be greeted by a Police Land Rover, who had been told by a man with a Birmingham accent to look out for us! (Roy Fellows)

(I waited until 9.0 p.m. for John and thought that he was in some trouble. R.F.)
At this time Roy felt he had visited everything in Brownley Hill, little did he know!
The next stage was to try and speed up our journey to Jug and find the elusive Alstonite! I thought about the problem, obviously clearing
debris out of the Horse Level would help but only marginally. What was required was another quicker route to the High Level, or so I thought!

25.03.90
Present on this trip were John and Robert Lawson, John Salmon, Kevin and George Farr. The idea behind the trip was to try and see if we
could find any easier way from BHMX Vein or BHMV to the High Level rather than travel the circuitous route via the Jane Foot flats.
We ascended to the High Level, hauled up a scaffolding pole for a relay, turned right, and descended the second sump on the right. The shaft
was well covered in flowstone and was very safe: it was 40ft deep. Going inbye, a very narrow level was not attempted, a small cross-cut at
the base of the shaft led to a forehead.

Going outbye, a hole was noticed in the floor which was crossed using a convenient iron hoop on the right band side as a band hold. Across
the other side of this sump, are typical BH stone steps going upwards for 10ft. At the top of this, the RH side widens out and is the foot of the
ladder shaft, noticed from the High Level: further along the passage a small X-cut goes off to the right, presumably workings on BH Sun
Vein: here an old clog was noticed.
Further outbye, the passage was partly blocked by a wall of debris: we lowered this, and clambered over. Just beyond this, stone steps went
down 8ft towards another sump.

I collected a rope from the surface and belayed it to a rail which was sent down from the High Level, (previously taken up there for this
purpose,) and went down the sump.
Now I am sure you have all had the feeling that as you go over the edge of a shaft-top, “will the top be stable or not?” You dread the
possibility of the latter. In this case, this is what happened, as I went over the top, debris began to move, and I quickly abseiled to the bottom!
I yelled up to Robert to drop as much debris down the shaft as possible, before I would re-ascent the shaft. He wondered why, but as he
pulled up the rope he soon realised the problem. Debris began to fall, and as he pushed on it, a large number of boulders came down the
shaft; luckily I was well out of the way.

Continuing on outbye , a large white chamber was entered, and then a narrow passage led down to a sump. I threw a boulder down,
and it splashed! Clearly it must go to the BH Horse Level.

We returned up to the High Level, and tackled Stemple Sump, so called because it was lined with stemples. As seen from the diagram
of the High Level this seems to be just short of BH Vein. We belayed to a scaffolding pole left at the entrance to the sump, went down the
stemple shaft about 25ft deep and along a cross-cut to yet another sump. This was abseiled down about 40-50ft into a large stope
dropping with water, containing a bait bench, tools, such as a shovel, pick and brush, and close-by, a wooden wheel-barrow. I thought we
had found something new! I told Roy, who descended a further sump in the floor, some time later and you have guessed it. This is
the stope on Brownley Hill Vein, usually accessed from the Horse Level.

22.07.90
Another trip by the same team, John and Robert Lawson, George and Kevin Farm John Salmon and Norman Thompson, with the aim of
seeing if we could access the Horse Level from the High Level, down the sump on Guddamgill Moss X Vein, discovered on 23.03.90.
I placed a scaffold pole at the end of the level, and abseiled down to the Horse Level. It was extremely wet! Water seemed to
becoming from above the present entrance to the sump and probably represents a sump in the High Level, now blocked, which is
letting out the water from this level back to the Horse Level. The shaft abseiled was about 35ft deep, and I emerged through a hopper
way about 40yd from the junction of GMX Vein and the Broomsberry Horse Level Head.
We had discovered a potentially easier way to Jug Vein, but could it be used? In fact WCMRG had already discovered the
now-recognised route to Jug by digging through a ventilation dam in October 1989 (9).

08-08-91
Explorations in Scaleburn X Vein

A team including John and Robert Lawson, Mike Luff, John McNeil, J McPherson, Dave and John Sargent, and several others of the
McPherson family, set off with the aim of seeing how our explorations in Scaleburn X Vein from the BH Horse Level related to the
Vein in Rampgill Horse Level.
Mike and Dave had visited the area previously, and reported that they had discovered a sump, crossed by a ladder, which looked as if
it might be the connection to BH Horse Level. To access this sump, you go into Rampgill Horse Level, take the LH branch (Scaleburn Vein), and proceed as far as the steps, which lead up to a plate level, which originally went to the Scaleburn Vein forehead. At the top of
these steps, you take the 2nd junction on the left, over a few falls until you reach a ladder laid across a sump. To our surprise, to
this ladder was attached an SRT rope. We threw over a 30ft electron ladder, and I went down to a small chamber at the bottom. A

Later that evening in the Crown, we met members of Wirksworth Mines Research Group, who told us they had left the rope in the
sump. They also told us that they had descended the sump (80ft deep), and came out of the BH entrance. They said the shaft was very
dangerous, being completely in debris, and on no account would they re-climb the shaft because of the danger!
I told them that now they had discovered the missing connection, the Capelcleugh to Hags through-trip was now a possibility.
Later that year I discussed this possibility with Dave Banks, who passed the information to Steve and Brian in Weardale, who, after
scouting the different connections, made the through-trip on Sunday, 10th of November 1991.

John Lawson.

References:-
1) WCMRC Review 13 p5-8
2) WCMRG Review 6 p 3,4,8 and 9.
The plan is Shorts Sump. Material, which had blocked the adjacent level into Jug vein. Another hole beyond this fall however allowed us to enter the blocked into the foot of Roughside Day-shaft. This was about 5ft by 3ft and far as the eye could see, and the foot of it was filled with fallen arduous journey over fallen roof all the way until a blocked level was reached in the W side, and just past this a hole on the left led this got deeper outbye and we left.

The fork towards Jug Vein skirted a series of sumps to the left, some watered, and below a small day shaft with horrible red formations formed by falling water, before the level kinked to the right and ran as apparently a crosscut to the Jug Vein. This is a long 45deg slope led up to a stope on Middle North Vein which ran cast towards GBX vein. This after a little clambering up and down walls en route came to a T-junction with a large sump to the LH side with two rails across it. This, we realised was the top of the rise we had attempted from below on our last trip. The junction area was stoped both north and south, and about 10ft above this level a small level went in about 10yds to a 10ft rice into a stope. The RH or southern arm went about 100 yds to a forehead and was arched for a short way, and then stepped up about 5ft for the rest. A wall above the stone arching was scaled but led nowhere.

The High Level, once reached, was found to be knee-deep in water, and partly arched with two sumps to the R.H. then a rise to the L.H. followed by a short level to the right leading it to a blocked shaft down. Just past this the level met the main High Level, a low level running inbye to our left, and outbye to our right. We went right here, and soon met another level running left towards the Jug vein, which we had been told was where the PDMS finds were. We checked the High Level outbye over a large fall, into water but this got deeper outbye and we left.

Having failed to cross the sump and having no gear to descend it, we returned to the crosscut. Derek in the meantime, had scouted the region of the Middle Vein flats, before progressing our way to the 30 ft internal shaft. This is situated in the vicinity of the intersection of the Brownley Hill North Middle Vein and Guddamgill Burn Cross Vein. The first man prusicked up the Bluewater SRT rope installed curtsy of our friends from Nottingham, and ladders were rigged by which the rest of the party accessed the High Level.
Once we had entered the High Level, we proceeded south towards the original High Level Mouth, turning left after 120 yds into what was thought to be the Sun/Jug Vein connecting crosscut. It wasn't until some way in to this crosscut that GRC noticed that we were heading in a northerly rather than the expected easterly direction, also the day shaft near the beginning of the crosscut encountered on the previous visit, had still not been passed. Following a brief discussion we retraced our 'knee step' south (with some cursing, it had been an extremely low passage), returning to the original level.

Once back on the main level, we continued south towards the original Brownley Hill High Level Mouth for a further 35 yds before turning left into the 572 yd crosscut to Jug Vein. The crosscut proceeds east for 143 yds before veering to the southwest for a further 429 yds; the first day shaft being passed after 73 yds. Arriving at the base of the second day shaft one hour and twenty minutes after entering the mine we were relieved to find the scaffolding poles awaiting us at the bottom of the shaft. A few yards on and we arrived at the first sump, located at the intersection of the crosscut with Jug Vein. The sump which appeared to be about 20 feet deep was rigged using a 30 foot electron belayed to a 20 foot steps thus necessitating an additional 30 foot of ladders to be attached. The last 15 feet of the pitch was rather unpleasant due to a combination of falling water and the ladders being 5 feet too short to reach the base of the sump.

A word of warning regarding this dog-leged sump, care must be taken not to dislodge any of the loose material on the edges of the horizontal portions since one boulder left a painful calling card with one of the party.

Having descended to the base of the Great Limestone we headed south along a partially stope railed level on the Jug Vein. Items of interest found in this level included safety fuses, a stem from a clay pipe, a clog, chisels and a small quantity of decomposed explosives. The only mineralization encountered here was sphalerite and calcite. This drift was followed via a slight dog-leg for 200 yds before terminating in a forehead.

Retracing our footsteps we headed north where at 80 yds from the base of the sump the railed level terminated abruptly; the floor dropping approximately 20 feet. The original level could be seen continuing 25 feet beyond. Having descended, we passed Graham's Sump before entering and exploring stopes on the original drift for approximately 50 yds before returning to Graham's Sump. The mineralization encountered in these stopes was mainly fluorite and ankerite (Ca(Fe,Mg,Mn)(C03)2). An intact pair of clogs was seen placed next to Graham's Sump.

A drift was then followed for 50 yds which left the vein in a north easterly direction. Two rises off the drift were climbed, but only briefly explored; however, this did not prevent two clay pipes from being found together with a clog at the foot of an internal shaft in one of the rises. The two pipes were removed for future display. Lack of time prohibited further exploration but certainly the area has a great deal of scope for further exploration in the future.

On ascending back up to the crosscut the opportunity was taken to have a quick look down the second sump which was reached by passing under the day shaft in a north easterly direction. Using the scaffolding poles for belaying one of the team descended and on one of the rises. The two pipes were retrieved without difficulty by Noel "Two-Lamps" Wood.

Brownley Hill-Guddamgill stopes 28th August 1989

Brownley Hill-Guddamgill stopes

Another three man team to return to the Guddamgill stopes to try and get some open-shutter photos of the stopes. Entering in the normal way, we turned south along GBX as far as Guddamgill Vein and climbed through the roof of the concrete arching up the LH fork, and up the ladder into the stopes. As previously reported there are two shafts that ascend into the roof of the stope. The first pours a great deal of water, the second is practically dry, and both about 25ft above the floor, making them out of reach. Before these shafts are reached, there is a huge shaft down, and this takes water running out of the first shaft up.

Beneath the shafts the store is fairly dry and open out at the end, where we began the photography. Noel descended the small shaft below come railway, found on our last trip here, which was about 30ft down to a slope of another 20ft to a flooded level at waist depth. This could be attempted with a bigger team in the future.

Returning back the way we came, we took more photos, and entered a stone-arched level which ran into the drop-shaft. Another level opposite was clear, and after a lot of agonising DKB made the precarious traverse on a rope to it, a bit of a waste of time really, because it went under the rubble for a while and emerged in a hole in the floor of the stopes further inbye!

On our way back up the GBX, we found the level east that we had been unable to find on our previous exploration. This is where the water becomes more than welly depth, next to a pile of rubble in the horse level. We entered this new level and found a rise at the end, with a shaft up from this and a stope running across it.
To the left was a steep incline and to the right the stope ran a few yards to a forehead. We clambered up a small face and onto the incline, which was a little awkward to climb due to soft black shale. The incline levelled out about 30ft higher and a level went back above us towards the top of the shaft, but couldn't be reached. The other way, another incline began after 10yds, but we were turned back by a strong smell of methane gas, which we had had a faint whiff of further down the first incline. The mine plan says this is in the coal sills.

Brownley Hill 15th October 1989

Another trip to BH, with another new member, Mike Banks (or Tim, as others him) plus DKB, Chris, Del, & Col, on what was to turn out to be the most significant trip of the year!

On approaching the mine, we saw a group of seven or eight people entering in front of us. DKB rushed on to try and have a crack with them, and actually caught up with the last man, but after acknowledging the How Do he went on. Very unusual thing, because one so rarely meets others underground that when it does happen everybody usually stops to exchange information, but not this lot! Maybe they had a new find they wanted kept secret, like the High Level access to Jug Vein, and as they went left along Welgill X, perhaps that may be true.

Our team went through to GEK and up to the junction with BH vein, where we checked the small stone-arched level below the stops where the tools were. This "rat-hole" as Del calls it, is shown on the map to connect to BR North vein, but in fact was a 10ft crawl into a bell-shaped working below the hopper from the stopes above.

Moving cast along BR vein we tried the first junction left, marked on the map but it went only 15yds. Continuing east past the two junctions previously reached, we checked off features shown on the map as we came to them, through thigh-deep water, stone-arching and roof-falls, eventually reaching a junction that the level altered its heading from. This was Brownley Hill Moss Cross Vein (BHMX), and here we stopped for lunch. The level shown running north on the map, was a stone-arched, partially back-filled entrance that Del tried and reported as open, and then IKB explored to the end.

This level had a watered sump to the left and then another beyond to the right, with a rise opposite. Further on, just before the end of the level, another rise was found to the left. Both rises are on the vein, the first rising vertical with a chimney in the top, the second was similar but had an incline running to the north in the vein which may be climable to the levels above, and was only 10ft up the rise.

The team pressed on eastwards along a level which became more difficult than even the bad section approaching BHMX, and consisting of badly pressure-bulged stone-arching, falls etc. but with sections of 7ft arching in between falls and sections of smaller and older arching. This lot then stopped, and we came into a series of sound levels with arching and intact roof. The level kinks slightly to the left here, but an arch in line with the original heading has been walled-up and water is running out from the RH wall.

On the map this is shown as a rise up to a higher level and the level continues curving round gradually to the right, past a level walled up with large slabs falling off the roof above the wall, so not attempted. This level, according to the map also led to a rise. Again moving on to the cast we came to a junction running south about 15ft to a rise, boarded over about 10ft up. Below it, in the water were two mine bogie chassis axles, which we removed and set up on the deads at the junction. A number of long rails were stacked up in the rise, and beyond them a large pile of black shale blocked what looked to be a level running south. If the map was correct, this should have been the entrance to the northern end of the Jug vein, so Del began to dig away at the pile and eventually gained access to a level beyond. He found a Y-Junction at 30yds and then returned. The junction tallied with our plan as being on the Jug vein, so having proved that, we moved cast again along the horse level. We passed a wide section with a lot rails stacked to one side and then on through a stone-arched section with blocked chutes and then a side cut to the left with a chair style explosives carrier lying in it.
A sloped crawl led up to a mall level in the floor of a large stope running parallel to the Horse level. This stope was roughly 50yds long by 50ft high and between 10 and 20ft wide. We found come sign of previous entry by mineral collectors who had left newspapers lying about, and some quartz and sphalerite remained. JKB climbed a slope at the eastern end, but turned back before reaching the top due to unstable material. On descending he noticed in the top of the stope above the others heads, large workings which he thought led off at levels in two directions, but weren’t accessible from the stope. The map shows these levels as being offshoots from the level above the Horse Level. The level was followed east again for only a short distance as it was flooded to within inches of the roof beyond a fall. An old level ran above this, but although JKB managed to reach it, it was a bit too precarious for his taste, although he said it was arched with deads against me wall, and beyond that deads had been wedged into the stope forming a roof, similar to sections found in the Kinniside mine. This may be worth pushing at some future date.

Returning back down the Horse Level, Mad-Mike and Del-boy discovered that a recess behind the stacked rails found earlier, was in fact a walled-up level well concealed with black shale coating. They removed the wall and Del and DKB went off to check it. It was assumed that this was High Cross Vein, from the mine plan. It ran due south, the first part over roof falls and under hanging slabs, with the odd short arched section and pack wall, a couple of chute/rises and a sump, then a crossroads. All this matched the plan. At the crossroads a large rise went up from the RH arm, and a sump down on the W side. Carrying on down the level, the level had more arching and short crosscuts to rises into large stopes on the left, and lower stopes on the right, with levels about 15-20ft up. Having been gone a lot longer than agreed with the others, the two returned to report their trip.

Back again down the Horse Level to the Jug vein junction and DKB, Mike and Chris checked the level beyond the blockage. At the Y-Junction the LH fork went for about 25yds to an understope running across the level ending a couple of yards beyond. The RH level went on, curving to the right where an arched level ran right to a sump. Here DKB found two clay pipes and a bit of clog leather. Further on, the rise shown on the plan was found on the right, and appeared to have been a chute /manway as a chute mouth is just past it although the partition timbers are now all gone. The rise was about 30ft high, 15ft long and 10ft wide, with a stone arched roof. The top level could be seen running inbye but apparently not outbye.

A second cut right to a sump was found further on, the level ending not far beyond. On the return trip, a lot of rock was kicked into the sump to build up a platform, which Mike then dropped down onto, finding that the sumps were connected by a flooded level, apparently parallel to the one we were on, but too deep for a safe check. When he tried to get out again, he couldn't get a decent handhold and a human chain was attempted, but grip couldn't be held long enough, so Chris was stripped of his sit harness, and with this Mike shot out of the hole like a cork out of a bottle, a very relieved man!

Pausing on the way back to collect DKB’s pipes, Chris then found two more on the edge of the sump. When the three joined the others, again after overstaying the agreed scouting time (naughty) the full team made its way back to GBX in 23min and then took the watered level along BR vein to Wellgill X and on out in a total of 50min.

Although we were the first into the top end of Jug vein, somebody else had been into High X vein from the other end, as far as the X-roads, as chalk writing was found on the wall here. (Not necessarily, could be from an abandonment survey party, see my Caplecleugh article. R.F.)

Brownley Hill mine 22nd October 1989

Having been well tempted on the previous trip, three members made a return visit for more. The Horse Level from GBX eastwards was checked off on the plan and Vickers rise was found to be blocked by timbers and rock. Just short of Moss X vein, a hole down the RH side of a long fall was found by Mike and when dug out revealed an arched level, which Del wriggled into. Once into the level, he was able to move more easily, but about 10yds on. it was completely blocked by a fall. Checking the map in relation to the heading, we now believe this to have been the southern end of Moss X vein.

Having lunched at the Moss X junction again, the walled up level at the point where water is running through the arching, was looked at but left as a bit risky as it appeared to be holding up the roof. At this point the level curves away from the one above it, and halfway

(These are actually portable lavatories; newspapers in the vicinity had an obvious purpose. R.F.)
along this stretch, a high wall had been built which, when scaled proved to be blocking off a X-cut to a rise (according to the plan) the line of the level being visible from the top of the wall, but the peeling roof discouraged entry.

Finally Jug vein was reached and an attempt was made by Del and Mike to try and break through the boarded-over rise by ramming it from below with a long piece of rail. (This being how Mike became Mad Mike!) A slightly suicidal activity which DKB observed from the Horse Level, he having given up trying to kill himself in rises (see the Capleclough trip). The boys managed to prove that yellow clay lay on the boards at one side, indicating possibly a false floor for a level above, but on trying the other side, and dislodging a couple of small boards, rubble fell down and the hole blocked with a boulder. Before it became blocked however, Mike thought that he saw more timbering a few feet above. This may be the actual level floor, and the space between may have been filled for some reason. Anyway, arms having weakened from rail swinging, it was decided to leave the boards to see if they would collapse under their load over a period of time now that a couple of the retaining stemples had been removed.

On to High X, and down to the X-roads, stopping at Thompsons Rise to climb up into the stope. DKB chimneyed up about 20ft and got into a level running south, but it ended after 20yds at a blockage. North of the rise a steeply sloping way seemed to lead on, but was not attempted.

Past the X-roads, Quarry Hazle Sump and Blacklock's Rise were confirmed, and three other sumps apparently not on the plan. A short cut to the left at Brown's Rise was found but not chimney or climbable, although a high stope was visible with levels running both ways about 18ft up. Also visible was a chimney built of deads and apparently suspended in the stope above the rise, how it was held up is unknown!

A little further on, Richardson's Rise was a hopper-type entrance like the Thompson's Rise, but was blocked. The next rise was on the right, and like Brown's was a cut to an un-scaleable rise, with a level each way at 20ft.

The team had now reached the limit of last weeks scouting mission, which it seemed according to the plan, was just short of a junction across to Jug Vein. The junction was there alright, but ran only to the vein at 10yds, and a 20ft dry sump, with what appeared to be a level at the bottom. Just short of this sump a stope and levels were easily accessible about 15ft above. The stope was entered and at point of entry had another level above becoming a stope further north. Hinds Rise was crossed, but a wall further on dropped about 10ft to a X-cut to Richardson's Rise, although at this time no attempt was made to cross it and into the eastern vein stopes.

The western vein was followed by straddling the drop to X-cut and followed to the forehead without finding anything of interest. On the return though, copies of the Financial Times were found in the stope, left by the Mineral collectors, known to have entered from the High Level.

Back down on the main level again, the team pushed further south past two blind headings left and right, to a large diameter shaft, estimated as 80ft high at least, and according to the plan this was a climbing way rise and stump, that connected with the High Level, Pushing on south the level turned to the left and ended in a blind rise of 25ft (Erwins Rise). A return to the X-roads was made, and the X-cut to Jug Vein taken. After a look up the shaft just down this fork, which again is large diameter and rises an estimated 40ft, but with a smaller diameter chimney in the top. The X-cut had a spiral chute to the left, blocked below, and then a wall of deads, before an open area at the junction with Jug Vein. Here, an understope to the right seemed to be a chute to a lower level, and another seemed to come down from a level above and to the north. Immediately on turning onto the Jug vein a chute-type opening led into a large shaft or rise, and the level continued but with many large roof-falls, and more shafts up into the vein on the right of the level.

After a great deal of exertion, a multiple junction was reached. To the right a level ran off with a watered sump on the left of it, and a man way up behind a wall on the right of it. Ahead were two levels one above the other, and behind us another level ran above the one we had entered by. To the left a level ran off to the east. According to the plan, this level should be the one that we had thought crossed from the High X, and also forked SSE to a rise. This level was pushed in an effort to prove where we were on the map, as the levels gave no indication of m which horizon they occur. Sure enough, the level forked SSE and ended in the now characteristic chute-type hole into a large rise. Entry was made to find two large rails had been put in to gain access up the series of large steps up to a level in a large stope above at about 20ft, up.

DKB shimmed up the rails and went off along the stope to investigate. It ran E-W and was about 40ft high by 20ft wide; with a step of 15ft up after 20yds. This had pieces of mineral samples littered about, and had obviously been visited by our friends. The level eventually met with the Jug Vein by stepping down 6ft to a large level running N-S. To the left after 10yds was a drop of about 80ft as the start of a deep and narrow stope running south, and to the right the large level continued north for a long way, the height about 20ft and from 10-20ft wide, a pack-wall on the right. This wall had an old water bottle and a couple of clay balls m it, so DKB upended the bottle and stuck it into a clay ball, to Identify the limit of exploration, and then returned to descend the rise.

Having run out of time again, the team made its way back out, exiting only one hour later but very tired!

Brownley Hill

29th October 1989

Chris Moore and Dave Banks returned for another go at Jug Vein, and stopped for a breather at GBX/BH junction. In the quiet they heard tapping. Not the dreaded Cornish "tappers", that miners used to leave presents for the spirits of long dead miners? No, some bugger in the BH stope noticing mineral samples!

Nipping down the level to the chute up to the stope where the tools are, they found a guy called Weston, whose brother David was up above together with this guy's son. His brother apparently is one of the loading lights in PDHMS and they had come up from Stoke looking in vain to try to kill himself in rises (and being in the Penmen). Much relieved, the boys pushed off along BH Horse level, where not far past Vickers rise, at a point where a number of large slabs had to be climbed over, a level was spotted running south. How on earth we had all passed it so many times without spotting it, nobody knows, because it was 4ft high and 6ft across at the entrance.

The level was followed to the forehead. but nothing found except a stope a little way from the end, which had a ledge which may be a level, about 15ft up, but due to horrible clay on the slope, it couldn't be reached without assistance of a rail or something. This eliminated another feature m the plan that we hadn't found,

Another find between Mikes level and Moss X, was a slope up between two lengths of stone arching, leading to a ledge/level about 20ft up, and further east a hopper mouth. In the stone arching only partially blocked which must descend from somewhere. On again to the Jug Vein, where an entry was made into the foot of the first shaft, here DKB climbed up 20ft to a stone arched level made from deads which ran south and had a side cut left into a man way up a small chimney. The sub-level went on for come way but reduced in size from 4*2 down to 3*18 and then blocked.
This was repeated in a number of other shafts moving south, but only two of them were connected together by the sub-levels without being blocked. Other small man ways connected up to higher workings originally, but many were blocked.

About 25yds short of the multiple junction a level ran west to a sump and then a rise, with a forehead just beyond. The rise was climbed by DKB standing on Chris’s shoulder (Human Maypole) and with some difficulty the clay slope was then negotiated into a level about 15ft above the other. Again this was a dead-arched sub-level. A little way on, a turn right, and then parallel, went into a man way down containing stemples. (This was later proved to be the one behind the wall on the RH fork of the Multiple X-roads).

The original sub-level went on and emerged into a small stope below a 25ft wall up to a higher level. To the left a side stope had a 20ft wall up to another level, and straight on the floor descended down a series of steps about 10ft and emerged as the level above the Horse level at the multiple X-roads.

Down on the Horse level horizon again the lads moved south past roppers and hoppers into a watered section running SW from the foot of an incline rise to a watered sump with a pair of clogs beside it. This had been described by Noel from his entry from the High level, and was proof of a through connection. About another 20yds on, the level ended in a 20ft step up to another level. This was chimneyed, and a rail was found jammed in as a delay across the level, presumably from the other team’s descent. This was Graham Sump, according to the mine plan.

This level was watered after a small fall, but not over welly depth, and had small side workings and holes in the roof up to higher workings, although one was the one the others had descended was not obvious. The level also had rails still fitted, and after a while the water receded and the rails were followed up a slight incline and round an S-bend. Again this was a feature that Noel had told of, so the boys pressed on past pipes lying on the floor to a part-demolished wall which was a bit of a mystery. They passed this and on to the forehead beyond, and were far panting by that time. Realising that the exertion so far had not been excessive they realised that they were getting a little wobbly and returned to the S-bend for better air. A near miss of asphyxiation due to oxygen deficiency which luckily was recognised in time by two experienced men, but could have caught less experienced people.

Reflection on it was realised what the wall and pipes were for, the natural ventilation in the mine via shaft and horse level acted as a siphon, sucking air out of the heading and requiring forced ventilation when working.

Returning back up the level past Graham’s sump to the wall and incline up towards Thompsons Sump, DKB scrambled up the slope over black shale duct to a 20ft chimney in a stope, at the top of which a level ran 15yds to a large diameter rise of 20 ft to another level, presumably the High Level, which couldn't be reached without some tackle.

Again retracing steps, a walled junction corner had chute openings in both sides, which when entered, revealed a large shaft/stope leading south. The junction which led west, beside it, had a sump to the left and a large rise to another vein at the end, this is assumed to be the Waltons Sump on the mine plan. A length of rail had been put in by others and with a little difficulty DKB scaled the 20ft to a dead-arched sub-level. The level ran about 25yds with a cut right into a rise walled with deads, and a rise about 15ft up a slightly overhanging south wall, not scaled, to what was apparently a level. A little way beyond this, another cut right led into a kiln shaped miners' dry or bait cabin, where two long clay pipes were found on a ledge near the floor, and three pairs of clogs against the opposite wall. The clogs differed from normal, one pair being the normal strap fastening, but the other two pairs were laced up like army boots. A quick rush-about revealed two clay pipe bowls, one of which was a decorated type, with a steam sailing ship on one side and a steam locomotive on the other.

Time having run out, the boys left the mine well satisfied with their work.

Brownley Hill
5th November 1989

A three man trip back to the came area, this time DKB being joined by Mike Banks (no relation) and our first female member, Pat Brown of Thornhill, on her first trip.

Pat was taken on a quick “tourist” trip up to the stope on BH vein to view the tools and wheelbarrow, before moving on to the Jug Vein. On High X, DKB stopped at Armstrong’s Rise to show Pat how pipes could often be found in stone-walling, and a little further on, waiting for the others to catch up, he leaned on a stone wall, and put his hand right on one! It just shows how you can pass these walls by and miss dust-covered artefacts quite easily. Bloody show-off.

A depression in the floor was rounded, the level then turning right to a large stope level down a 10ft pack-wall. This level ended as a large 15ft square fore head to the left of the wall, and ran right to join the main N-S level on the vein. This was followed south with a 60ft pack-wall to the left, to a junction, where DKB found the upturned water bottle he had left on a previous entry from the E-W stope level, now to the left. Ahead, the 80ft drop was looked at, the line of the level being now a deep undercove, and was realised to be the one reached by entering the chutes on the junction corner to Waltons Sump. Returning north, a number of workings to the eastern side were noted for future exploration, and a pick-head and wood saw blade were found in ‘a corner.

At the Waltons Sump rise, short rails from the level were fitted in as belays for easier access next time, and the party left for surface, reaching it in 1hr 25min, and darkness, it being 5.25pm. Another good trip

Coincidentally, considering our recent clay pipe finds underground DKB received a letter from a Dr David Higgins of Liverpool University, who had been passed to us by Harry Fancy, and was interested in details of our pipe display in the Gutterby mine cabinet at Whitehaven Museum, and any others we might have found. This was an answer to a prayer, as DKB had been researching the bowl design of the ship and locomotive, to try and date it and thereby date the workings in which it was found. He had drawn the designs and matched them against drawings in a book on Brunel, to the P.S Great Western, a steam sailing ship, and to the North Star, a steam locomotive on the Great Western Railway. The ship was launched in August 1837, the locomotive delivered in November 1837!
The designs were not however an exact copy, the locomotive having a larger central drive-wheel, the pipe having all three wheels equal in size, but the footplate and funnel designs were the same.

Likewise the ship, a paddle steamer, had no paddle wheel shown on the pipe, but the funnel and rigging design were identical.

Anyway, details of the Gutterby pipes and of the more recent finds, were sent off, and since Dr. Higgin’s reply a second letter sent with further finds, which will now be detailed. Read on.

Brownley Hill 19th November 1989

Getting a bit repetitive isn’t it? But when you’re on the scent, what can you do? Keep going, and that’s just what happened

This time with a bigger team of DKB, Del, Noel, Rod “I want to be alone” Chilton, and another two new guys, Dave Dickson, and Bryan McGowan, both of Gosforth

Having reached High X, Rod decided to check out workings up Thompsons Rise and Noel elected to stop with him, as solo exploration is frowned on in the Group. (Puss, pass. RF)

The rest went on to Grahams Sump, and back to Waltons’ to return to the higher workings found recently. Working through the sub-levels and up to the top stope level, the party followed it south to the drop into the understope, Here, at the junction with the E-W stope level, and began the survey.

Del began by checking an incline in the corner of the intersection of thee. E-W to the N-S stopes, but it was run-in at the top. The others tried a little photography in the E-W stope, before moving on north. Next the pack-wall was climbed and a stope beyond it entered which ran parallel on the main level and connected through further north. Returning to the level the connection was then confirmed from the other side and a passage down and east into a level about 20 yards long with a sump halfway along. Over the sump, a whole load of broken pipes, clogs and water bottles were found, and on descending the sump, another pipe with Prince of Wales feathers and a Kings crown on the bowl was found by Bryan. The sump led off to a series of headings, a hopper from the side-stope above and a drop clown into the Horse Level, just south of the multiple X-roads.

Back on the main level moving north, and past the 15ft forehead, was another about 20ft, the continuation of the level to the north being along the top of the wall and to the right. Here, a side tunnel also led right to a wall down into the understope on the Horse level.

Carrying on north, over a pile of rubble, a X-roads was found with a small working ahead, a long understope to the right, about 20ft down deepening further on, and left through some fallen ground into a large stope whose roof had come down. Ahead and to the right, a second stope had large falls at north and south ends, the north being blocked but for a hole up through come bad rock fall, which was thought too dangerous to attempt.

The huge fall to the south, was traversed and the other side sloped back down into a level to three small foreheads and a sump halfway. (This was later proved to connect to the sub-level north of the multiple X-roads and is the 20ft wall found on the trip with Chris Moore. DKB)

There being no way to the north, a return was made to the start, above the Waltons Sump hopper/stope, and a passage over the pack-wall to the west was taken into the top one of the two sub-levels. Much of the roof was down, but paceable, and was followed to an area of white mineral, where a collector had left clusters of samples on flat surface. As one or two samples had unusual crystals on them, they were removed for analysis. A little further south, a major collapse prevented further exploration, so the party moved back to the spiral man way at the north end and descended to the lower sub-level. This was given a good search around likely bait area, and a number of clay pipes were found by all in the party.

At least three of these pipes had a wheat sheaf and tree design on the bowls, later identified as being of a Carlisle design.

Having dropped down again to the Horse level, various accessible rises and stopes were entered and the connection proved with the sub-levels reached from above.

At the multi X-roads, the higher level above the northern am of the horse level, was taken, and the 20ft wall scaled by DKB, proving the connection to the level above. The 25ft wall was not climbed and is yet to do.

Back on the horse level, the eastern arm was taken and the left arm taken the fork to try and determine whether it connected with the dry sump found at the point where it is shown on the plan connecting with the High X Vein. This in fact was not the case, it ending in a foreground without any rise or sump. As the height prevented pacing it was not possible to estimate how far from breaking through it might have been.

On the way out, the party found the other two's bags at the junction with the main Horse level, and left a message for them, making for surface. It was then realised that D.D. and B.Me would not be able to get their clean change without Noels car keys, so to kill time pastime!

Began digging from below, with Noel working above. Ten minutes later they had a connection and shortly after, had created a way through again. When looked at, the fall was seen to have occurred at the bad pressure-bulge, and was a lesson in the hazards of our pastime!

The rest of the journey as far as the first shaft on the Jug Vein was not a problem, and we stopped for lunch, Michelle beginning to regret putting on her thick jumper under the survival suit she had been equipped with.

As usual the route was followed to Moss X, but in the first section of stone - arching past that, a complete collapse was encountered. DKB, who was leading at that point, opened a hole above the fall and into the void above the arching, and was joined by Noel, and the position evaluated. A few gaps could be seen into the level beyond, but the material couldn't be easily moved, as DKB crawled along the gap above the arching clearing a path as he went, until he could climb down at the far end. He then returned to the fall, and began digging from below, with Noel working above. Ten minutes later they had a connection and shortly after, had created a way through again. When looked at, the fall was seen to have occurred at the bad pressure-bulge, and was a lesson in the hazards of our pastime!

The plan was to try and find a way up into the top levels by way of one of the man ways in the sub-levels, so DKB climbed the 20ft up to the sub-level in the first shaft and rigged the electron for the others, and then entered the side level to a little stope containing a man way up through the deads. An awkward 15ft climb into the shaft revealed that it was blocked from above, so the sub-level was given a thorough search before descent, turning up a couple of pipes and a copper pricker.
After de-rigging, the operation was moved to the next shaft south, and again DKB clambered up into the cub-level, discovering that the only way up was by a man way directly above the rise, and appeared to be clear and 30-odd feet high.

With Noel in attendance, DKB roped up, and chimneymed to the top. The man way was 35ft high and 3-4ft wide initially, bellowing out midway, and then necking in above to 2ft * 3ft, necessitating turning in the shaft to maintain a comfortable climb.

This done, DKB pulled up a rail for a delay, followed by 55ft of electron to reach the foot of the shaft, and top-roped Noel up. The tope reached was 25ft high and 20ft across, with a large collapse to the south, large slabs having come down, one having skated over the man way, and was resting beside it. To the north a large pile of material had run in from above, blocking progress that way.

Before bringing the rest up, DKB checked each end for a way through and was, disappointed, but a gap in the eastern wall led to a side-stope of similar size, and another gap to the north created a pillar. In the eastern wall opposite the top end of the pillar, he found a level running east, with a X-roads about 10yds along. He informed Noel, who began bringing the others up the man way Michelle in the lead. She was a little worried, it being her first electron ascent, but did very well; especially considering it was a full 55ft climb for her.

At the X-roads, DKB went left into a stopeled level 10ft lower, reaching a large fall of slabs at the end about 20yds on, where a climb up and through, revealed a tope north of the main stope. A lot of roof had come down, but in the far LH end he found a large shaft in the floor with roof collapsed around it all. This, he assumed was the top of the first shaft, the blocked man way tried earlier being under the rock fall in the stope.

Returning to the X-roads, he found that the others were now all up the shaft, and Derek and Mike were taking the eastern branch, so he and Michelle went south along a low shalow-floor level about 25yds to a forehead, then returned and went after the others. The eastern arm turned north after 10yds and went in for some way, a large vug in the LH wall, containing large chunks of quartz crystals, which were dragged out and distributed. Further on, the level met another cutting across from the right and the team split again, Noel, DKB and Michelle going right, Mike and Derek to the left.

The level to the right was all clog marked floor and low, with a side cut right into the level we had left originally, but a fall in that level now blocks this off. The level continued with wailing in the right, and a whole line of micro quartz vugs on the left, some nodules of which had had their ends cut off by the miners presumably, as there were no recent marks on the floor. Possibly these were for spar-boxes, very popular in West Cumbria in the last century.

The level rose slightly at the end of this stretch, and was joined by a level from the left. Ahead and to the right the roof was collapsed. A look over the fall to the right revealed a hole down into a side-stope, which sloped down to the south to a forehead but had a man way in the eastern wall down to lower workings. This man way was found by Noel in descent, to be blocked about 20ft down. A large rock covered with quartz crystals, was sampled before the climb back into the level. The level was blocked by falls to the SE, so the one joining from the north was followed to a small shaft in the floor; 2-3ft in diameter, with a short piece of level beyond then an understope of 10yds before the floor began again. The level above and beyond the understope was slightly stopeed, and a chimney/traverse may be possible, but was not attempted, so it is not known if this level continues as shown on the plan.

Following after the others, the team was re-united at the NW end of the level about 25yds beyond the junction. Here, the level formed a small flat and a forehead, but had been cut left, again over a fall of large slabs. Here, the level ran 10yds to a large hopper-top, bridged by a rail to a X-roads. A level ran left about 20yds to a forehead, ahead was 15yds to another, which seemed to have been a bai area by the clogs and bits and pieces left. To the right however, the level went on over a pile of deads, and sloped down to a walled-up level with rails set in it endways-on as if to hold up the roof beyond.

Turning back south, a stone-arched level ran off to the right, the hopper joining it as a chute from the left, and running perhaps 35yds to a large shaft/ hopper down about 25ft to a floor sloping down to the south. Opposite the level, the shaft top was again walled-up. More clay-pipes were found in this level, as were a couple of nice bladed varieties of calcite.

On examining the plans later, the shaft at the end of the stone-arched level could emerge at the elope of material that emerges into the horse level just to the north of the first shaft entered.

By this time we had overstayed our time, and a quick exit was made, everybody descending the electrons except DKB, who de-rigged the pitch and chimneymed back to the shaft bottom. The trip out was made without problem leaving the mine at 5:25pm.

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Brownley Hill 31st December 1989

A flurry of visits followed by a months gap, the dreaded flu bug having taken Its toll of active members followed by demands on time placed by families over the festive season.

So it was only a three-man team that made it m New Years Eve, to squeeze one last trip in before the end of the year, albeit a short one due to impending New Years Eve festivities in the evening to come!

Noel and DKB were joined by Benny Hardy who had last been with us way back during our Nentsberry Hags explorations.

DKB had got a video lamp and battery-belt and was keen to do a little more photography, and this was tried in Middle Vein Flats, and again on the way in to Moss X level. This was to be our exploration for the day, so following lunch; Noel crawled into the low stone-arched entrance, to find it to be blocked by a roof fall ten yards in. With some difficulty, due to the restricted amount of room in the arching, he cleared the fall by pulling slabs of roof into the level. The other two to place a best they could, then an entry was made.

The previous scouting trip had found only two of the three rises shown on the map. and only the third one at the end, had looked climbable, so it was to this that the team made for, This was a 5ft slope to a 10ft rise to a sloping way up to the right (north). The wall to climb up was of deads, and a loud noise of a hidden waterfall could be heard, although where it fell from and drained to is not clear, as the incline above was dry, and the level below did not run with that much water. Could there be workings to the side and below that are not on the map?

The incline was in fact a series of steps with slopes between of black shale, the stone-arched roofs stepping up also. The last step was about 8ft high and led to a 10yd level blocked by fallen rock. Some bits of strip metal and clay-pipes were found together with a fairly good example of a rock-splitter, but as about to descend, DKB found a low level running east from the top of the last step-up in the roof,

This level had a floor covered in clog-marks, with two sets of continuous lines running down it, presumed to be made by sledges as the roof was too low for barrows to have been used, being only a little higher than a mans back when crawled along. How the miners could make a full footprint with their clogs is a mystery, because although it was possible to squat, it was very difficult to walk in that position!
The level ran on to a heading 30yds to the east, with deads stacked to each side, although little was found on the stacks other than a few tallow candles. The level was about 4ft high and 6-8ft wide, and barren, presumably driven as a trial looking for a parallel vein.

Having drawn a blank with the third rise, an attempt was made of the second one, this being a 15 * 5ft vertical rise into a N-S stope, which on chimneying the northern side led to a level in the west wall about 25ft up, which was a 10yd dead-arched level turning north to a roof-fall. Just above the entrance ledge, a very tight semi-circular rise ascended to a higher level. The rise was roughly 30° across the flat and 24° from face to back wall. DKB tried to get in but could not enter it, so Noel, standing on DKB’s back was hoisted up into it. He climbed to the top and found a similar level above the one he had just left, then climbed the continuation of the rise to another level above.

Having returned back to the level below, the location of the first rise was searched for and located adjacent to the first sumps. Unlike the other two rises which cut to the left and up in the stope, this one ran diagonally NW up a slope about 6ft high, then in a small chamber ascended another 6ft to a slope running back above the other towards the level, about 4ft high by 8ft wide. Five yards up this, the foot of the rise was entered, apparently directly above the main level.

The rise was 20ft long by 8ft wide, rising blind, about 30ft. A 10ft level ran north about 8ft up and opposite it, another run about 30ft to an iron-stained forehead.

Having found very little in Moss X, the three began their journey out, but as a little time was spare, DKB decided to try and ascend the horrible muddy slope, previously discovered between stone-arched just outbye of Moss X. This he came to regret, as the slope was above a 10ft drop into the level, and the only way he could stay on it was to brace one leg against the back wall. Having ascended the 20ft to the top, he discovered that the apparent small level was in fact just a small ledge, and had to work his way back down very gingerly! He was helped the last 10ft by Benny forming a foothold with his shoulder, and arrived back in the Horse Level very muddy, Benny having to wash him down to try and make himself a bit more presentable. Well, you never know who you might meet down there, do you?

With all the climbing, it was a very tired team that left the mine at 2:30pm.

**Jug Vein**

14th January 1990

A three man team, DKB, Noel and Colin Bell of Moor Row, on a trip to try and break into more new ground on the Jug Vein, following the now accustomed route through to Moss X, and on as far as the point where the level has been walled up to the right between where the water is coming through the arching, and the Jug Vein junction further on.

Here, DKB began clearing a crawl way over the blockage, and after about 20 minutes had enough space to squeeze between the large slabs and the roof, into the level beyond. He found about 10 yards of level leading to a rise which was running water, from a small choked chimney in the RH corner. It did not appear to be safe to attempt to clear it, so he returned to the Horse Level. Another loose end tied up.

The party moved on to the High X Vein, and down to the cross-roads, stopping there for dinner. The large rise at this point, shown on the map as J Waltons Rise, was viewed with the spot lamp and appeared to have a level midway up it, as well as the chimney at the top, but the 10ft climb up to the first stopes, where the stepped side looked climbable, was too sheer to scale, needing a couple of long rails to even attempt it.

Dinner over, the X-cut to Jug Vein was taken, and DKB roped up, and chimneysted the 55ft rise into the stopes above, taking up another rail, before fitting the relay for the electronics. The others followed him, and once up, sampled an area of pyrite in the wall next to the rise, but turned up nothing startling.

Making their way north into the next stope, they looked at some vugs in the LH wall, and dropped a paper marker down the sump at the end to try and identify the shaft if later found from below. The roof had completely blocked any further progress north, so the previous route was followed east and then north to the hopper beside the crossroads. DKB took the level running south, and after examining the stoped end, decided that this was the other side of the collapse beyond the shaft that he had just left. While the others tried to obtain an interesting calcite left by Noel last time, DKB went north to look at Mike's walled-up level.

The rocks in the wall were pretty solid above the three rails protruding from the wall, but he managed to loosen and remove a number of rocks below them sufficient to pull out one rail. This allowed rocks to slip down from above, and running in and pulling at lodged rocks, and running back each time, he was able to start a slide of material from above. An ominous rumble caused him to think he had opened-up a chute, but once the fall subsided he was able to see a black hole through the rocks 10ft above. Shouting to the others that he had broken through he began his running in and out starting more slides, until he had a hole big enough to get through. Having been joined by the two mineral devotees, he ventured forth.

The result, although shown on the map, was rather a stunner, as the crossroads indicated by the map was, in fact a 30ft stopes crossing east-west, and the level ahead was at three different horizons. The breakthrough was at the top of an 8ft wall or plug, blocking the level, which was at the same horizon on each side.

Dropping down into the east-west level, the party had a large wall to the left above an arched level, and about 20ft high; ahead (north) a small level in the floor led to a large sump, which was arched over, and appeared to have a crossroads over it! To the right a ledge at waist height had a short heading above it, and a level continuing east, under it. This was followed, and led to a north-south level, stoped to about 20ft high, the RH (south) arm running a few feet to a forehead, the LH arm continuing some way. Just to the north, a short heading ran east to form the crossroads shown on the map, and beyond that a stoped and backfilled level ran off to the left (west) over a 20ft stepped wall of deads.

Whereas the map then indicates another crossroads, the LH side did not exist, but another heading went right, and a nice quartz nodules was picked up, lying on the floor. Not far beyond this, the plan proved correct, in that a tee-junction running east -West was encountered. Another short heading ran east, but the west arm was again stoped about 25ft high. A little further down this arm led to a drop in the floor, and a crossroads not shown on the map! The LH arm ran to the arched sump from its northern side, the RH arm ran north past a load of clogs, rail seats and a couple of clay pipes, and ended at a rise, with a step up to a level running east and about 3ft higher. This level ran 20yds to a large sump, bridged by rails covered in deads, and a stoped level running on beyond it.
Noel climbed the rise at the western end, discovering more pipes and clogs in a working above, and a level also running east above the other one merging with it at the stope area above the sump. The levels were assumed to be over the main Horse Level, and the sump could well be the one that Del and Mike had tried to remove the boards from, at the north end of the Jug Vein.

A return was made to the E-W stope and the party dropped down about 6ft to the stope floor, and followed it west. It went on about 30yds to a high stepped wall up about 30ft to a higher level, which Noel scaled to find a forehead a few yards beyond. The stope appeared to be about 40ft high by 8ft wide, and was devoid of any timbers or artefacts.

Following the level to the arched sump, it was possible to climb over to the LH side onto the arching, the crossroads running east-west, but had 10ft walls each side, with levels above. These were left, and the party returned to the breakthrough point, and turned right (west) into the arched level, running through the 20ft wall of deads. A few yards in they found a seating area, with two sets of
clogs, which were photographed, and the level began to rise up through an S-bend and eventually emerged out of the pile of stacked
deads into a very large stope.

The stope varied in height, as the eastern end was partly back-filled, but in places was estimated at 60-70ft high and 10-12 ft wide.
Not far west of the emergence of the arched passage, a level set in the floor ran back east under the deads again to a large sump, about
35ft deep, which was believed to descend into the forked level on the Jug Vein entered from the Horse Level, at Mike and Del's Rise,
and found from below by Mike, Chris and DKB in late 1989.
The stope was empty beyond this point, reaching the dimensions indicated, and a little further on, a large hole in the floor led to a
chamber about 20ft down. This could be bypassed, and about 10yds beyond another high stepped wall rose about 30ft to another short
heading. Having spent a lot of time on this rather lightening tour, it was time to leave, and it was a very smug team that made its way back out
to surface again, with 5 clay pipes and some mineral samples after seven hours underground.

Brownley Hill 21st January 1990

This trip was a follow-up to the first, to photograph the large stopes discovered the previous week. The tripod etc was set up for open
shutter work, and Mike, Del and Noel provided the subjects whilst DKB did the business.

This done, a second tour was staged to show Del and Mike the area, and ended up at the workings above the Horse Level.
Del set up the pitch and abseiled down the shaft to the bottom, remaining tied on whilst he attempted to clear the floor of rubble and
mud, revealing the timber floor below. With some effort and muttered curses he finally broke through and proved that it was indeed
the rise that he and Mike had attempted to open from below, at the junction of the Horse Level and the Jug Vein (North End).
Meanwhile, DKB and Noel crossed the shaft on the platform of deads (held up by rails and timbers) over the shaft, and into the level
beyond. This had been walled up at about 25 yards, and on investigation proved to be holding back some material from above and to
the left (north). This did not look to be readily cleared and was left.

The party returned to the break-through point and examined the large hopper to the north, stone-arched over, which had a rail across
the floor on its north side, and another above it, presumably for tipping bogies against. On the south side, a short level about 10ft long
and 3ft lower than the main level, also led into the hopper. The hopper itself was about 35ft deep by 10ft wide and 25ft long, its floor
a mass of rubble and muck. Time forbade a descent, but this was planned for a subsequent trip.

The party made its way to the hopper/man way in the floor of the southern east-west stope, and rigged the SRT rope for descent. A
kibble hook was found in the arching here at this time, but was left behind. The belay was made with some old rails wedged in the
arching, and the rope left in position after descent, to allow a prusick ascent later.
The party made its way out, removing only a pipe and bowl on this occasion, both found by Noel who has overcome his "duck" on
this activity, and is getting on peoples nerves by finding all the pipes nowadays!!!!

Brownley Hill Jug Vein 29th April 1990

A request was made to the stope left in the shaft up to the Jug Vein stopes, by a four-man team. Noel ascended first, and on DKB's
request pulled up the rope to fit a belay loop at the overhang point. For some reason he let the rope back down not having done so,
and Dave began his first SRT ascent. This was going well until at about 10ft up, Dave discovered that a knot had been tied in the
rope! He was suitably unimpressed! Noel protested innocence and luckily Dave was able to stand rather precariously on the wall
with him.

The main aim was to re-take the open-shutter pictures of the large stope, the previous lot having been fogged in some way. It wasn't
DKB's day, because he set up his tripod on a pile of deads O.K., but then stepped back and fell backwards 10ft into the arched level
below! Luckily only his pride was hurt! The photos’ were having been re-taken; Noel roped up and was lowered down about 20ft into a bell-pit shaped understope in the
floor. He found some walling in line with the stope above, but nothing of note was found down there.

The second object was to return into the old levels first found after ascending the shaft from the southern part of the Jug Vein, with a
view to crossing the shaft and understope that led north over J.Waltons Rise on High Cross Vein.
This was attempted by DKB, who found the traverse over the understope to be very tight. He left the rope tethered, and scouted the
level beyond for some way, finding climbing shafts down, and stoped areas, before returning for help.
Noel crossed, and they both went on, where Noel recognised the further reaches as the area he and Captain Anonymous had climbed to
from Armstrongs Rise on High Cross Vein. The boys went on and scouted the various rises, sumps and levels to the north, but
further progress north was prevented by a shaft, not passable without gear, and better attempted from the route via Armstrong's Rise.
Some photos were taken during the return trip across the understopes, which should prove quite interesting.

The understope further south in the old level, was looked at again, and some quartz samples obtained, and on climbing back out, Mike
found a nice shellfish fossil in the shale, which DKB promptly snapped up for the collection!
Next, the party returned to the large hopper with the arched over roof, and the SRT rope was rigged for Noel to try to find a way
through. He descended to the floor about 30ft down and found a hole in one corner which he began to open out. This dropped about
8ft to an arched level, where he immediately found some clay pipes!
He shouted up for somebody to join him, and Mike agreed after much protest, to go down. He was the only one left with his SRT kit
with him.
Having joined Noel, Mike realised that he had been there before, and identified the hopper as the one that emerges in the wall of the
LH branch of the fork in the level of Jug Vein North End!
The two lads below refused to climb back up, and after de-rigging, the two Dave’s returned to the ascent shaft and set up the gear for descent. This involved knotting two ropes together through a sling and karabiner, and abseiling down one side, before pulling the rope out of the other. A common practice, but a little unnerving the first time. A nylon string was left through the karabiner for a future use. Noel had found a number of clay pipes, and the kibble clip previously left, was also removed for future display. After eight hours
underground, the lads were glad to reach the cars for the journey home, having tidied up more loose ends, and made two connections into known ground. A successful day.

A small team entered the mine and proceeded to Grahams Sump on the southern end of the Jug Vein. Here, a previously entered stope running due north, was re looked at, and followed to the end, where a level, previously thought to end at a forehead, in fact had a hole in the roof, and continued on north.

A little further on, the level was stoped up and walled, but a 15ft climb gave access to more level, and a blockage 20yds on.
This was a tight crawl under wedged rock and timber, which held back rubble from above. (Peats Sump?)
The level opened up beyond the fall, but had rocks strewn all over the floor, eventually heightening into a normal level, with many vugs in both walls, containing minerals that had been previously visited by mineral collectors.

Near the northern end, these vugs penetrated through to a similar level approaching at an angle to the right. Where the two levels met, a large rise about 10ft diameter, ascended to a level estimated at 30ft higher, presumed to be the blocked-off section of Jug Vein High Level. The level continued north for about thirty yards to a forehead, the vein having petered out.

The vein in the level running SE was also rich in minerals, and was followed until a 10ft sump was encountered following a tight section. This was eventually traversed by DKB, and followed onward to a stoped-out section over a large sump down to the Horse Level horizon. This may have been traversable with ropes, but was not attempted without. The shaft at this point seemed to go up as well, but this could not be confirmed from the level.
The group returned to the Horse Level and retraced steps to a large rise to the left, about parallel with Thompson’s Sump on the plan. This was very muddy and was scaled with some difficulty to find a level about 10ft above the muddy slope. Obtaining a foothold with muddy boots was difficult, but eventually the team ascended into a small arched level running roughly south from arise above the ascent point. This level forked, the M side being a dead-end, the RH fork leading to a small stope, with a rocky slope above the arched level emerged from holes in the wall.

Six sticks of PHOENIX gelatine dynamite, with the date 1898 on them lying drop down to the Horse Level horizon. While this was being rigged, the stopes above the level were entered but revealed nothing. Sump, using three ladders, and removing the last one (the second reaching to 3ft from the floor) to site at Grahams' Sump for the 20ft drop down to the Horse Level. While this was being rigged, the stopes above the rise at Walton’s Sump.

After a stop for lunch, the team made its way to the level and sump, shown on the map just north of Waltons’ Sump. The sump was roughside Shaft. Here, much time was spent wondering how to dismantle the “Alston Cap” to gain entry to the shaft without it collapsing in on itself. Mike eventually noticed that if the bolts at the top of the legs were loosened, and the wire hanger of the lower hoop is disconnected, the leg can be pivoted up sufficient to allow entry, and indeed closed behind the last man, to prevent sheep falling on those descending. A genius!

Brownley Hill
20th May 1990

This may be yet another in a long line of visits, but this one was to be a classic, intended as a through trip, but in fact ending up as a double through trip! Read on

A four man team of DKB, Noel, Del, and Mike, made their way up the hill from the parking bay on the top road above BH portal, to Roughside Shaft. Here, much time was spent wondering how to dismantle the “Alston Cap” to gain entry to the shaft without it collapsing in on itself. Mike eventually noticed that if the bolts at the top of the legs were loosened, and the wire hanger of the lower hoop is disconnected, the leg can be pivoted up sufficient to allow entry, and indeed closed behind the last man, to prevent sheep falling on those descending. A genius!

The shaft was stone lined for 20ft, and then the walls became cut rock, covered in a horrible khaki slime, which, when swung into, was found to be a thick coating. About 80ft down the shaft dog-legged, being joined from below by the continuation, offset to one side by 10ft. The top half was about 15ft diameter but the lower part was about a 8ft by 4ft slot and fell another 55ft to the pile of waste at its foot, previously reached from BH High Level on a previous visit.

The abseil down was a bit hairy, as in places the rope had touched the sides and sudden surges followed by braking on dry bits, caused some dramatic yo-yo effects. The original idea had been for two men to exit via the Horse Level, and the other two to de-rig and prussick back to surface, but shaft conditions prompted DKB to advocate the High Level exit for later, which his partner reluctantly agreed to.

This agreed, the remaining 60ft of manway pitches were fitted with electron ladders and descended, to reach the level south of Shorts' Sump, using three ladders, and removing the last one (the second reaching to 3ft from the floor) to site at Grahams’ Sump for the 20ft drop down to the Horse Level horizon. While this was being rigged, the stopes above the level were entered but revealed nothing. Also found by Mike during the rigging operation, were six sticks of PHOENIX gelatine dynamite, with the date 1898 on them lying in holes in the wall.

After a stop for lunch, the team made its way to the level and sump, shown on the map just north of Waltons’ Sump. The sump was rigged for SRT and Del abseiled down about 20ft to a sloping floor, which entered a N-S lower level, flooded each side, but
deeper considerably to the north. Noel pulled off his party trick by conjuring up another clay-pipe from a hole in the wall. (He makes you sick, doesn't he?)

Exploration carried on by moving north to the crossroads, and then following a long level WSW to a forehead to find nothing. Having returned to the crossroads, the rise was climbed to enter the level above the northern arm and up some steps to a 25ft wall over an arched level. This, Noel climbed, and began to explore the stope above. With DKB in the level below, he proved a man way down, blocked by a large boulder, and a further rise and sump at the end of the arched level. He went on beyond that, and felt that more could be discovered at a later date. In the clay pipe stakes he had a field day, discovering a number of examples, together with clogs galore!

Meanwhile the level below was being followed west and then south to a man way down, with a short passage beyond. It was whilst checking this, and the 6ft rise beyond that Del also found a pair of very unusual small pipes in the arching, nearly identical but one bearing the stampings of "Pringle of Carlisle".

The team met up again at the crossroads, and Mike and Noel set off along the usual route out via the Horse Level. Del and DKB went south, collecting the bogie axles from their hiding place on the way, and began their ascent. This was done by one ascending, the other tying on the axles to the electron for them to be hauled up, and then following them stage by stage, to the High Level. This took 45mins! The axles and electrons were then secured to the foot of the rope hanging in the shaft, and the long hard journey out via the High Level was commenced. Del had extreme trouble with the low, rock-strewn level, due to his height, and some dark curses were heaped on the lesser-stature DKB for his reluctance to SRT out.

Eventually the SRT equipped rise from Middle Vein was reached and the descent made, before following Middle Vein to the Horse Level and the normal way out.

This route had taken 1hr 50min to reach the car, and after dumping some gear, the long haul up to Roughside Shaft was to arrive just in time to help Mike and Noel cart the gear down to the cars, they having managed to haul the axles etc up on their own. They had been out for 40mins before the others, and had also rebuilt the Cap and surrounding cairn.

For information, the bogie wheels were of 12" gauge, and 71/2" diameter wheels, with C axles ending in 5/8" squares, the wheels having 1 1/2" square holes in them! The difference having been taken up with a square wooden plug with 5/8 hole, and little iron wedges. Very unusual!
A group of four for this trip, DKB & Noel, showing Dave Bridge (newly joined) and Angela Wilson of CATMS, the Jug Vein stopes, and clearing up one or two loose ends.

We began by trailing all the way through to the multiple crossroads on Jug, with Dave giving his usual running commentary along the way. From here the ascent was made into the sub-level to the north side, where Noel re-climbed the 25ft wall of deads and fitted electrons for the others.

Once all had ascended to the stope above, the exploration began, and the clogs that Noel had found on the last trip were examined, with DKB and Angela spending some time collecting parts of clay pipes in the small chamber east of the stope and at the top of the now-blocked man way from the arched sub-level below. The wall over the arched level running north from the man way was attempted by Noel, but the chock stone at the top was too big to pass by safely.

The arched level was followed over a sump, which descended past the sub-level below, down to a branch of the Horse level horizon of Jug (where DKB & Chris Moore first ascended). Just beyond the sump, a very tight rise was attempted, but nobody could manage it as it was only about 18” wide. The level finally ended in a pair of cuts right, one of which had been a man way but was now choked, the other went nowhere.

Having descended back to the main level and de-rigged, the party moved south to the workings found above the horse level not shown on the map, but immediately west of Thompsons Sump.

These workings had proved very interesting on the last trip, but had proved impossible to draw accurately from memory, so on this occasion DKB spent some time pacing distances and recording bearings, to present the drawing inserted at the last minute for the last issue. (This is shown again now to remind members). The two shafts which had caused problems in working out the plan, were in fact, the same one approached at different horizons from different directions! We did find a nice powder charger and a few bits of witherite-type mineral in the deads, and Dave and Noel abseiled the shaft, while DKB and Angie de-rigged and went back the way they came.
On the way out, the rails in Waltons Sump were ascended, and the sub-levels and stopes above were toured, descending via the man way into the horse level south of the crossroads, before making off to the portal, which was reached at 5.30, after seven hours underground.

Brownley Hill Jug Vein

With DKB and Del having recently gone into semi retirement, volunteered to guide George Wilson and Dave Hacker, via the north route to the Jug Vein. Also accompanying the party were Mick Lomas and Karen Molyneux making their debut trip underground to Jug (why not start as you mean to go on).

The previous day Mick and Karen, up on a day visit from Bolton, had called in at Florence Mine Egremont to enquire about underground trips. The only people at the mine that day were work party of WCMRG volunteers involved with the Florence Project. Sensing their disappointment when told that regular trips for the public had not yet started, I invited them to the WCMRG Sunday meet up at Nenthead. Much to my surprise they accepted!

On the Sunday morning, the Bolton contingent met in the car park, Nenthead, before being taken down to the mine entrance where George and Dave were waiting. Introductions over, we entered the mine and proceeded along the usual route via Brownley Hill Vein to the Northern end of High Cross Vein.

Having reached High Cross Vein, we moved on south down the Horse Level and ascended Walton's Sump, before moving through the old levels prior to reaching the higher levels on the Jug Vein. Slides were taken of these areas including the E-W stope while the mineral experts searched for the ever elusive Alstonite.

Having failed to find any evidence of the ever elusive Alstonite, we then re-entered the Horse Level, and continued South down to Grahams Sump. More photographs of the water filled sump and clogs were taken, while some of the party took this opportunity of having some lunch.

Adjacent to Graham’s Sump a stope running due north was entered and followed to the end, then up through a squeeze in the roof to the continuation of the level. After approximately 6 ft the level was stoped up and walled, necessitating a 15ft climb which then gave access to a further 60ft of level before a tight crawl passed in-fall from above (this in-fall had been cleared by J Lawson who had previously entered the area via Brownley Hill High Level). The level beyond the fall contained vugs discovered on a previous trip. Rumour has it, that this was the area visited by the editorial board of a well known mineral magazine some years ago, who reached the Jug Vein either via the Roughside Shaft or the BHHL, route, however, recent information leads us to believe that it wasn't them, as they apparently ran out of electrons on the 3 X 20 ft pitches from the BHHL.

An hour was spent looking for fluorite and ankerite samples, a couple of nice samples being seen by Dave on and in the deads but were left untouched. The team then left for the surface, emerging one hour and twenty minutes later. An enjoyable day had been had by all, a fact borne out by me receiving and passing on to DKB three new membership fees within the following week.

Noel Wood
This was a biggy! A ten person team entering the mine at 10:40am to tie up loose ends in the High X and Jug veins. Included in the trip were Mick and Karen now members and on their second trip, Noels brother, Paul, Kevin Jordan, and two newcomers, another Steve Clarke (now known as Steve Clarke and Ian Seymour.

I took the usual opportunity to give a conducted tour on the way to High X junction, and taking up the lead, began to find paper markers with arrows on them, pointing the way, which, on reaching High X junction, we found to be directions for John Lawson, left by Roy Fellows.

(I had previously got to Jug vein via the high level and abseiled down to find myself in what I immediately recognised as the horse level, although I had not been in that section before as it had only just been made accessible by the WCMRG. I suppose it was instinct! Anyway, I was immediately on the phone to John on the Monday about all this. RF)

To show the newcomers the stope on the main level, we moved on and took the LH cut further east along the main level. This led into the floor of the large stope discovered on a previous trip, with unreachable levels visible above the entrance. While here a number of us decided to look at the levels at the top of the eastern end wall, visited by Noel and Rod sometime ago. Once the slope was ascended, a small slot led through into a chamber beyond, with a small hole at the back, and a level that led off to the south. The level led to a T-junction, the RH fork being run-in from above, but the LH fork led off into a small flat and a short level to a forehead beyond. This level is the one leading north shown on the plan as Cross level, just east of the stope.

On descent, Del and I had lagged back, looking for artefacts and had entered the chamber, when I spotted a hole in the roof, with a level visible through it. I found a foothold that allowed a higher look, and looking the opposite direction to the level, saw a pair of cast iron wheels on what looked like a small winch!

Jackpot! The problem was though, how to get up through the small hole I was looking through? Shouting for Derek to re-enter the chamber again I looked round and found the small hole at the back, was passable with care, and led left down a small level, but also went up and into the level I had spotted earlier. Once up, the winch could be seen at the end of the level, half buried in rock and timber that had fallen in from above.
The level also turned right at the winch and ran 10yds to a forehead. Del and I were quickly joined by Mick and Kevin, and I took a photograph before beginning to dig it out. It quickly became evident that what we had found was not a winch, but was in fact a small hand driven ventilation fan, connected to a pipe that ran back along the level, buried in the floor.

My film having run out at the time I really needed it, I had to borrow Paul's camera to record the find for our records, before we reluctantly had to leave it. (What made my find really special was finding it in an area that Noel had already visited!)

On my way out I looked at a rise above the hole from the chamber and found that it was blocked with timbers from higher workings, and on descending to the small level below, found that it too had once ascended higher, but was now blocked from above. Presumably it was these higher workings that the fan was ventilating and may be worth trying to clear the timbers in the rise.

Having descended to the Horse Level again, I took Del to the East and on reaching the deep water that turned us back last time, I climbed up and into the old level above the Horse level and crawled to the end, where it was run-in from above descending I dislodged a large rock, which fell on Dels leg, as he was lounging on the slope below me. He got a little miffed hobbled off down the level muttering dark North Sea curses about incompetent *@!!/£**, to tell everybody who would listen how careless I was.

The party the proceeded down High X, past the crossroads, to the 20ft dry. sump found at the southern end of the High X vein west-side. This was fitted with electronics, using a piece of rail situated above, and Mick and I descended to find that the level at the bottom went only a few yards each way (N-S) on a vein of pure white mineral, which Mick took samples of, before we ascended again.

From here the western stope was followed to the crosscut over the horse level to the hopper on the eastern stope. Noel and I crossed the hopper, and using Noels back I clambered up the slope to the north for about 20ft to a position where I could look at the stope. I found myself at the top of a 20ft wall, and looking back south could see that the Stope continued on past Noel at 20ft above him. Looking around I found that I could descend to floor level by using ledges on the RH wall, and then began to work my way north, past Browns Rise, over Sparks Rise (choked) and into a X-cut leading west to a short southerly heading to a forehead obviously trying to pick up the western vein. The remains of an ore-sledge were lying in the X-cut, but were badly broken-up. A second high wall across the stope proved too daunting for a solo attempt, so I returned to Browns Rise and dropped the 10ft or so, back into the Horse level and rejoined the others.

The day having advanced somewhat, the party moved off to the entrance, stopping for a quick look in the Middle Vein Flats, where Noel and Co. found a couple of M.C.'s from Hull, (one of which was a Cornishman,) before reaching daylight at 16:50. Artefacts removed for display were, one rail seat from High X, and a rake head from BH hopper.
Brownley Hill Mine,

Sunday, September 12th 1993

Present:- Dave Banks, Rob Scott, Mike McCrickard, Bill Griffin, Mick Lomas, Karen Molyneux, Nick West, Janet Birgin, Heather Selwyn, Bruce?
After a break-down in communications during the week, arrangements were finally cleared with Mick on the Friday night, and he, Karen, Bruce and Heather brought out the maypole sections from their place of concealment in Smallcleugh on the Saturday for the trip today, the stope, the timber false floors, BIA's classic sight, were also shown. Much appreciation was expressed of the sight, before moving on and down the LH fork to the "Blue Pool" where the water-filled blind sump was admired, and photos taken.

Just outbye of this, we met Roy Fellows on one of his solo photography trips in his old stamping ground, and after a "crack" moved off down Wellgill X Vein.

The hidden connection down to Nentsberry Haggs Mine was pointed out, before passing the Middle Vein Flats, not visited due to shortage of time, to the Engine Sump, and the trek out to daylight.

Everybody seems to have enjoyed the experience, both in viewing new places, and in seeing electron techniques in practice; and even a couple of artefacts were found, so although we did not achieve our goal this time, the day was not a waste.

We exited at 16.50, and after changing we went our separate ways.

Dave Banks.

Brownley Hill Mine Sunday, 16th October 1994

Present:- Dave Banks, Rob Scott, Mike McCrickard, Bill, Tony, and Kevin Griffin.

We met up at 10.10am at the Wellgill parking area, changed and went underground at 10.30am, proceeding straight along Wellgill X Vein to the connection via Gin Foot Sump into Nentsberry Haggs mine.

Here, we made our way down into the small flat, and I familiarised myself again with the area, accompanied by Rob in looking at some workings on a minor vein parallel to the Wellgill X.

The Griffins then showed the rest of us an access they had dug, which ran south into a stone-arched level running E-W beyond the fall. A short L shaped crawl revealed a rather unusual construction, with the 6ft stone-arching being regularly replaced by pent-roof style boarding. This was installed from 3ft from the floor, angled up to two large round timbers laid across the arching, a 1" steel pipe running between them. Backfilled rock is visible behind the boarding which is vertically aligned and braced midway, as well as top and bottom. What purpose this alternating arching and boarding serves is unknown. A horizontal beam at mid-height across the arching had two insulated pulleys fitted, which may have been for power or signalling cables. Also in this level was a large conical-topped container perhaps used for oil or water, which was removed for display. A fall at the end had been previously dug and passed by the Griffins, and led back into the branch that leads from the Wellgill X haulage level into the double hopper down to Haggs, so presumably this level is either the haulage into those hoppers, or a parallel manway. After taking photographs of this area, complete with Mike and the container, we crawled back out.

Back in the flat, where the connection up into Brownley Hill leads out, a 25-30ft rise, once a ladder-way, was ascended into the engine chamber discovered by the Griffins. This was stone-arched to a height of 8ft, and was 12ft wide by 15ft long, containing a large wooden base for the engine. The remains of 6 inch pipes led to two places from the ladderway, indicating probably two operating cylinders, but whether these were steam pipes, or possibly air pipes from the compressed air system that once existed through Gin Foot Sump, is unknown. The chamber had two 6ft arched portals in the far end from the ladderway, with two rope accesses, one in the ceiling and one above the RH portal. Beyond these was a large circular chamber, choked about 15ft down, which is assumed to have originally been the tipping area into the hopper tops. Some heavy timbering is visible in the floor, indicating a collapse of the roof onto the hopper timbering.

I was joined by Rob, who kindly posed for photographs of the engine room, before we returned back to the others.

Having thought about this engine room, I have come to the conclusion that the engine contained in it must have been a compressed-air powered winch for hauling bogies along the Wellgill X Vein from the crossroads at the entrance, hence all the rollers fitted in the level to keep the haulage cable off the walls."

The party then made its way along North Middle Vein to the sump at the end where it meets the Guddangill Burn X Vein system of workings, where the Griffins descended an electron into the working below, to make their way to the Horse Level on GBX Vein, and on to the rise on Tatters String where we had last used the maypoles back in November 1993.

The rest of us made our way via the convoluted workings round to the SRT roped rise up to the High Level, where it was intended we would retrace our steps of last year, haul up the maypoles and the Griffins, and begin ascents of rises from the High Level. This was not to be; although Rob did get geared up and began an SRT ascent of the rope, he discovered that although it was bearing, the weight, the rope appeared to be seriously frayed. I suggested joining the others and transferring the maypoles back, to use them for the ascent.

As it was near dinner, Mike and I explored the stope, discovering that the two sumps and an inclined man way, found in the area near the roped rise connected with a sub-level below the stope, which could also be accessed from a rat-hole in the understope to the south. This sub-level led north to a large oval sump. By the time we emerged, Rob had removed his kit, and after consuming our bait, we refitted the electron into the sump at the end of North Middle Vein, and followed the route of the others.

On reaching the location of the maypoles, we found that the lads had got sick of waiting for us to appear above them, and had begun exploring east along the two BH Veins, beginning a dig on a level.

We told them of our difficulties, but rather than transport the poles through the mine below, it was suggested that we assemble them where they were and enter the High Level that way again. I argued against this, because I did not feel that a safe entry into the eye above could be achieved, due to the bend in the maypole pulling the electron so far away from the lip. Mick Lomas had managed it...
last time, but I certainly did not wish to, especially as I had not been happy on the last trip, even with Mick pulling the top of the maypole into the eye! My argument was eventually accepted, possibly aided by the fact that we had left the electrons at the roped rise!

We set off with the poles back to the roped rise, with difficulty in my case, as I got one of the steel sections. Having arrived back at the destination, we waited for the others, having a couple of hours spare before we needed to exit, but after three quarters of an hour we became concerned that something had happened to them. Perhaps they had missed the crawl from the GBX Vein and gone right round, or they had been injured or stopped by a fall?

Having only three searchers I decided to send one out via North Middle Vein to the X-roads on Wellgill X one out via GBX Vein to the same point while I retraced our steps to Tatter String. If I had not found them there, I would exit via BH Vein, through the water, rejoining the others.

I found the other party just descending the laddered rise from the BH stopes, they having spent an hour exploring some possible new ground! I was somewhat agitated, explaining our worries as to their non-appearance. Had they told us they were intending to have a look around before joining us, both parties could have done so, but as it was we had wasted one of the two spare hours. So I told them to deliver the poles, and I would rejoin the others and exit the mine, leaving the ascent the High Level until we could obtain a replacement piece of SRT rope, and maypole up the rise to fit it, probably next month.
I rejoined the others, and we headed for borne, much to the surprise of my wife at such an early return!

Meanwhile, once the Griffins had delivered their poles to the sump, they spotted some black holes between slabs on the northern edge of the connection from GBX to NM Veins.

They began digging and discovered a back-filled level running north. When entered, they found a packwall to the right with loose shale on the left, and after squeezing over another roof slab the level could be seen to continue north, but access was restricted, and would need clearing.

Moving back to GBXV they continued south, turning right towards the Engine Sump, and then left along Wellgill X Vein for a quick look.

Going past an impressive stone pillar supporting the roof, they explored some small workings on the left. At a crawl further on they found a large metal pipe that had been forced out from the wall by a rock failing against it. They cleared some debris, and were able to look up a rise with lots of pipe work and timber in it. The rock was wedged between the pipe and the roof, but could be moved with a hammer, which would allow the rise to be ascended. This done they then made their way out.

Dave Banks

Brownley Hill Mine Sunday, 6th November 1994

Present:- Bill, Tony, and Kevin Griffin.

Our intention on this visit was to check out various sumps and rises along the Wellgill X Vein.

The first rise tried, was near the flats, shown on the map just beyond the dogleg in the level. The junctions on the rise are at different horizons; the first leads into the flats as shown on the map, higher up the second junction leading west runs to a forehead.

The rise itself continues on upwards before also ending in a forehead.

A rise beyond the manway to Haggs, but before the water in the level, has a rise going east, but the maypole only reached the lip, and couldn't be climbed off.

The first sump tried, north of the BH Vein on Wellgill X had planks across, and was taking water from the Horse Level. When descended it led to a high narrow stope running cast but led nowhere.

The second sump was run-in with shale, but the remains of the level again ran east under a solid roof but shale walls for some yards.

North of this, a working to the right was entered, and had a deep draughting sump, but was not descended due to lack of sufficient electrons. A rise just before this was just a small working.

Beyond this on Wellgill X another working on the right had a rise with a V-junction at the top, both arms of which led to foreheads.

The third sump on Wellgill X was descended, and opened up at the bottom, looking promising, but was totally run-in at the bottom.

Being fed-up of things leading nowhere, we left the final sump, which is at the base of the incline of material where the Horse Level is blocked. It probably goes for miles.

Returning along the Wellgill X vein we nipped up the BH Vein for a quick recce for a future trip. Climbing onto the level arching, we came into some flat-type workings with packs of deads supporting the roof exactly as in Gutterby. An interesting stone-lined sump was noted, after which the way on became more collapsed, until after dropping down and then crawling, there was no way on.

Returning to the BH Vein Horse Level, we began our exit, but just after leaving the stone-arching a hole was spotted above in the solid rock. This was maypoled to a small working which has a blocked rise in it; there was also a piece of wood wedged in the pack with a candle sitting on it.

On the way out, a rise was noted between the flats and the Engine Sump, which will be tried next time.

Bill Griffin.

Brownley Hill Mine, Nenthead Sunday, 20th November 1994

Present:- Dave Banks, Rob Scott, Steve Johnstone, Mick Lomas, Karen Molyneux, Noel Wood, Kathy Prince, Bill, Tony and Kevin Griffin.

This was a return to the High Level, to try to climb a rise found by Mick twelve months earlier.

Having failed to access the High Level in October, the intention was to maypole the roped rise, and fit a newer SRT rope, kindly donated by Noel Wood. Unfortunately, I left the rope at home, not remembering it until we were past Cockermouth on the way! Rob and Sieve were most amused by this display of advanced senility, the rope being the focal point of the whole exercise.
We arrived at the parking area at 9.55, and waited for the others, Mick being surprisingly sparing in his criticism of my blunder. We were lucky in that he had a spare rope which we could use to rope the rise if needed, and we entered the level at 11.00.

Having collected the poles from their hiding place on the way, we entered the area of the rise, along the North Middle Vein, and Mick and Noel inspected the installed rope, and passed it as climbable. Mick kitted up, ascended, and rigged electronics for the rest of the party.

Having ascended, I searched for the date and initials identified by John Lawson in his article in Review No. 15, and found them on the RH side of the rise-top. Unfortunately it did not appear to say Mar.1779, but 1991! Mick and I spent a little time trying to decipher the indistinct carvings, until Mick tried indirect lighting from below, which revealed the 1991 to indeed be 1779, although the supposed month was in fact the initial MA, and R or M. There were also other initials and another date, 1820. While Mick tried to clean the grooves I set up my camera, and tried to record the find.

By the time I was finished, the team and maypole were all up, but having found no sound rock to fit new delay hangers for the SRT rope, Noel decided to go back! Kathy, a little reluctantly, joined him, and Karen opted to join them rather than sit about while rises were ascended. They spent a little while on a tourist trip to the blue sump and left for an afternoon in the pub.

So, seven remaining members moved north along the level towards the rise. Within feet of the roped rise was a major fall which involved a wriggle through a gap below a rather ominous-looking slab hanging from the roof, but this was passed without incident although Sieve moved it when he nudged it during his passage through. Beyond this, on the left was a sump, and an open level which passed three other sumps to the right. The first, Pearson's Sump, adjacent to the level., appeared blocked at about 15-20ft, the next two were quite a few yards from the level. Finally the level became constricted just before the crossroads. To the right was a walled sump, which again seemed blocked at about 15ft, and a rise, which was walled off from the RH arm of the crossroads. A small incline crawl rose to the left above a wall. Beyond these was the junction, the intended rise being in the LH arm a couple of yards in. Although the plan does not show a crossroads here, the location appears to be on Brownley Hill North Vein.

Mick free-climbed into the rise, and he and I began to erect the maypole, assisted by Steve. Mick began his climb, discovering a large slab suspended on a ledge about 12ft up, and a walled slot in the back of the rise at about 210ft, which led into a working on the Brownley Hill North Vein. While we waited, Mick scouted the possibilities each way, but Tony became impatient, and ascended to join him. When Mick returned, I began my own ascent, and Tony went off west to push the scouting further.

On reaching the working, I discussed with Mick the possibility of further ascent, but was interrupted by a voice below us in the working. Rather than sit about down below, Rob and Steve had found that the incline on the left in the approach to the crossroads led to a rise of about 10ft up into our working. As they prepared to climb this, I went east up into some small workings, then on into a stope with a sump in its foot, traversed the funnel-shaped understope onto the other side, and into a working and forehead. Disappointed with the find, I returned to find Mick back in the rise looking at further ascent. As Steve was now at the top of his climb, I moved west to get out of his way, and met Tony descending the rubble slope. He described a number of workings and a muddy level with sumps and rises, so I ascended the loose rubble slope with difficulty, and crawled over the top into a stope beyond.

I found an understope with a timbered sump below me, with what looked like three levels fanning out at angles beyond. Traversing a large rock on a ledge to the LH side, I looked into the two RH arms to see that they both led into a stope with a sump in the foot, and then followed the LH level, past a crosscut into the stope side, and on into a level from which water poured into a large sump on the right. This level was the muddy one, with orange mud having formed a cascade of rising shelves ascending up the level. Part way along here, walking on the hard crust, my leg disappeared up to the knee into the mud below the crust, and I progressed further very carefully, to find a hole in the top of the stoping apparently into a higher level. The fork in the workings and the large sump, match the plan, adding weight to it being on BHN Vein.

Having returned, I waited for the others, and when joined by Steve and young Kevin, we all re-checked the ground again. I went into the RH fork to see if there was a way down and sensing movement to my left threw my arm up as a large slab peeled off the pillar and bit my shoulder and the side of my head. Luckily 1 was able to literally shrug it off in front of me, where it crashed into the stope. It was about 4ft long 3ft wide and 2ft thick, but luckily had been shaley vein-rock rather than limestone, and did little damage other than a bruised ear, arm and ego.

The middle fork, the other side of the pillar, was also quite unstable, and we then viewed the stope from the short crosscut. From here were a series of footholds down to the sump, which I used to get down into it, and found a working in line with the stope, and another of to the LH side into a small working below the level. There was another sump in the floor of the former, but I did not venture down this in case I could not get back out. Rejoining the others we looked again at the muddy level, but the crust gave way altogether. Returning towards the large sump, we found a walled-up side level on the left, which Kevin explored, to find a small working running west for a few yards. Sieve decided to explore the timbered sump in the floor of the first understope, and descended this to find a short blocked level running back east.

When joined by Tony and Bill, another shot was tried of the muddy level, which Bill and Kevin scaled the stope to the hole up into the assumed higher level, but it too was a small working blocked to the west.

Tony then re-checked the sump in the side stope, and descended the further sump of 10ft I had not attempted. He found a level running through a crawl back cast, and a working beyond. When he ascended, he was replaced by Bill and Kevin, who pushed through to the working, finding a short sump on the right, about 15ft deep and blocked at the bottom, and a drop beyond. Through a hole in the base of this, entry was made into thigh-deep water in a level which went on to the West, running water being heard in front of them. They felt it prudent to leave this for a future trip, and returned.

Having effectively exhausted the immediate possibilities apart from a calcite whitened rise above the RH fork, which had two apparent levels in it, we were joined by Rob and Mick, who had been ascending the original rise.

Rob and Mick had pulled the maypole up the shaft, re-positioning it in the rise, and were able to look across at the same height as the top of the rubble slope, but separated by the stoping. About ten feet above this again, Mick found another level to the east which led to a forehead. Several feet into this level, he free-climbed a calcited and stempled rise for about 25ft to a level running east which was
beautifully calcited, like "Santa's Grotto" he says, but he did not enter until it could be recorded photographically. The rise ascended again to the west, where he found a 2ft square level beading south, with tonnes of large broken rock to the north, which he hopes to explore next time.

The two lads were shown the large sump, and the rise above the RH stope, and were told of the watered level below, everybody agreeing that there was potential for at least another trip to push the untried areas further.

On our way out, Tony had been followed by Kevin, and while I waited at the top of the rubble slope for him to descend, the slope started to move below me, I shouted a warning, and tried to hold the rubble back, but not for long, and with a rush it went. Kevin heeded my urgent warning, and took off like a gazelle down the last few yards, leaping the rise-top to join Tony, closely followed by a 3ft diameter boulder. Fortunately the boulder and accompanying rubble settled before reaching the rise-top, and we all carefully
made our way down, me and Mick using the climbing rise (hopper?) back into the level. Mick, for some reason, opted to come down the 45deg slope head-first, and looked a little uncomfortable emerging from the head-height opening until I offered him a back to help him out of the hole he bad got himself into. (Nice turn of phrase that wasn't it?)
Mick and I dismantled the maypole, while Rob and Steve attempted to follow Tony and Kevin east and down the funnel into the sump, which dropped into the western arm of the crossroads. This was a little ill-advised, as they had to cross a further sump in the level and some difficulties were experienced before they joined the rest of us. This sump had been descended by the Griffins, and found to lead east to a rise, blocked a few feet up, and a deep, dog-legged sump, which continued on down, possibly to the Horse Level?

The Griffins were keen to descend another sump they had found earlier in the RH side of the northern arm of the crossroads, and I joined them while they rigged the pitch. The sump was a nice clean oval one of about 25ft, and Tony was soon over the edge and on his way down. Meanwhile my attention was directed by young Kevin to another set of initials and a date on the LH side of the cross cut to the sump. This example was far clearer than that of the roped rise, being one set of initials I.T. and a date 1785, with another set of initials W.T. to the RH side of the sump, but no accompanying date.

Tony was gone for a little while, but on his return reported a level running north, but full to the roof with shale, which when dug revealed a filled sump on the left, and more shale beyond. A level in rock led west to a shallow water-filled sump about 4-5 inches deep. To the south was a back-filled level but appeared to be filled to the roof further in. Bill was keen to have a look but time was getting on, and others in the team needed the gear to descend the roped rise, so the party made their way out.

Mick, Steve, Rob and I left the poles at the crossroads for the return trip, made our way to the roped rise, and began to rig the pitch, but it was some time before the Griffins arrived, they having decided that they would need some of the poles for their on going explorations below. They had also found more initials on the level and other sump tops, which they detailed to me on their arrival. Between the crossroads and the dated sump on the western wall W.T. was faintly carved, and below it another well defined I.T. surrounded by a circle of cut dots, and at another point another well-carved set. On the stumped sump they found W.T. on the RH side of the sump, but none were accompanied by further dates.

It would be an interesting exercise, as many of these sumps are un-named on the mine plan, to record these initials, which seem to signify the sinkers and the date sunk, and use research techniques to name the sumps. Looking at the plan, except for Forest's and Pearson's Sumps immediately north of the roped rise, the practise of naming sumps and rises doesn't seem to have begun until the latter part of the driving of the High Level (first driven) and continued when the Horse Level was driven below it. This is suggested because the plan shows named sumps on the High Level above the eastern end of BH Vein. Having said this, the evidence now shows that the High Level reached our roped rise in 1779, and the sump beyond the crossroads six years later in 1785, which, even with the sinking of the intervening sumps, suggests a small workforce.

The ladders were rigged, and I followed Steve down to the sub-level, where I could hear voices coming from the sump down from the end of the MW connection. Thinking that it was Noel and the girls, I told Steve I would join them, and he could pass me the poles from the connecting crosscut.

On reaching the sump via the circuitous passages I found that it was not Noels party, but a group of four explorers from Bolton, trying to free climb up from the Horse Level. The leader passed a rope up to me and attempted to climb, but I ended up pulling him bodily from the hole. I advised the others to wait, and shouted up to Steve for an electron and belay, which young Kevin provided for this crosscut. As this was being prepared the others joined us, and the four explorers decided to follow us along MNV to add this route to their existing knowledge of the mine.

Mick and I moved off, closely followed by Rob, but the others were a little delayed by the fours inexperience in crossing the sump midway along MW Steve eventually caught up with us, exiting with the Bolton contingent, but the Griffins had decided to remain, and after depositing the poles in their hidden store, they explored an area south of the crossroads on Wellgill X Vein, descending a sump in a southerly level, which led down into a short level blocked at the southern end, and running water to the northern forehead.

We left for home just before five, Mick chasing my car up the potholed track to the road, but he was in reverse! He was a little more reserved on the way home, actually staying behind me all the way to the M6 for some reason.

A good trip, and although no artefacts were found, we did break new ground as the floors of the workings reached were still clog-marked. We did fulfil the club aims by recording photographically some aspects of the mine, and making some sense of the mine plan, so often proved to be wildly inaccurate.

Dave Banks.

Brownley Hill mine, Nenthead, Sunday 28th November 1993

Present:- Dave Banks, Mike McCrickard, Mike Banks, Mick Lomas, Bill Griffin, Kevin Griffin, Steve Johnstone, Dave Bowness, Steve Dent.

After early morning efforts to ensure we had the arrived at Nenthead Car Park by 10.40, and made our way over iced tracks to the mine, changed, and entered at around 1 lam.

As four of the team were new to the mine, I explained various features as we went in, using the easier but wetter route via Wellgill X Vein and Brownley Hill Vein, which prompted many cries of near ecstasy in the 1 metre of thigh deep water (?).

We took the LH arm of the impressive stone-arched junction into BH Vein, and ascended the ladderway into the workings between BH and BH North Veins, where we stopped for lunch. This done, we moved inbye along BH Nth Vein to the second rise we had found on our previous visit.

The maypole was assembled and after some adjustment and a trial run, Mick climbed the electron ladder, and entered the High Level. He moved outbye for some distance, discovering a number of sumps, and then moved a little way inbye reporting many clog prints.

On his return, he suggested pushing further, and I offered to ascend and act as his back-up. Luckily Mick was available to steady the top of the maypole, as the size of the rise allowed a considerable bend to pull the top away from the lip.
We moved inbye first, along a trench about 18 inches deep cut into the floor, presumably for bogeys. The trench itself had once been underwater, as many clog-prints of all sizes were covering the 12 inch lip on both sides, as well as some on the floor of the trench. Some of the prints on the floor appeared to be boot prints.

We followed the level over about 100 yards of falls, to arrive at an area that crossed the level, with a sump slightly to the left of our level and another about ten yards to the right of the level, with large slabs of roof partially filling the space between them.

The LH sump had loose material around it, making it awkward to see down it, but a rock thrown into it fell about 20-odd feet. The RH sump was better, the floor being visible about 20ft down, but a large slab was perched overhanging the edge. The furthest (RH) side was walled, and the outbye side appeared to be undermined, but no level was visible. A short drive had been made past the sump, but appeared to stop in fractured ground. We looked between the slabs at where the level might have gone on, but there appeared to be no way forward.

Retracting our steps, we reported our finds to the others, and went on to inspect outbye. We took a LH crosscut to a loft blind sump, with a small working beyond, a short drive beyond being walled up with rocks to hold the fractured roof.

Turning outbye again, we reached another sump, with a tallow-candle lamp on a ledge at its entrance. An accompanying Marathon wrapper had a May 1988 sell-by date. A My Mums Lemonade can was also next to the sump itself. We had been preceded by at least one person, over five years before!

We advised the others to join us, and moved on down the level trying to stay on rocks in the water, to prevent stirring up gases from the mud (hydrogen sulphide).

We passed a number of sumps and short levels to sumps before turning from our general south of west heading to nearly a directly southerly heading.

We were joined by Mike Mc, Bill & Kevin, And Steve J, and everybody began taking detours into levels on each side, Mike finding one that opened out into a large slope and seemed to go on, which on later looking at the plan, seems to have been the one marked "old level now run close". Unfortunately our intention to check it on our return, didn't work out, due to the time.

Moving ever further south, we passed a number of rises, as well as sumps, some of which do not appear on the plan.

Finally we reached a major level turning back NW and followed it to a fork. The LH fork went to the top of a laddered rise, the RH fork turning north past a deep sump, to a second one with a delayed SRT rope fitted. A Mars wrapper dated Oct 1987 gave an indication of this being the point where our predecessor ascended, the rust on the Maillon reinforcing the supposition.

I had been getting a feeling of deja-vu since the junction, and suddenly realised where we were! This was the rise from the Middle Vein area which had been our access to the High Level route to the southern end of the Jug Vein, back in 1989.

We moved inbye through a fall of large slabs, and on through water past shorter levels to sumps now on the RH side, discovering the letters "NH." carved in the wall at the top of one sump. Eventually we came to a crossroads, the LH arm running about 20 yards, but with a climbing rise mid-way along it. The RH arm led nowhere, and the level inbye, not shown on the plan, led to a load of iron stained mud flowing in from somewhere.

On our way back, we found a rise and sump just outbye of the crossroads, which is shown as a sump.

Returning all the way back to the original level, we continued south into a junction running west, and through some stone arching to a chamber with a watered level beyond. This began at thigh depth and required lengths of steel scaffold pipe, we all duly was stood trying to keep warm, the water was neck high on Karen in sections of the level; I think if I had been in her very small shoes, I might not have bothered. Needless to say, I was harassed for not knowing the depth of water. She advised me that Mitch had not followed, and that Pat had returned to ensure he was safe. I decided this was a good time to exit, and so would anybody else who was being viewed as I was by Karen "I taught Ivan (the Terrible) everything he knew" Molyneaux

We all met up at the small exit climb, Pat Karen and myself rather wet, Mitch looking extremely sensible and dry.

After changing back at the car, it took a good half an hour for feeling to return to parts of my body; I hope that went for everybody else, I hate to suffer alone!

The drive back over the pass via Buttertubs, was as exciting as it was beautiful. The views melted away the horrors of only an hour or so ago, but I think I may leave the next trip to Gunnerside for the summer - and with dry suits.

(Billy Griffin writes up a lot of meet reports from here on. He didn't like doing it, although he makes a decent job of it. He was late sending a lot in so I have had to try to sort them out. Please excuse any bad continuity. RF)

Brownley Hill MineFriday, 30th December 1994

Present:- Bill, Tony, and Kevin Griffin.

We returned to Brownley Hill to continue the search for a way up to the elusive High Level above the Wellgill X Vein. First though, we turned right at the Engine Sump, and headed south down the level, past the rise we had tried clearing on an earlier-visit. The three-way connection on the mine plan is correct, with the crosscut leading off to a forehead, after flat-out crawls on the way.

Returning to the sump level, a sump was passed on the right with blue water in the bottom. Further on, the floor ceased to exist, but was spanned by a rail; however, a hole on the left led down to a point where the water-filled bottom of the hole could be reached. The
water again looked blue, and was very deep; by bridging across the level, the earlier sump bottom was reached, but shortly after there was no way on.

Returning to the railed hole, we moved on to a junction; to the left it was blocked, to the right a working had a watered level heading off, but the roof came down to the water. We could find no way to the Y-junction where the Wellgill X meets the Guddarrigill Burn X Vein, so we returned to clear the rise.

Having brought a lump hammer this time, to break up the jammed rock we took turns bashing away at it until a large piece sheared off just sufficient for a tight squeeze through. A strong draught was coming down the level now, and going up the newly opened rise, so we were eager for a look. There was an amount of rubble stacked up directly in front, but just above the level we were in, was a recess in the rise. We decided it would be better to squeeze through and get into this recess, rather than try to clear a bigger entrance and risk bringing too much down. Tony went in while we waited as back-up to dig open an exit if needed. He informed us that a hole in the recess appeared to go on, and we waited for him to report back. We were surprised to hear his voice come from the level behind us, and on going to look, were able to climb up to him through another hole which we had missed previously. We followed him through a tight squeeze back to the recess. Moving across the loose stuff, we were able to look up to daylight many feet above. The large bore iron pipe runs from the level all the way up this day shaft which appeared to be topped with an Alston Cap, and is in very good condition. Pausing for photos, we then dropped down the squeeze as the quickest way back to the level.

Moving back past the Engine Sump, we went straight on and maypoled Rise No. 10 on the previous map. This simply goes back a few feet at the top, and is nothing of note. Much closer to the Engine Sump is another rise, possibly the first connection up to the High Level shown on the mine plan. We began erecting the maypole, but the action of doing this, and climbing the electron, caused stuff to fall down the rise, and began to undermine a rock perched at the top. As there was room to remove the maypole in one piece, we removed the electron, and used the maypole to dislodge the perched rock. The maypole was then re-rigged and ascended to the ledge, but revealed only a deep recess. The rise does continue to one side for a long way, and is fitted with square stemples, but there is no floor to work from, and the wall is very loose. It was impossible to climb. But good luck to anyone who tries it, because it probably leads to the High Level. (A job for Mr Fellows? -ED)

(Who do you think I am, bloody superman. RF)

Moving on up to the Brownley Hill Vein, we climbed up into the stopees heading east climbing a couple of walls, passing a sump down to the Horse Level, leading eventually to a high narrow slope.

Dropping down 25 ft on an electron to a rock strewn floor, the Horse Level could be seen about the same distance below. From this horizon, a way-on could be seen, across the stope; but could not be reached across the void. Returning to the Horse Level, the rock strewn floor could be seen from below to be a false floor of deads stacked on stemples. Climbing above the arching, where there always seems to be falling water, the continuation was reached, but goes to nothing except a forehead.

On the way out, a nice rise was free-climbed part way, to where a level could be seen, which appeared to go to either side, but was left as a spur for a return visit, and we exited the mine at about 8.30pm.

We must have been one of the last cars down Hartside in 1994, as the following morning it was closed by snow.

Bill Griffin.

Brownley Hill Mine Sunday,  8th January 1995

Present:- Bill, Tony, and Kevin Griffin.

We returned to the rise partly climbed on the last visit, on the left of the crosscut between Wellgill X and Guddarrigill Burn X beyond the Engine Sump.

Having climbed up, we found a level heading N-S, and headed south. After passing some small workings and climbing a wall, the floor of the level was covered in a black crust, which broke through into an orange sludge. The floor then vanished into an undermine which we traversed across, a wall of deads being at the far end. A narrow working on the left led back to the level, which then sloped down a squeeze through deads. Care should be taken getting down the three foot ledge at the bottom, as there are some beautiful stals here which cannot be seen from above, but are hanging from the ledge. One of them must be all of eighteen inches long.

There are several ways on from the stope here. The first on the right was nothing; the second was back-filled but could be seen going on over the deads. A climb down was seen, but first we continued south following the level.

A six foot climb down, led to a stope with a Y-junction at the far end, but both arms were blocked. There are some stemples in the roof here 6-8 inches long.

Returning to the stape, we climbed down and came to a N-S junction. South was a stope, but north led to a crawl west into a stope on the left, and another down, on the right returning to the start of the crawl, we continued north, then climbed down a wall of deads, with a bole through at the base. We pressed on (north) into another stope beyond, and then returned to the hole. As we were looking at the hole, a rock-fall was heard in the stope we had left.

The hole was a man-way through timbered deads, with a series of steps going down; the last 8-10 feet must have had a ladder once, but it was no longer there. The end of the man-way was a level heading east, with a water-filled sump on the left. The level is only short and joins a stone-arched watered level heading N-S. Going south the water was getting deeper, when I noticed a small opening on the left, and part of an old ladder on the right. The opening led to a rather collapsed level, curving round, and I realised at this point where I was, having been here on a previous trip. This was the level marked on the plan as “level below the tuft”, and we had just crossed the GBX Vein Horse Level.

Returning to the end of the level at the manway bottom Kevin discovered an inscription on the wall “TXA 1897” we thought the “X” perhaps stood for “&”.
Returning up the man-way to the stal stope, well pleased, we intended heading north from the top of the entry rise, but after the traverse we remembered a hole on the right (east) that we had not checked. We crawled into this and into a high narrow stope.

On the way into the stope, a small hole on the left led into the stope further north, and on the right a level shaped like an inverted ‘V’ led south to a blockage.

In the stope to the right, the ground led ever higher to the south to a dead end, and on returning, the stope led north, high and narrow. It reminded me of Tatters String ahead, we came to an orange coloured rise, down which water was running. Scrambling up and over the rubbish at the base, we entered an even narrower section. Wedged rocks in the roof were noticed, many of which had new fallen onto the floor. This section led on to what may have been a sump or understope, but was now blocked.

Back at the wet rise, we climbed up to a middle horizon onto the deads viewed from below. There is another horizon above this one also. Moving north along the middle horizon, we came to a working on the left, which then turned right through more orange grunge,
before turning left at the end at a 3ft step up. Here, we found an old lamp, rusty, but in good condition. Up the step and along, we came to a 15ft drop down into a level, about 10 yards to the north of the top of the entry rise!

We returned to the stope, to get the top horizon, but on climbing up, a gap in the floor prevented onward progress, although it appears to go farther than the lower two horizons. It may just be like the southern end, rising up to nothing. The wet rise may lead to more, but the smooth sides caused by the running water, prevented a climb.

Back at the top of the entry rise, we were eager to reach the level to the north, as the plan showed it went some distance. However, reality did not live up to the plan, as we hit a forehead after just fifty yards. A bit of a sickener but we did find the business end of an old scraper along here.

One pleasant surprise to the day was the complete absence of empty beer cans in the higher areas we had visited.

Bill Griffin.

(Bill tells me that in a number of places, undisturbed clog-prints were seen, and as the black-crusted orange mud was undisturbed also, it seems likely that this was a “first entry” by them. The artefacts found also tend to support this. - BD)

Brownley Hill Mine Sunday, July 16th 1995

Present:- Bill. Tony, and Kevin Griffin.

Having entered the mine, we made our way down Brownley Hill Vein, past the High Cross Vein junction, and entered the arched entrance on the left. We crawled up into the stope, and climbed the wall at the eastern end to inspect the ventilation fan.

We had been asked by DKB to look at the possibility of digging around it to see if it could be removed.

The fan was visible from below, but the base-plate is wedged in position by a rock hanging through the slot in the roof of the first chamber above the climb.

On climbing up the rise beyond this chamber, and into the level of the fan, we saw that the fan appeared to be holding back material from a rise. We searched various levels and understopes for an alternative exit, but found nothing, so, as digging it out might cut off the exit, and possibly damage the fan with more stuff coming down the rise, it was left for an attempt by a bigger party

(Good, hope it says there. RF)

Descending back down into the stope, a couple of holes were seen 20ft above the entrance, but when accessed, they just connected into a small working.
Back at the Horse Level, we moved further East to look at the deep-watered section seen by DKB and Derek (Journal 7 page 17). At a collapse, a small arched level was seen just above, and was entered to a block after 20 yards. We then moved on through a collapsed area in yellow shale, with stemples across now at knee-height. On reaching the far end, we looked down into the arching; the water was gone.

Quickly entering the level, we were impressed by its size, it being about 8ft high arching. At about 7ft height, a black tide-mark ran all along the level, indicating the old water level: now the water did not cover our wellies, and railes could be seen still in position, with a double-width section and points still in situ. The arching is from wall to wall, alternating from the left, then the right, with square holes in the roof at intervals. The first three of these have been boarded over from above, but the next three open into a large stope above.

The stope was entered and found to run the full length of the level, approx 100 Yards. It was 40-50ft high, with stemples in many places, some with boards across, and high in the roof others could be seen with deads still on them, as the last working platforms.

At the far western end, a blocked rise was cleared, revealing a wooden ladder. The rise has some dodgy stuff hanging in it, but appears to connect through into the stope-top, perhaps onto a level of false-flooring high above. We also suspected a connection from the foot of the rise into the small level above the main level, mentioned earlier.

At the far eastern end, the stope appears to have fallen and run through an opening into the level below, blocking it. This is an excellent place for a dig, as the size of the hole would limit the spread of the fall, although there might still be water behind it. Could there still be a connection through to Scaith Hole mine?

Having been well-pleased with our unexpected find, we moved on into the High Cross/Jug Vein system, and scouted through to Thompson’s Sump, in preparation for a maypole attempt in the next visit.

Bill Griffin.

Present:- Bill, Tony, and Kevin Griffin

Driving down the track to the parking place, a car following us parked, and two guys began pulling mining gear out of it. I went over for a quick crack, and discovered that they were Dave Hacker (a WCMR member) and George Wilson (another mineral collector), also going into Brownley. We were to meet them twice more underground later.

Having made our way to Waltons Rise area on the High Cross Vein. Kevin attempted to cross round a sump (A on plan) in the entrance to the LH (east) arm into the level beyond, but the shale gave way and down he went. Fortunately the sump was blocked and dry about 12ft down, so he quickly climbed back out, none the worse. We eventually crossed using a rail, but apart from the blind Spa Well Rise, there is nothing along here until it ends at a collapse/forehead.

On to the Central Jug Vein, and a sump (B on plan) 25 yards north of the multiple crossroads had blue water in the bottom, but a level could be seen in shallower water. I went down the electron for a look; a level ran off both sides of the sump. To the north it was quickly blocked, to the south it appeared to step up and go on. As I continued descending into the water searching for the bottom, I could be seen in shallower water. I went down the electron for a look; a level ran off both sides of the sump. To the north it was quickly blocked, to the south it appeared to step up and go on. As I continued descending into the water searching for the bottom, I ran out of ladder before finding it, and as the open level was on the other side of the sump I could not reach it.

Continuing south, a dry sump (C on plan) between the crossroads and Walton’s Sump was descended, and had a crossroads at the bottom, but none of the levels led very far. The east and west branches ended in foreheads. the north and south sections appear to be part of the system below the Horse Level, but were watered and blocked.

Back up again, and across the top of the sump, a level could be seen at the mouth of which was a shovel, a long bar, and a single clog. Crossing round the sump, these were reached; the level only going 30yds. A little digging about around the tools revealed a shot-hole scraper in two pieces, and a rusty metal can without a lid. Also, under a small slab, were a couple of dozen clay balls about the size of peas. We couldn’t figure out any use these might have been put to, unless you can imagine the miner sitting there at the sump-top and firing them down at workmates below!

(They are probably for sticking tallow candles to rocks, their equivalent of our Blue Tack. RF)

We then went on to Thompsons Sump. (This is marked on the plan as a sump, having been driven down from the High Level. but when approached from the Horse Level horizon, is in fact, first a wall surmounted by an incline to a rise, and then a short level to the foot of Thompsons Sump - Ed)

This sump had a pile of muddy rubbish in the bottom, with a large lump of roof sitting on it. The whole sump is black and muddy and wet, too wide to chimney, and un-climbable. However, we erected the maypole, which just reached the top of the wall of rock lining the top 3ft of the sump. As I ascended and came to eye-level with the base of the walling, I could see the foundation that it had been built on was long gone. In fact, the wall is hanging in midair, not a very comforting sight considering that the maypole was leaning on it, and I had to descend the electron hanging below it. I got back down, and we re-positioned the maypole, and Tony went up for another look. As he climbed, the maypole began sinking, eventually going down about 4ft, leaving him short of the sump top. He came back down, and we attempted to get another length on. Tony lifted the poles while I was putting on the next, this was not properly connected when Tony informed me he had lifted the maypole too vertically and caught it in some loose roof directly above. We froze, and then after a quick 1-2-3, we dropped the poles, and shot out into the level. Fortunately nothing came off, but what we need is a foot for the maypole, to stop it sinking. (Later provided by DKB, for future attempts.)

Bill Griffin.

Having checked out previous copies of the Journal for an alternative High Level access to Thompson's Sump, I found what I wanted. (see J7, p 14) We made our way to the Central Jug Vein, to where the level veered SW at the wall at the foot of the incline up to Thompson's Sump. At the next bend where the level turned south again, is a large rise up into a maze of workings surveyed by DKB, Noel, et al in July 1990. That survey (see 38, plb) showed two rises, which looked as if they would ascend into the E-W section of the High Level between Thompson's Sump and Peat's Sump.

We climbed the wall at the top of the mud slope, and then another at the end of the 1st level, before crossing the sump to look at the two rises. We put the may ole up the first rise (manway), but it was just too short to look at the rise top, so we built a rock foundation for the pole. The rise is driven through limestone all the way, and is very sound, an old metal hanger being driven in part the way up. At the top, it breaks into the bad rock (shale) of the High Level, with a slope of fallen roof material at the getting-off point. The pole bending during the ascent, caused it to move away from the slope, and Kevin had the bright idea of tying a rope to the maypole top, and throwing it over to drop down the haulage rise beyond. Tony could then hang onto it and pull the maypole into the slope. This also gave something to hold onto when climbing off the maypole.

This was done, and a wide arched level could be seen on the RH (west) side. After ascending the slope, which was fairly stable, a continuation to the left (east), partly buried, was also visible, the rises being to each side of the E-W level. A modern digging tool was also found here, presumably left by a previous explorer: the pouch having rotted, but the tool was in pristine condition. It can be reclaimed by its owner if identified, but will be put to good use meanwhile.

Moving east, the arching soon ended and we entered the usual shattered conditions of the High Level. We progressed forward in a crouch, until we came to Thompson's Sump, the top of which was avoided due to the hanging packwall collar. Too much wall had collapsed for there to be a date, so we continued east until we reached more arching after about 50 yards, partly buried by collapse, and blocked 10 yards inbye. This effectively seals off the 80ft Climbing Rise from the High Cross Vein, and also Yorg's Sump, so we continued east until we reached the junction east towards Thompson's Sump. Obviously (Tony wouldn't even let me try for best of three) Eventually we got into the High Level using the maypole, and also Yorg's Sump further east.

Returning to the maypole, we headed west, through sections of arched level, broken by collapses, until we reached a T junction. There was no sign of Forest's Rise or Peat's Sump, perhaps they do not access the High Level. A pack-wall could be seen at the junction, buried by roof, and we went south, but the going became tighter, and knowing from the Journal of a block along here, we did not push it, turning back before any sign of the short junction shown on the map.

Back to the T-junction and continuing North along more bad level, this time with no arching, we came to a forehead with a sump. (Viewed from below in J7 p 14) No workings off the High Level were noted apart from this, Thompson's Sump, and our ascent rise.

Returning to the Horse Level, we turned South to a point where the level curves under the High Level (SE of Forest's Rise) and accessed the rise previously viewed from above by DKB, Noel et al, entering the SE section they were unable to reach. This though, is just a straight drive of sound level ending in a forehead exactly as shown on the map.

Bill Griffin

Returning to the Central Jug Vein we entered the first rise from the north end, which has a large pack wall to the left. This had a level to the left (south) and right (north); the left side was climbed to an arched level which had a branch to a small stop. The main level didn't go far until it was blocked. So we began checking the arching for artefacts, with Kevin scratching about in the floor. He managed to turn up a miners' pocket knife, well encrusted but recognisable, and a pipe bowl with a crown on one side, and Prince of Wales feathers on the other.

(This sub-level, and its continuation from the next rise to the south, appears to have been created using mine rock as arching in the base of the Jug Vein, the void being back-filled above it as the stoping continued up. It appears to have been used as a dry area for changing wet clogs for dry ones, and having a meal and a smoke, hence the many finds of artefacts both on this trip and in early explorations -ED)

Returning to the Horse Level, we moved on south towards Graham's Sump. A working just off the right of the Horse Level was climbed into, and from the top of a step-up created by a wall, a level could be seen above our entrance-way. This was accessed, but is only very short with a rise to the High Level at the end. The pile of debris at the foot of the rise, can be traversed to drop back into the Horse Level beyond. An interesting feature here is the installed railway; there are two sets with one being laid directly on top of the other. The toe set being of a much narrower gauge.

The Horse Level was then followed to the 20 ft step-up at Graham's Sump, which was climbed, and the first rise south was ascended. Going north, we came to an intersection just looked at, with a continuation across it, which was walled-up. (We confirmed later that this rise continues to the High Level) Returning south, our entrance rise was passed and then we climbed up to reach the foot of Short's Sump. A squeeze on the left (cast) led to a parallel rise, but Short's was climbed first. The slope at the top prevented our getting off into the level, so we drew lots to see who would return to Graham's Sump for the maypoles, which unfortunately I lost. (Tony wouldn't even let me try for best of three) Eventually we got into the High Level using the maypole, and went north, passing the top of the rise previously noted, into worsening ground until we came to the junction east towards Thompson's Sump. Obviously no blockage exists where we had turned back on our last trip.

Returning south, beyond the maypole, we went through the bottom of Roughside (Day) Shaft, and turned east to a sump. A level can be seen part way, down, but with the electron already being used on the maypole, we had to leave it.
The High Level to the cast is watered just beyond here, deepening beyond thigh depth inbye, but a drainage channel has been dug by someone to try and send the water down the sump. The floor around the sump is clean rock, and the watered level floor is below the height so not much can drain away. We wondered how it was drained when driven, during mining operations. Being fairly exhausted by now, we left the wading, and returned to the maypole. At the top of Short’s Sump is a “window” through into the parallel sump beyond (thought to have been a level when first visited by the Group during initial explorations -ED). This had apparently been walled-up at some time, but looking across Short’s, Kevin spotted a carved date on the back wall of the sump beyond. I accessed the sump by moving the maypole across from below and climbing up through the “window”. Putting the electron down the parallel sump, the others joined me, and several photos were taken. The inscription read “WW 1781”, and was 4-5 inches high and deeply chiselled, the two W’s being interlocked. The sinking of the presumably later Short’s Sump seemed illogical, as the only way off the dated sump top is to the High Level anyway, and both down to the same place. The only difference is, the exit from the dated sump is a low chute cut through the limestone into Short’s.

Delighted with this discovery, we descended the sumps, Tony and Kev down the “1781” sump, and myself down the maypole in Short’s. While the maypole was being dismantled, Kevin spotted a complete clay pipe sitting on a rock ledge at eye level directly opposite the chute from the “1781” sump. The pipe had a plain bowl, with “T. Nugent, Glasgow” on the stem.

On our way back out, we decided to take the junction west to Walton’s Sump. climbed the rise, and moved south to view the clogs detailed in a previous journal.

Several pipe bowls were turned up, and noted as follows:- (1) Tree one side, wheatsheaf on other, with small foot at bottom of bowl. (2) Plain bowl, “McDouggall, Glasgow” on stem, no foot. (3) Sailing ship one side, something enclosed by oakleaf garland on other, with foot. (4) Plain bowl, but with “Pringle, Carlisle” facing the smoker, no foot, but curiously flattened stem. (5) Hatched heart on bowl, “TW” on back, “McKenna. Gateshead” on stem.

Kevin also found the needle in the haystack, in the form of a brass pin which was in the packwall. This was green with age, but why was it down there?

Bill Griffin

Brownley Hill Mine Sunday, 22nd October 1995

Present:- Bill and Kevin Griffin.

The purpose of this trip was to bring back the maypoles to the North Middle Vein, ready for the meet on the Sunday following.

Tony declined his help, making it more difficult for the two of us. Having collected the poles, we couldn't resist a rise from the Horse Level of the North Jug Vein, which runs south from the Jug - Brownley Hill Vein junction, before turning west.

After a struggle, the maypole was eventually erected, and we ascended into a stone-arched level. A couple of hours was spent looking over ground already done by the Group, but new to us. However, a couple of points are worth mentioning.

At the sump top spanned below by rails and deads just above the entrance to the Jug Vein (First reached from below, by Mike Banks and Del, and later abseiled Del) the way on east was blocked by a wall and a run from a rise behind it. We lowered the wall to gain access, and cleared a way to the right of the run, the level beyond was visible, and once the run seemed stable enough I slid through. Thirty yards in was a complete block, seeming from above. No time was spent on this, as the oxygen level appeared to be low, and I was glad to get back to the wall. The blocked rise was then tackled, several stemples being in amongst it, one of which was the key to the block. As much as could be safely cleared was removed, but the “key” stemple was left due to the lack of room for a quick exit.

Just west of here, a traverse into a working with a sump was looked at. The sump drops to the way to the walled level, and has a small level out of reach above it. This was accessed with a long rail, and runs north for about 30 yards to a forehead. The floor is thick with the fine black shale found in parts of North Middle Vein. A back-filled level, also at the sump-top, appears to have a rise at the back, and again this was cleared as far as possible without tools, but still remains blocked.

Down the sump and into the level, a couple of clay pipes were found buried under rocks: these were left on a rock ledge for others to see.

Further south, in the high workings, a fall of plate and shale was spotted in a stope. This was out of place, as the roof was all limestone, so we had a dig at this, and after many falls, a black hole opened up into what appeared to be another stope above.

We eventually opened up plenty of room to get in, but this would have involved climbing up a lot of loose stuff stacked vertically. This was considered too dodgy at the moment, but can be easily be brought down in the future (or more likely it will come down itself), and access gained by a bigger team.

Back at the Horse Level, we set off with the maypoles, eventually arriving at North Middle Vein, exhausted but at least they were available for the Meet.

Bill Griffin.
Brownley Hill Mine, Group Meet Sunday,  


Guests:- Brandon Sidebottom, Shirley Everett. Nick ?, Simon ?.

Driving into Nenthead, I turned into the low road access we had used in the past to see if it had been repaired following its recent collapse into the river. It hadn't, but a local informed me that a completely new road was to be put in starting on November 1st (this to run behind the spoil-heap, away from the river -ED)
Continuing up to the car-park, we had a bite to eat, and then car-loads of members and guests started arriving.

We decided to use the High Road access to get to the usual parking place, so I drove off, leading the convoy off up the first left, instead of second left turning, ending up at a scenic “forehead”. After a quick three-point turn, I headed back, passing car after car of grinning occupants who made comments like “And you’re going lead us underground?”

Getting on to the correct road we met Dave McAnelly, (who brought the number up to fifteen!) at the top of the hill, and then all drove down to park at the bottom of the road.

Rob pointed out that we had lost Mick and Co. so I circled round to the start of the low road, and spotted his car turning in, I was just in time to see them disappearing round a corner of the track, already changed! Returning to the others, we were all finally ready, for the days exploration.

I was disappointed that DKB couldn't make it (bad back), as the report writing would have obviously fallen to him. Naturally I expected Rob, as a senior member, to step in and take over, and told him so. But he insisted that as I had more experience in this mine, I should lead and take on the report as well!

The intention had been to access the High Level by an SRT ascent of the roped rise, followed by installation of electrons for the others to ascend. The maypoles, brought here by Kevin and I the previous week, would also be hauled up for transporting to the exploration area.

Rob had some doubts about the ability of some of the guests and first-timers being able climb the rise on electrons, and no-one seemed keen to ascend the SRT rope anyway, so it was decided to collect the maypoles in the North Middle Vein, and move via the Guddam Gill Burn Cross Vein to the “tools stope” on Brownley Hill Vein to use the rise there.

Although time-consuming this had its points, (1) Everyone could have a go at the electron in the descent of the easy sump on NMV, (2) The party got to see more of the mine and (3) I knew I was going to get wet in the flooded level later, and going this way everybody got wet!

Having dropped down the sump on the NNV, I re-opened our buried level entrance, which runs north from the E-W connection to the Horse Level. We discovered this connection months ago, but had not pushed it and as we waited for the others to descend, we had another look at it. Squeezing into the level, I moved north, Steve J who tried to follow me was unable to squeeze through. The level was watered to about thigh depth inbye, but was so low that crouching meant getting wetter still! Having gone about thirty yards, I entered a low flat at the end. Disappointed, I returned, and met Kev on the way in.

Once everyone was down the sump, we moved on to GBW and turned north along the Horse Level, through the watered section, which I gleefully waded through, to listen to the moans of the others as they warned those behind of what was coming.

Arriving at the "tools" stope on the LH fork at the BHV junction, the maypole was assembled in the western end of the stope up to a rise previously discovered. Unfortunately, as two lengths of pole were still in the High Level, the maypole was four feet short. I stepped off onto a ledge part way up, and Mick ascended past me, from where he hauled the maypole up and positioned the foot of it on an outcrop of rock. While I held it steady, Mick ascended the remaining part into the side level, where he belayed the electron to a length of pole, and was then followed by Karen and then me.

Realising that the sub-level would quickly become crowded, I moved along it to the foot of the stemmed rise, ascended, and fitted a top-rope for those following. I was soon followed by Kevin, Dave, and Shirley. In the stope below, some of the party decided not to attempt the climb, and Rob and Phil, the photographer that DKB had asked to take his shots for him, stopped with them.

As no-one else was to ascend the electrons, they were pulled up to the High Level and used in the stemmed rise.

Rob then guided the second party around the area, before leading them out to day. where he had to sit in the car watching trials riders riding up the beck for three hours, until Steve, who was with the first party, came back out.

The first party moved into the higher workings above the High Level, first visited 12 months earlier. Shirley impressing the others by the ease with which she ascended the stemmed rise. I asked her if she had done much mining before, and was told no, but that she had plenty of climbing, It showed.

Half a dozen of us headed for our watered level, a continuation of the High Level beyond the collapse, reached by climbing up through the stopes. Once there, we waded into waist-deep water, sinking into the muddy bottom and after 30-40 yards came to the base of the wet rise on the left. This ascended to the north of the stope above, to which it connected via a crosscut, and continued higher.

Turning and following the level to the right. a pack wall was noted along the RH side of the level. Here, the level widened with what appeared to be a drowned sump on the left. which Steve spanned with a rail to prevent anyone stumbling into it due to the water becoming cloudy. Gradually the water became shallower, and was only welly depth when we reached a rise on the right.

Further inbye, the level ended at a forehead with a sump to the right, taking water from the level. We couldn't see away off the sump bottom, but the rubbish-strewn base was only about 12ft down, with the water running through it.

Returning to the rise, Steve and I had a go at climbing it, seeing a level higher up, but the others were moving out so we left it. Karen must have had a high tide mark after this muddy level!

We checked the foot of the wet rise, via a muddy crawl, and over a pile of muddy debris, to squeeze into a hole opposite, which ran roughly west in deep water to a forehead after 25-30 yards.
Back up in the stope, the others were having a look around, avoiding the area I had warned them of earlier, where DKB had nearly been caught by a falling slab of shale. I spent a few minutes explaining the map to them, and where we were, before moving outbye to find Mick.

I traversed across from the rubble slope into the connection through to the white calcited stemmed rise to find Mick sitting at the top. Climbing up, I got within 6ft of the top, then found going a little difficult. Rather than attempt it and be unable to descend again, I gave up.

(Editors Note - Mick and companion had ascended the stemmed rise, and after photographing the "Calcite level", Mick had crawled down it for around thirty yards to a forehead.)

Having descended again, I found that Steve had been combining his mining with a bit of sky-diving, but had fortunately escaped with bruising.

As time was getting short we dropped back down to the High Level, where I was assisted by Pat to dig out the two maypoles buried by the collapse of the chute since the last meet.

We headed back to the roped rise on the NMV, but I was worried about the top link for the maypole, which had been dropped back to the "tool" stope with the poles, so I decided to descend the roped rise, and on to the stope to retrieve it. The electron was set up for my descent, and I left leaving Kevin to guide out a party of four, who were by now feeling the cold, and the rest, who were to follow Nick.

On reaching the "tools" stope, I found that the poles had been removed (by, Rob), so I went out via the wet level on BHV, and met Kevin and his party, who I joined to exit the mine.

Mick and the others came out some time later, giving me some "stick", as apparently they had been waiting for me to return to guide them out! Fortunately Steve had recognised the route, or I would have had to go back for them.

All in all, I thought the day had gone well. Although not much new ground was covered, nor photographs taken, any problems were, in my opinion, due to the size of the party. But I learned several things from this meet, one of which is to get somebody else to write the meet reports before venturing underground.

Bill Griffin.

Brownley Hill Mine Sunday, 4th November 1995

Present: Bill and Kevin Griffin.

A week following the Group Meet Kevin and I returned to the watered level on the High Level horizon (beyond the fall, and reached through the stopes above), to push the sump and rise.

The rise turned out to be 45 ft to a sound level in limestone, running SW for 10yards to a forehead.

The sump does in fact have a way off it: this is below your feet as you look down it, and again heading SW. In plate, this level goes 15ft, becoming badly shattered. I dug what seemed to be a block, to find nothing but layers of plate beyond. It seems to be just a very short trial, ending in a shattered forehead. This is born our by the fact that the level roof is supported each side in plate rock packwall: hardly a reliable medium for any level of any consequence.

Bill Griffin.
Narrative by Dave Banks

Brownley Hill 7th of January 1996

Feeling capable now, of going for the roped rise, we did this on the 7th of January. I took along a camera to photograph the date at the top. This had always puzzled me, being difficult to make out by cap-lamp, so I took along a 100 watt video lamp to see if this would help. The result was very interesting; the date is definitely 1770, along with the initials TP, but just above this is what appears to be MAPIXI. It took a little while to figure out that this is actually two sets of initials, MA and PW (the centre of the W being crossed, like an X). Higher up, in large letters, is TP, with, smaller again to the left, IH 1809, and to the right, WR 1820; further up in the top left corner is TW 1809. As I moved back to take a photo, the large initials IT vividly stood out under the powerful light. These are impossible to make out using a cap-lamp, appearing to be just holes in the rock. These initials IT are significant in that they appear again with the date 1785 at a sump-top further inbye on the High Level.

The old rope had been hanging in the rise for years (since installation by Roy Fellows) and had been used by many mine explorers, but, cleaned up surprisingly well for its first wash since installation. It appeared quite sound, and was put to good use as a practice rope for me and my son Kevin, having both acquired SRT gear. I think it says a lot for the resilience of the rope that after all its time in the mine, it was subjected to nearly 600 up and down travels by us practising using SRT. At the end of this it looked rather fluffy, but is still quite sound for practice. However, as the 600 travels were done as a straight hang, there was absolutely no rope abrasion, which probably accounts for its longevity.

Narrative by Dave Banks

Brownley Hill 3rd February 1996

The exertion of transferring the maypole from the Horse Level to this area of the High Level took its toll, and we had little energy left to erect it in the rise. With difficulty we managed to get 30ft of electron into it, and I moved from my position part way up, onto the electron, and ascended.

An opening some 20ft, up only goes back a few feet, so I continued up. I found myself looking at the base of a timber platform, with the top pole resting against a ledge a few feet below it. There appeared to be a level on the left, higher up, so I free-climbed into this, then top-roped Kevin up, looking across the timber platform which is supporting deads, the level beyond ends in a forehead after a few yards.

Turning into our working, we went up an incline of rubbish, and into a high but narrow level. Gradually the floor came up to meet the roof, until after perhaps 40 yards we were flat out, peering at the mud-filled block at the end. So a lot of effort was spent for little return, except that we know what's up there, which is satisfaction in itself.

Brownley Hill 3rd March 1996

Arriving at the mine, we met three other explorers also going in. They turned out to be WCMRG members, but unfortunately I didn't get their names. (believed to be Messrs Robinson and Harrison + friend. It would be nice to receive a report of their activities too! Ed)

Having completed our videoing, we decided to have a quick look at the stempled rise which Mick Lomas had discovered last year. This time managing to get up it, we moved into the white calcited level, to the forehead. Noticing a hole in the dead-arched roof, we got up into this, and moved left over deads, which eventually became too tight for us to proceed; however, the end is draughting.

Crawling back out, we must have disturbed air or gas trapped in the deads, which released itself in a quite loud moaning wailing groan, which lasted several seconds, and was pretty eerie.
Moving on past our entrance hole, we came to the top of the mud slope on the other side of the rise. This was down on our left; ahead, a large wedged-in rock was squeezed over, and we were into the bottom of a further rise. The sides of this were thick with slimy black mud, but there appeared to be levels off it, and is possibly a major sump from a higher level. Definitely worth maypoling!

Back at the top of the mud slope, I crawled up the 2ft square level, to the forehead, then we established by poking about that this is a normal sized level, simply back-filled. Further digging at the base by Kevin, breached through into a concealed working. We quickly cleared an entry, and dropped down into it. The floor sloped downwards and the water became deeper, but we used a ledge to get to the end and peer round the corner, to see a forehead!

Brownley Hill 10th March 1996

We arrived to find a group of explorers getting changed; these were fellow members John Lawson and Co., who were off to the Jug Vein for the day.

Ourselves, we were off to the High Level beyond the cross-roads to IT's 1785 Sump, taking up a length of rail for a delay. Using our new SRT rope, we dropped down to find three ways off at the bottom. However, basically what you see is what you get, none of them going more than a few yards. In fact, one has been back-filled with the material from one of the other two.

Brownley Hill 28th April 1996

The bulging wall of arching 20 yards inbye of the portal is now very bad; with a day’s work something could be done to keep the mine open to the portal. The level is a "cut and cover" job for many yards, and such is the slight rise in ground cover, that entry could easily be made from the surface at the collapse, when it happens, but it would be much better to keep it original.

(This has since been repaired, quite professionally. RF)

Up on the High Level, we moved round to Hombsey's Rise (on the GBX Vein towards Tatters String area). The High Level widens at this point, with the foot of Hombsey's Rise on the right. The rise appears clean, with many stemples in situ; it may not be possible to maypole it in one go due to its height, as our lights were becoming lost in the blackness looking up it. A shelf 20ft up, could provide a useful point to continue maypoling from.

A few feet to the north of the rise is a sump that leads down to the Middle Vein according to the mine plan. The top is stable, with a bank of small shale, and we dropped down, finding it clean and sound. According to the plan, the west end of the Middle Vein is shorter than the east from the sump. We headed west over rubble, and a couple of sections of solid rock left in situ. Eventually we dropped down about 1ft to what at first appeared to be a forehead. However, at floor height is a man-sized crawl-way blocked by broken rock, and at about 6ft height, a small "porthole" also broke into whatever is beyond but is filled up to at least this height with rock. I pulled some out, but a prodder is needed to prise out more. This is draughting well, and the plan shows what could be a rise or sump at this point, but it is not marked which. Returning to the sump bottom, we went east, again through sound level, eventually reaching a forehead. The mine plan is inaccurate in showing the position of the High Level with the middle Vein; the distance from the sump to the western end is much longer than shown, the levels each side of the sump being about the same length. The Middle Vein has no workings off the main drive, and no artefacts were discovered; but in the west side, a 2ft high wall has been built across the width of the level, obviously a long time ago, purpose unknown.

Brownley Hill 6th May 1996

We were just getting changed on arrival, when a whole convoy of vehicles came up the road. Apparently they were a newly-formed group from Bradford called Epoch, and they were off to do the Brownley Hill-Haggs through trip via Gin Foot Sump.

We entered the mine to find that the level wall had now collapsed; access was still possible over it, but daylight could be seen, and obviously more material would wash in. Unless something was done soon, the Horse Level would flood right back to Engine Sump. We wanted to take another look at the High Level above Tatters String. To speed up access to this area, we began digging a block on the North Middle Vein, (beyond the crossroads on the intermediate level), which I took to be a connection up to the High Level shown on the plan as west of Bear's Sump. This was born out by the dig material being the High Level rock, the NMV being in limestone.

I eventually resorted to a length of rail to poke upwards, stacking the rock that fell into the level. About 5ft up, we broke through into a rise that immediately began draughting upwards. (It is actually a sump down from the High Level.) Unfortunately a large slab was hanging in a bad way, perched by a corner at each end. I couldn't get it to come down, and it was too awkward to climb up and squeeze past it.

We decided to go up to the High Level, and weigh it up from above. This we did, by going round to the roped rise, and then along the High Level to where I thought would be above our dig. It was indeed the sump west of Bear's Sump, the slab being visible from above. There was a lot of fallen roof at the top, so we moved the obviously loose bits, then cleared one side to small shale. I went down on our own rope, picking up speed to hit the slab with some force, but it was tightly wedged, and didn't go down. Kevin came down, and dropped through into the level we had just left, and I began dropping rock through to him, which he cleared back into the level. Eventually I was able to man-handle the slab through also, and access was complete. Having removed so much rock, breaking through into the level beyond the sump-foot appeared an easy task, so we went for this.

I eventually pulled out a rock which left a black hole, and peering through I could see the level continuing. Frenzied rock removal opened up the hole, and we entered the level. It varied in height along its length from 10 to 12ft, to steeping height, and from man-width to several feet wide in places. Pack-walled extensively throughout its length, there was a bank of the fine black dust in much of the floor, fallen from the roof.
East of our entry point we came to the base of Bear's Sump. This is open to the High Level, there being a bank of small shale at the bottom, the top having a walled collar. However there was no indication from the shale or dust banks that anyone had come down it, as our passage could be clearly seen. We eventually reached what would have been the forehead, but it is back-filled for several yards at a small working, where it appears forward driving was discontinued, and a little probing carried out on the sides, the waste being packed to the forehead. Obviously nothing was found, as no workings lead off.

Returning back down the level, I found one artefact, which was a round wooden lid off something, with old grease on it, and a piece of wood for use as a spatula. (To grease bogie axles?)

Now that a new route was open to the High Level, access to the Tatters String area would be quicker and also dry, this way avoiding the wade from the old roped rise. Just outbye of our new dig, Kevin unearthed an old rail seat, and further digging turned up no less than 43, which were left on display.

Brownley Hill 12th May 1996

I had tried phoning round various people to help repair the collapse just inbye from the portal, and finally got a positive response from Dave Bridge. He and some CATMHS members met us for a look at the situation. Some time was spent stabilising the collapse, and clearing level walling which had come in; then it was decided that support would be needed for the roof slabs at this point. This would need to be organised, so we went for a look at the CATMHS dig at Hudgillburn, which was very impressive.

A cutting had been excavated up to the portal, and a railway installed with a bogie to run on it for taking out the dig waste. Once this was driven through to meet the original dig, the whole thing would be self-draining, and progress faster.

I and Kevin returned to Brownley Hill to squeeze in some exploration. As it was then 2pm, we would have to do something within easy travelling distance. There was a sump at the north end of Wellgill X Vein, which we had found but never been down as there was no suitable belay at the time. (see Journal 16, p21, sump 5)

Deciding to go for Sump 5, Kevin carried the bags, and I dragged a long length of rail (it was too heavy to lift) from the flats, up to the sump. Normally I would have taken a short length, and buried it under rock, but my SRT rope is only 65ft long, and during a phone call to John Lawson, he reckoned it could be no more than 70ft deep, although he had not been down it. So, I had to get a belay point right at the sump-top to make sure my rope would reach the bottom. It was hard work getting up there, crossing two sump-tops on the way, but eventually the rail was in position. I tied on the rope, and went for a look, as it isn’t possible to see down it without being in danger of falling down the thing. I could see the rope swinging at the bottom, so obviously it didn't reach, but having a stop knot already in the end, I went down. I couldn't reach the floor, but by untying the stop knot, I had enough rope to get down. The end was 1 ft off the floor, but allowing for the pile of muck in the bottom, and the rope used in tying on at the top, John's estimate of 70ft was spot on.

I went for a quick look around, and then back up the rope to give Kevin the crack. He was keen for a look, so down he went, then we both headed SW along a level which then curved west to meet another level running both ways at a step down. We took the level running NW, presumably going outbye, as the water was running with us. Passing a large upright timber, we noticed several large iron hooks in the RH wall at calf height. Much railway was still in place, and several packwalls were noticed along the level. We explored 150 yards with no end in sight, then returned to the junction. on past this, and heading against the water now, we noticed more rail and hooks in place, then a length of 6 inch bore iron pipe on the floor.

We met up with Dave Bridge and other CATMHS members to tackle the collapse. This was cleared and heavy timbers put in to support the 2 roof slabs, with spine boards down the LH side to stop runs into the level. Use was even made of the old gate that lay on the level floor. The surface hole was backfilled with rock, and when completed, the job looked pretty good, and should last for some years. We emerged from the portal to the click of cameras, to meet a family of four, over from New Zealand. They were surprised to learn that people regularly went into the mine, and even more so, when we told them we had been repairing the level. It was our turn to be surprised, when they told us that this had been their ancestors mine a couple of hundred years ago. (Hutchinson) A good days work, with a combined effort by WCMRG and CATMHS.

Brownley Hill 16th June 1996
Having accessed the High Level, via our cleared sump on the NMV, we moved inbye towards the area above Tatters String. Moving over fallen roof all the way except for one short section of arching, we came to the "old level" junction. Just before this is a level on the left, quite shattered, this led to a junction. Ahead was quickly blocked; the other arm led to a rise, and then a blocked sump (1). It was possible to crawl down to the left at the sump top, and into a stope, but with no way on. The rise leads to workings off in opposite directions, but both to foreheads.

Back at the main level there is an apparently run-in rise next to the inbye continuation, but we looked at the "old level" opposite first. We crawled up this, coming to a stope with a tight way-on in the far corner. This is a U-bend squeeze into a second stope, in worse condition than the first; a large lump of wall appears ready to peel off, just above the entry point. Searching around, we couldn't find any way on, so we returned to the first stope. Under some hanging roof, the level continues for 30-40 yards, but is then blocked; a dig may be possible to clear a way on. Returning again to the main level, this opens out just beyond the run-in rise, a small working on the left is quickly blocked.

The continuation of the High Level goes dramatically into limestone here, with sound original level. However, a rise to the left of a junction goes up 35ft back into the shale rock; what 1 could see off the top of it did not appear worth the effort. In the roof of the level at the entry to this rise there was a 2" borehole.

Carved initials were noted on the junction wall, several more being seen during exploration (see plan).

The level goes straight on to a forehead, past another junction, but the mine plan shows a sump here. Running water has turned this part into a grotto, with waves of calcite forming everywhere. It seemed to me that if there was a sump here, then we were standing at the bottom of it, as a small working on the right appeared to have had a rise in it, but is completely calcited shut now. Then again, this "hole in the roof" matched in size, the debris on the floor. Maybe the debris is sitting on a wooden staging over a sump-top, and is now calcited into place; it is difficult to work out. Sump 2,3, and 4 are all blocked, then a junction has a wet rise that looks sound enough, with stemples still in, but this was not done.

Sump 6 still has part of a wooden staging at its top, but the lip is very badly undercut, and difficulty was experienced getting back up the rope and over the lip.

Another junction on the right was soon blocked, but Sump 8 was interesting in that it has a 3ft packwall each side of the level leading to the sump-top, leaving a narrow channel up the level, eighteen inches wide.

Sump 9 is shown on the mine plan as being some distance from the end of Tatters, but it actually drops to a level that leads into the end of Tatters String. (This had been maypoled previously by the Group)

A kink in the level leads on into worsening ground and the shale rock. The level opened out into an area with Sump 10 to one side but so much loose stuff slopes down towards the top of this that we couldn't get a look down it. It seems possible that some of the loose stuff has already gone down, and blocked it. There may be a way on, straight ahead, but fallen roof is holding up a large "step" in the roof, that looks likely to detach itself when unsupported. The level continued to the SE to Sump 11 which is well blocked, a way on is run-in by clay. (See Journal 14, p39, for a reverse exploration of this area.)

Bill Griffin
This long-awaited trip was to follow-up the Griffin’s recording of the graffiti along the length of the High Level, the main intention being to photograph the better examples, but also to recover some clay-pipes that they had left in the Jug Vein previously. Whilst this trip between Christmas and New Year has traditionally been for exercise only, we did have some who were new to the game (Andrew Smith, Howard Crellin, and Mark Benn), and some, like me, who were returning from semi-retirement. Other old hands included Noel, back on leave from the States' Del, Rob, and Mike Mc. In fact, the only ones in the party who had done much in the last twelve months were Bill Griffin and Bob Johnstone, who made up the last two in the ten-man team that arrived that morning to find 3-4 inches of snow at Nenthead.

Originally, the great Mick Lomas had agreed to attend, after much pleading by myself, pointing out the attraction of being able to tear mercilessly into the veterans, but unfortunately I was informed by Dawn, one of his ladies, that he had been laid low by Chinese Flu, and was too ill to venture out.
So it was a very dejected gathering that assembled at the roadside beside the bridge, after half of them had assembled at the car park and had to be led back to the correct meeting place by myself. Del cheered himself up a little by accusing me of unclear instructions, but I blame oxygen starvation to the brain, as him, Rob and Noel are all over 6ft!

Bill and Bob arrived as we were getting changed, and I did my usual tour-guide bit of showing plans of the mine to give the newer people an idea of where we were going.

We then set off along the track, Rob and I leading the way like a couple of excited school kids, past Wellgill, to the mine, leaving Bill and Bob to catch up, as Bill likes to have his sandwiches before entering.

As we entered, we were able to inspect the area that the Griffins and some CATMHS members had shored-up following a collapse of the arching, and were very impressed by their efforts.

We made our way along the cross-cut to the Engine Sump, along Wellgill Cross to Middle Vein, and then along that to the sub-levels on Guddanigill Bum Cross Vein, where we waited for Bill and Bob to catch up. Del and Noel made a valiant attempt at verbally attacking me on a number of occasions, but it was all regurgitated old gags, which had to be explained to the others, and sadly lacked the spontaneous knife-thrusts of Mick Lomas.

When Bill and Bob arrived, we made our way along a low level to the foot of a sump from the High Level, where Bill had re-sited the SRT rope to avoid the watered section of level at its original site.

Bill SRT’d the rise, fitted electrons, and the rest of us ascended, slotting in new members between veterans, to demonstrate the techniques of ladder-climbing. All the new ones ascended without problem, but Rob had a little difficulty at the top due to a twisted ladder (and his abnormal stature) and after much struggling and hurt pride, eventually accepted a top-rope, and was dragged up the slope past the lip of the shaft. Apart from a pink face, Rob accepted the mirth in good part.

Having all gained the High Level, we crawled north through the falls to the junction, where we were able to stand again, and shortly came across the first of the carved initials found by Bill and Kevin on the section on Brownley Hill Vein.

Bill had not brought his video lamp, and mine proved inadequate for non-flash photography, so I had to attempt the shot with flash. This was repeated at the other locations along BHV, but the lamp was not my only problem, as muck got in the lens cover of the compact camera, and condensation kept masking the lenses of both the compact and the SLR! Still, we persevered and hopefully we will have got a couple of decent shots.

At the 1806 sump, we stopped for lunch, and Bill and Bob went on inbye to look at the possibilities of further exploration.

Noel decided that he had partaken of enough exercise, being bent double for much of the trip due to low roofs, and advised us he was going to the pub for lunch, but agreeing we would make sure that his car was gone when we came out.

At this point Del declare UDI and decided that most of the party had suffered enough, and that he would lead them down into Middle Vein Flats, to view something a little more interesting.

On the way back Mike, Rob and I stopped at the junction, and went off to explore the old level which ran parallel but to the south of BHV. We entered a large round stope over a mound of fallen roof shale, to find a hole continuing opposite at the foot of the slope, a level above and to the right of it, and a hole in the RH wall with what looked to be a sump foot in it.

The latter turned out not to rise more than 10ft, and was not entered, and the level was entered by Mike and Rob. I looked at the hole at the foot of the slope, and found it to ascend in a tight crawl beyond. Having then joined the others, they reported a badly collapsed level ahead, and another turning left. As I entered to have a look, Bill and Bob joined us, and Bob entered the other hole and into a large sump-foot which was very wet and had a level about 15ft above him. I was able to see his lamp from the LH arm of the level, which was blocked by large slabs. We did open this up slightly but decided the effort was not worth it.

We all then rejoined the others at the ladders rise, and Bob agreed to accompany me along the GBXV arm of the High Level, to photograph more dates. We waded through knee-deep water, past the sump with the wheelbarrow-wheel and axle, before we found some very clearly carved dates at the third sump along, with more at the original roped rise further inbye, and then pushed on to the last one just beyond the crossroads at the limit of our explorations of last year. As the time we had agreed with Del was running out, we then headed back to the ladders rise and the patiently waiting Bill, and helped him de-rig before heading out on.

Bill and Kevin had found a load of old rails and rail-chairs when digging out the foot of this sump, and I brought out an example of each for the museum.

I met the others as they were leaving the Middle Vein Flats, and joined them for the journey out. But Bill and Bob took a little time out to explore a small working off the North Middle Vein route, before following us.

As usual, I forged on ahead down the crosscut to the portal, eager to get out of wet clothes, but without my usual companion of such tactics, Mick Lomas.

The trek back to the village was made more difficult by the stiffening of legs due to the cold, and on arrival at the cars, the removal of wet gear and donning of my flurry suit were done as quickly as possible.

Noel had left. and as I changed the rest caught up, the usual banter beginning between the old hands. When Mike and Andrew had changed, we left at 3.30, probably the earliest we have ever left Nenthead, but after over twelve months of abstinence, I was too weary to have stayed underground much longer.
Still, it had dragged some of the old hands out with the few that are still active, and hopefully the new members having had a "taster", will be keen for more, so maybe it will have been worthwhile.

Dave Banks.


A long awaited and overdue return to active mine exploration for me and Mike Mc, saw us meeting up at 10am with Bill Griffin, Joe and Carol Rothery at the Rampgill Car Park, for an entry into Brownley Hill. Bill had agreed to lead the meet, if I would do the report!

The intention was to carry out three maypole ascents left over from previous exploration by Bill and Kevin, before removing the maypoles to Rampgill. This was the reason for parking at Rampgill, so that we would walk from one mine to the other with the poles, but not have to walk back with wet clothes.

So, we walked across Nenthead in our mining gear, and entered BH at 10.45, making our way to Middle Vein Flats to uncover the maypoles and clips from where they had been buried in the deads.

Moving back outbye towards the Engine Sump, we stopped at a rise just short of the two churns, and attempted to erect the maypole. After a number of attempts to straddle the rise-foot by Bill, Mike and myself, we eventually managed to install the maypole, and Bill ascended high enough to discover that this too was only a trial rise, ending up in a 6ft square chamber.

On his descent, I suggested to Bill, that as he was the only one to have gone up, he should write the meet report. Much to our delight, he replied, "Ahh, you said……………….." like a schoolboy denied something promised to him. Of course the rest of us derived great enjoyment from the subsequent discomfort at his spontaneous response to my suggestion.

(If you don’t get this one, you’re not on your own. RF)

I also took the opportunity to give the two Rothery's a quick lesson on electron climbing, before moving on to the next rise. We transferred the poles along to Engine Sump, turned left along the crosscut, and left again along GBX Vein for twenty yards, to a level off to the left. This contained a sump, with a small chamber beyond and to the right of it, but also a rise before, and to the left of it.

We erected the maypole again, and, because we intended to pull it up after us, I explained to the two Rothery's how important it was to tighten the clamps really hard, so as to prevent the end pole dropping out, and stranding you up the rise.

Bill climbed up first, roped up, and top-roped Carol on her first electron ascent, which posed no problems for her at all. She was followed by her father, Joe, who also ascended without problems. When Mike and I had joined them, we proceeded to haul the maypole up after us, and yes, you’ve guessed it, the end pole dropped out! Bill was almost ecstatic with delight at being able to get his own back, repeating my words on how important it was to ensure the clamps were properly tightened.

Even Carol had a go, which provoked even more mirth, especially when I pointed out to her that young mine explorers who took the Mickey out of their elders should only do so after having safely descended back down! We used one of the maypole sections across the rise as a belay, and Mike descended the electron to find out that it was now too short. We had an anxious couple of minutes, when I searched my bag for the wire belay, without finding it, until Mike informed me that it was in his bag! I fitted the wire belay to the top, which gave us just enough length for him to reach the floor and recover the missing pole, which luckily had not gone down the adjacent sump.

While he was doing this, Joe and I moved inbye, exploring the workings first opened up by Bill and Kevin. We found the short side level, and crosscut to a 12ft sump, and also the large stope outbye, which was stained red with iron carried by the water running down through it. It went at least fifty yards beyond the point we reached it, and at least 25ft above and below us. Returning to the others, we all had our bair, and then began to re-build the maypole up the walled section of vein above our entry rise.

This proved to be a little tricky, as we had to erect two sections, allow Bill to climb up top a ledge at around 15ft up, and then, using his assistance, add a third pole, allowing him to climb nearly to the top, to repeat the exercise, before adding the forth pole.

Bill gained access to the workings above and immediately found a wooden ventilation trunking in the floor, which went off down the level. He reported that the level went off both ways, but he wanted one of to join him. Mike was quickly volunteered as the best candidate, being the lightest of the experienced ones left, and after a little set-back while he tried to reach the end of the ladder, he made his way up to the first ledge. Here, he was stopped while I set up slave-flashes for a photography session with Joe. After a dozen or so poses, I passed him my camera to take shots above, and then let him resume climbing, taking a couple more with Joe's camera as his backside disappeared up the ladder.

Bill's Account

Having got off the maypole, I headed inbye for a quick look. Wooden ducting was still in place on the floor, a side level was mostly back-filled, but passable over the top, and beyond this a narrowing section was barred by a wall, just too high to look over.

Climbing onto it, a slope of muck dropped away into a void, making a return impossible once dropped into. I returned to the maypole for back-up with the electron. My pleas for someone to join me were met by a flurry of flashes, as photography became the order of the day below. I took another look at the ducting; the open end of this stopped exactly at the edge of the rise, and further inbye it ran into a protective rock culvert built over it, which had been buried under a collapse (I have seen ducting running through a culvert in the flats in Smalllellagh). A length coming out the other end, was supported by four rocks built up to maintain its level. A little further in, a hole in the floor, through rocks, could be looked into, but not passed.

Back to the maypole, I eventually got Michael to ascend to help me get past the wall. Once he got up, I removed the electron, and we went to the wall, where Mike wrapped one end of the electron round him, and I threw the rest over the wall, and went after it. Some more ducting was lying on the slope, with other lengths leaning against the wall at the overhang, and also on the floor. Beneath the overhang, a working, ending in a forehead, had collapsed rocks above, obviously part of the hole in the floor above.
Back into the larger working, a sump could be looked down, and had water falling down it from an offset rise above, but was not viewable from below. I found a small piece of scrap metal, and dropped it down the sump. Returning to Mike, I crawled up the backfilled level, which ended above the large working; having been mined away, as the continuation beyond could be seen opposite, ending in a forehead. We took a couple of photos for DKB, then climbed back down. Once back down at the Horse Level, I went inbye to the next rise, partly walled-up from the level, and climbing into it, I found my piece of metal, confirming the connection.

(Note - I believe the rise/sump to be John Lawson's route from the High Level, see Journal 15, p8) (Further information on this area was in Journal 17, p 1 l.)

A chilly twenty minutes elapsed while they went off and explored the working, which went around thirty metres inbye to a sump, and fifteen metres outbye.
On their return, we dismantled the maypole and reversed it for the trip down again, but this time using three aluminium poles instead of the one steel one, as we thought that the steel one was slightly bigger, and that this was the cause of the clamp parting from the aluminium pole earlier. (I know that this sounds like an excuse, but I claim in self-defence that it was Mike who suggested this - Ed.)

When the maypole was launched into the void, we were a little uneasy about its footing, so I top-roped Bill as he climbed down, but he was happy with it, and descended without problem, although he did move it back a foot to the wall as a more secure base.

Then I top-roped Carol, and although she was a little uncertain as she descended the rubble slope and gained the top of the ladder, soon began her descent. She stopped for a little while, and I thought she was in difficulties, but when I asked if she was all right, it appeared she was giggling, not crying, and was actually enjoying the experience!

Joe followed his daughter, also top-roped, again with only a little problem negotiating the lip between rubble slope and the vertical wall below.

After lowering the bags, I gingerly descended the slope, and with relief, gained the ladder, but although I passed the lip OK, I dislodged a large amount of soft rock and muck as the ladder swung which caused a tremendous boom as it disappeared down the adjacent sump.

Mike, unlike me, seemed to have lost none of his confidence during his absence from exploring, and descended without any trouble whatsoever.

As the others were packing the gear, I used a pole and attacked the muck below the lip, dislodging two large chunks with great effect. I left the major part, immediately below the lip, and Bill expressed concern about this, but I assured him I had it in hand, and, sure enough, minutes later the largest chunk of the lot came down. Although the rubble slope still remained, I left the rest to gravity, and am sure that it would clear itself before the day was out. I am sure that if we had known beforehand, that the supporting wall beneath the rubble slope was so fragile, we would not have attempted this last rise.

This done, we made our way out to day, carrying the maypoles, and then walked through Nenthead, stopping for a quick drink at the cars. Carol opted to stop at the cars and get changed, and an argument ensued as to whether we should attempt another rise in Rampgill, as we were taking the maypoles in. I was keen to get home and led off with a pole, but Bill followed me with the rest of the gear and we headed inbye to deposit the poles into a hiding place in Rampgill.

Bill however, had thought that the intended rise was before the workings we were intending to hide the poles in, and when he realised it was not, he decided to just hide the gear and return to the cars. I decided to use the opportunity to show Joe and Mike the dates and initials in the higher level, while we were in, and we headed further in, Mike and I watching Joe in great amusement, as he tried to negotiate the water without flooding his wellies.

We stopped at the iron-stained cascade for photos, and again at the top of the stepped incline, before passing a short way down the level, to show them the 1775 date, the earliest yet found, before returning outbye.

We stopped at the Brewery Shaft, and looked down and up at the magnificent structure, before returning to day at 5pm.

It had been a good trip, the two Rothery's coping very well with their first taste of electron work, despite the "cabaret". Mike and I had re-awakened our skills, although I was certainly a lot less confident than I once was, and we resolved to make greater efforts to attend more often in future to get back into the swing of things. I was very pleased that Bill has easily assumed the mantle of the experienced mine explorer, laid down by those of us who had preceded him, and I was quite happy to let him!

Dave Banks.

This ends the explorations of Brownley Hill mine. I have no doubt that more will be discovered in the future, and I hope that what is written here acts as a "Springboard" to other explorer’s efforts.

Roy Fellows, 2007