

Fine Burn Iron Mine **NZ019 349**

A line of waste heaps on the 270M contour, above Pye originally Eye Close opposite the site of Bollihope smelt mill, now Fineburn Carvan Park, Bishopley.

These had caught our eye on a number of occasions whilst heading over to Teesdale and so finally on a bright and cold January day we went to see what they are.

A line of shale waste heaps running along the contour, with a series of leats and an old cart track joining them. On the 1857 survey, they are labeled as Hushs and 2 Old Levels; a track leads downhill, past Eye Close and then a footbridge over Bollihope burn to Low Bishopley. A second track leads E around and into Fine Gill, over a ford and to a line of old quarries in the E bank of fine Gill. A third heads SE, uphill to a higher ford over Fine Burn and then N and E to White Kirkley. The 1896 revision has them labeled as Old levels (lead).

The waste heaps are composed of very well weathered shale, showing no sign of any mineralisation, with a few brown ironstone nodules. Initial thoughts were that it may have been early coal mining, as there is a thin coal mapped by BGS between the Great Limestone and Little Limestone and there is a coal drift mapped on the S flank of Fatherley Hill, above Frosterley to the N. There was no sign of any coal on any of the heaps.

Looking at the 1881 Geological map, it shows an outcrop of ironstone running around where the heaps are and also to the E of Fine Burn, where there are disused quarries.

The deposits seem to be unlike the ironstones formed in association with the mineral veins of the North Pennine Orefield, more similar to the Jurassic nodular ironstone that was collected off beaches and as a by product from the Alum shale quarries in N Yorkshire.

There was an analogous, though older ironstone in the Redesdale Ironstone of Northumberland, these ironstones are below the Great Limestone. There was "extensive, though not very profitable, working". The nodules were got by open workings, shafts and levels. "These ironstone nodules general take the form of lenticles, ranging from the size of a pea to masses of 50lbs. weight."

Special reports on the mineral resources of Great Britain, Vol. XIII 1920.