

GrimCrag & Crook Wood

Team: Allan & Linden



Date: 25th February 2007

Outlining: The GrimCrag & Crook wood slate workings are situated above the small village of Ulpha in the Duddon Valley. They appear to work a band of blue/silver slate, which was also worked on the Cove & old Man workings on the Coniston Old Man, as well as the Horse Crag and Penny Rig workings at Tilbertwaite. At this site the slate seems to be of good, workable quality, and often had nice bands along it's bedding plain.

My visit

Until visiting the site I had little idea of what it would hold. I had visited most of the slate producing regions in Cumbria, save this one and the Kentmere workings; and it was decided that I should visit these workings first.

Having late started, we had little time to explore much of the site. I parked my car near a place called Low Wood, near ulpha, and started to head up into the forest, accompanied by my son. The path was what seemed like an old cart track or inclined tramway, although probably

not the latter. After about 100m. of walking uphill, we passed an old building, which looked like it might have at one time been an office of sorts. Immediately afterwards we passed the lowest of the levels. The surface had little of interest, apart from remains of a dressing shed and a few old metal bolts. At the edge of the tip was the lowest of a series of levels. Having not planned to go wading in 1m. of water, I had not taken waterproofs, and therefore could not go further than 2m. into the tunnel. For this amount of water, the tunnel was obviously quite major, and probably led to a close-head or some close-heads. There was very little in the tunnel save a nice rust flow from one of the walls. Having spent my given five minutes on this level, we continued upward to see what else was of interest.

We soon reached a second embankment of tipping, which had no real interesting features, apart from a hole in the ground about 150 squared feet in area. One of the sides was terraced, which might suggest it was once some kind of processing plant. There was also a tramway (rails taken) on one side of the pit, which would back up this idea.

A little further up we reached a third level of tipping, which 'again had no relics except an old building of some kind. My son noticed what might be a level by a stream flowing from a cutting, so he went to check that out while I had a look at a pit quarry. The pit quarry had nothing of great interest, but gave the impression that it might have once been an underground close-head, with the roof removed. I couldn't see any tunnels, and if they were they were probably covered in spoil. Happily my son did find a level, so we went to have a look.

The level's entrance was blocked by tipping from later workings, but there was room to squeeze through at the top. In doing so we entered a sizeable passageway, which was flooded by about 1ft of water.

Unusually - the tunnel was "cobbled", but not of a matty-spawning design, but of a much earlier one. The structure was very similar to that of the old Smithy Bank tunnel on the Coniston Old Man. After this first stretch the tunnel got drier. On the right was a VERY old sleeper of some kind next to some kind of curved bar jutting out of the wall. The tunnel then got extremely narrow. We had now entered hard rock but the waste was piled up in big walls on both sides of the tunnel. On the walls could be seen various iron pegs and pieces of rotten timber, as well as several iron bars. The tunnel was far too narrow to allow any kind of rail transport, and while being already narrow was gradually getting lower. Oddly the tunnel now entered a timbered section. The tunnel was extremely low and wet, in fact it was probably smaller than even some of the smallest tunnels in the Coniston Copper Mines. Why build such a tunnel? We dare go no further, as the beams looked as if they wanted to be moved, causing the roof to collapse, as well as a lot of waste rock on either side of the tunnel. We emerged from the level, and headed up the hill to the top level.

The tips were not as large as the ones of the lower levels, but there was an interesting wall stopping the tip from falling onto the footpath, which might suggest that the footpath was once a tramway. The bank at the top of the tip had nothing but a wall, but a cutting could be seen at the

far end. At the entrance to the cutting was a sign saying: 'Danger, deep excavations'. Whether that meant the level at the end, or the deeply flooded cutting leading to the level we were not sure. The cutting to the level was actually dangerously deeply flooded with quick sand or mud, so we tried round the other side of the cutting. There seemed to be no other way in without a ladder, so we could only look. The level itself was more of a cave working, and was at least 15 ft. wide. Some kind of walling could be seen inside, but nothing to determine anything. After about 15 minutes of looking for an alternative way, we decided to come back another time.

Before we abandoned our trip we decided to have a quick look at the nearby GrimCrag mine. We quickly wondered down towards the mine and had followed an old track towards the main bank. The tip was quite small and the bank had little apart from an old dressing shed. The level we entered proved to be longer than expected. We followed it in about 200 ft before deciding to return.

Conclusion

For a limited one hour, we still had time for a good look around some of the workings. It would have been good & interesting to see were levels one, two and three terminated at, as well as to follow the GrimCrag level until it's end.

Hope CATMHS & co had researched it, look like bits of it wont last for too much longer.

Allan