

OLD MILL CLOSE MINE – WENSLEY-2006

Kitted up in the field on the right just after the pub leaving Wensley and I could see the winch A frame as I walked up the hill. Signed in at the tent adjacent to the winch and was issued with a pit check to take with me, I looked at the very thin rope on the winch and put all thoughts about identifying bodies with brass checks firmly to the back of my mind. Walking over the hill we arrived at the entry shaft already rigged by Roy R, in turn we all abseiled down where Dave was waiting for us. Dave ably assisted by John then guided us through what was described as a giant sponge, this surprised me as in the guide book description due to the length of passages stated as something like 14 miles I for some reason had the idea that the passages would be fairly large, instead what I found was a very confusing maze of very small low passages. It wasn't long before we came to the first set of artifacts, these were old leather boots, tools etc, Dave explained that the decision had been made to leave all the items in situ rather than take them out to a museum, I could understand this as seeing them where they were used was much more interesting than looking at them on a glass shelf in a nice warm museum but sadly, like a wheelbarrow we later came across some of the artifacts were rapidly disintegrating. There were also some very interesting inscriptions, some chipped into the rock and some written in clay that had been stuck to the wall one read 'J.TAYLOR aged 12 years' others had the date 1830 and some although not authenticated dated back much further. We also saw a couple of old barrow ways used to transport ore and an old launder constructed with rock and clay to transfer water from one area to another.

Continuing on and we saw probably another 5 or 6 sets of artifacts consisting of boots, tools, tins, clay pipes, rails etc but the one that really stood out was a white clay pipe that was in perfect condition and looked as if it could have been placed there the day before. At the bottom of a shaft were the remains of what was a blacksmiths forge, the highlight of the trip for me, it consisted of a hearth built from rock with a large set of bellows at the back that although deteriorating were still easily recognizable and a small anvil fixed on the hearth, it was easy to imagine someone hammering away sharpening the picks and chisels. We made our way back to the bottom of the winch shaft and summoned the winch, "who's first then" was met by silence until a brave lady stepped forward and decided to make all us blokes look like wimps. It was actually a very enjoyable ride up the shaft as not having to prussic allowed a relaxed look at the shaft on the way up. All in all a superb day and I must pass on my thanks on to all who organized the trip and set equipment up both from Masson and PDMHS.

Trip report to my caving club S. Harvey