

An Excursion into the Penmorfa

September 7th 1989

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On a Sunday morning in August 1989 a group assembled at the Penmorfa, Phil, Bob and Alma Smith, Richard Burton, Dave Jenkins, Geoff David, Bill Oliver and myself. A trip into the adit had been long overdue, and there was a distinct air of enthusiasm among the party. Soon we were lifting the unlocked gate off lugs, noting the vegetation was now quite thick and was obscuring the portal. Once inside all those memories came back, the shock of the cold water, the damp, the oozing mud and that finely constructed dry stone lining. We noted the bulging masonry that coincides with the driveway to Glan-y-don cottage had deteriorated further; many commented that something should be done soon.

Ahead lay the notorious mudslide, no different to normal, perhaps one day it will be cleared. Beyond, the tunnel lining appeared to have narrowed, probably as a result of the pressure of mud that flows from between the beds of limestone here. Then started the long haul through waist deep water along the perfectly cut straight passage, I could not help but marvel how each six foot of passage represented one weeks around the clock work, the complete tunnel taking eight years and eight months to complete between 1834 to 1842.

On one of the walls half way along our route I noticed many initials of explorers of the 1970's, they included two very notable people of the time "Billy Davies" and "Huw Tudno Williams" dated 1977.

We finally reached the point where the level had broken into the workings, here we took the right hand fork passing the two flooded shafts, which Chris Jowett one day intends to dive, this year he says! At the base of Vivians shaft we stopped to look at the blockage and wonder how far it continued, and to what height the column of trapped water extended. A quick on site calculation estimated a mass of water at least 100 foot high lay above us.

From Vivians the party headed north to where Higher shaft had once connected but was now blocked. The passage continued to where it had been intended to connect with Treweeks shaft but was never completed. The walls of this passage had become coated in calcite flowstone ranging in colour from yellow to red from iron oxides and from green to blue due to secondary copper mineralisation.

The party then returned to the "Y" junction, this time taking the left fork, there we spent a quarter of an hour investigating some of the ways off the cross cut at the second vein, these were the first workings I had explored when I was introduced to the Penmorfa in February 1975. In those days wetsuits were unheard of and you were doing well to have a carbide lamp! This place will also be remembered by Billy Davies and those who were with him on the day he decided to take a very quick route down one of the shafts he was attempting to climb. As always Bill survived to climb again another day.

Finally the group set off to the higher workings from the main junction, stopping to view the most eastern of the veins in this area, which clearly displayed the hanging wall and footwall of the lode indicating a dip to the west. A stop for food and drink was made before we headed off over the "ice bridge", here we were within one of the larger stoped veins, could this have been what the old miners referred to as the "cyllell" or knife.

Before long we were climbing a series of small rising walkways that ended at the large flat roofed chamber, this was certainly the largest chamber that has so far been discovered, being roughly 60 by 80 foot across and at least 50 foot high. From here a number of passages radiated, these were explored into places which I or others in the party had not visited before, once more showing that there are always new areas to be found in these seemingly endless workings.

In one place Dave Jenkins and myself observed a rock cut feature about four inches wide that extended around the walls and roof of a passage, suggesting some sort of sealed doorway, possibly to control ventilation. This was as far as we were to go, and so we returned to the "Y" junction, one half of the party returning via the "ice bridge" while I followed the remainder through the more sporty route down the lower waterfall pitch. We were all glad to cool off as we waded back through the water in the main level towards the entrance.

Back at surface we were greeted by Les and Martin Smith who had thoughtfully brought along a supply of hot tea and whiskey or should I say whiskey and hot tea, this completed a most enjoyable though long awaited excursion to the Penmorfa.

One note I would like to make is that Bill Oliver our oldest member completed the tour as well as any man, if not better than some I have seen, and he is 72! (Sorry Bill if I have the wrong age, blame Edric). The above-described excursion was made on Sunday 13th August 1989.

C.A.Lewis, 7th September 1989