

HENFWLCH MINE EXPLORED BY ROY FELLOWS

The Henfwlch Adit emerges at SN 737882 just above the Nant-y-moch mountain road, a particularly scenic part of Mid Wales. There are spoil heaps just above the road, and just inside the trees, the stone chimney of what was once a building. Beyond this, at the head of a section of bogey ground is the Adit.

I first entered this about 1988; at that time it was thigh deep in water. It was found to be a straight heading for about 200 metres passing a blocked rise on the right and a blind heading on the left. The blind heading contained the remains of a wheelbarrow. After the straight section, the level turned South for about 70 metres and then West. On the right a short level has been made into an explosives store and has the remains of a wooden door. After passing another short level on the left, leading to a winze, the level reached a collapse. This could be passed, however a few metres on was another solid collapse.

In 1994, I returned to the mine, in order to descend the aforementioned winze. There was a length of timber across the level, put there for this purpose by other explorers. However, I considered this inadequate and placed a number of bolts. The winze was found to be 48ft deep to a solid bottom where there were a number of sections of ladder, which had fallen away from the sides of the shaft. There was a window to the west into a large stope, a floor of rubble being gained after a further few feet. Here, water coming down the shaft disappeared into the floor. Progress inbye was prevented by a continuation of the collapse from the Adit above. Above a bank of deads, the stope extends about 15 metres in an outbye direction.

This was the limit of my earlier explorations, however towards the end of the level a gap in the boulders draughted strongly, and this was to be the subject of my recent attentions

In the winter of 1996 I returned to the mine as part of what I am now calling, my 'Mid Wales Project'. The object of this is to gain workings not previously entered by modern explorers.

The water level now was upper chest, and in the freezing weather conditions and chill factor winds prevailing at that time, made changing out of a wet suit at the end of the day, something of a feat of endurance. The object of the exercise was a dig at the draughting area at the end of the main level. This required a considerable amount of timber, however the deep water was to be a blessing, as it was quite easy to make it up into little rafts and tow it down the level. The dig being vertical and in loose material has required special considerations. Initially, it was necessary to squeeze past a boulder of slightly questionable stability, it was very tight, and although only about 8ft I fitted a short length of electron, without which it would have been impossible to get back out. This boulder has subsequently been half chiselled away, and secured with a scaffold pole plus some shoring to support the ground underneath it. Also, immediately below the dig steep rubble slope was encountered. I have consolidated this by driving in road steels to pull in a horizontal length of timber, at a place where a step is very conveniently placed. My fear was that disturbance of the rubble slope by exploration parties could compromise the integrity of the dig.

The dig leads down to the head of a stope, which has been filled with collapse material and backfill. It is the same one reached by the 48ft winze. Descending the rubble slope and ascending a slope of backfill the horizon of the Adit is regained. This horizon is made up of backfill in a stoped out area, the height is about 12 feet. Here is a very interesting artefact. A wheelbarrow made without any legs, in near perfect condition. These wheelbarrows are of a type known in Derbyshire as 'Sough Barrows'. The word sough is a Derbyshire name for a drainage level, and Derbyshire soughs are often very confined spaces, hence the design of the barrow. However, the Henfwlch version is somewhat larger and is fitted with a cast iron wheel.

The level continues for another 200 metres or so end at a collapse of what appears to be dried out mud from the surface, on the left is another winze. Before this, two blind headings on the right are passed. The first has an enamelled teapot, now almost rusted away. The second has been half backfilled. One section has extensive packwalls; at this point there are the stubs of many tallow candles. The winze at the end has been descended after some difficulty providing a suitable belay. The walls of the level are in a soft mudstone, the same kind of ground seen at the Hafan mine to the southwest, a different kind of ground to the rest of the mine. This is obviously unsuitable for bolting, and I was also unable to make a satisfactory belay with scaffold poles, after dragging them through the levels. My final resort was an Acro prop. The winze also required the use of electron due to a slope of soft ground at the top. It was found to be 40 ft and blind, being mealy a trial.

Obviously, the burning question is that of a possible connection with Hafan. Rather than give an opinion on this, I shall try to reiterate the facts and leave the readers to make their own conclusions. One of my colleagues has suggested that they must connect because the water running down the 48ft winze must be exiting at the Hafan Deep Adit, however this is not necessarily so. David Bick states that the mines never connected and that the water could be finding its way into Hafan by natural fissures. Indeed, at the end of the workings several veins can clearly be seen to take the form of natural mineralised fissures rather than solid rock.

The geological survey seems to suggest that the two mines do connect, but without saying so in so many words. It describes the Henfwch Adit as 'draining the principal or Hafan shaft to a depth of 24 fathoms. About 83 fathoms further west the Bog shaft is drained by the same Adit'.

Plotting the course of the Adit on the OS map puts the collapse at my dig at the shaft on top of the hill adjacent to the quarry. (S.N 735882). This must be the principal shaft referred to by B.G.S. Plotting the rest of the Adit on the map takes one to a point only about 80 metres from the head of the Hafan incline, where the Hafan workings start. To add to the controversy, David Bick describes the Hafan deep Adit as being driven for 250 fathoms, (500 yards)! This would most certainly take it below the horizon of the Henfwch workings.

Exploration of the workings described is both easy and straightforward, all in there are about 600 metres of workings that can be explored without vertical techniques. On a subsequent visit I was easily able to lower the water level to below belt depth, a little more work would reduce this level still further. The dig is reasonable for anyone of average build, but would probably be impossible for anyone of a wider girth. The 48 ft winze is both safe and straightforward; a little damming in the level can stem the water flow. This mine should provide interesting exploration for many years to come.

References

Memoirs of the Geological Survey. Vol. XX by O. T. Jones. (Mining facsimile reprints)
 The Old Metal Mines of Mid Wales. By David Bick. Part 3

HENFWLCH MINE ACCESSIBLE WORKINGS PORTAL AT S.N. 737882 ROY FELLOWS 1997

