

The Dodger's Dispatch

**The irregular scribblings
of the Derbyshire Caving Club
(established 1960)**



**December 2006
Christmas and
New Year Special**

EDITORIAL

Christmas again – will it never go away? At least it means the AGM has been and gone and we can go back to life as normal with the same committee, members, activities and issues to discuss as last year. Agenda for future meetings: The Dinner, The Drill, Tackle, Boring things about Mine Safety, errr ... I think that's about it. The New Year will see the Treasurer/Webmaster/Editor in hospital for a few weeks so bear with us if there are delays sending out membership cards and so on. Tony will have access to the inner workings of the website and Simon or Andy will look after any financial issues. The DD can look after itself unless someone else wants to take up the challenge.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

As far as I can see, the insurance will be the same as last year (£15 for a caver, £5 for others) and the basic subscription of £10 for a full member was not changed at the AGM. Therefore, the most common rates are:

- Full caving member including West Mine and digging at Alderley Edge: £25.
- Full non-caving member allowing access to National Trust mines at Alderley but no digging: £15.
- Associate member who does not need caving insurance through the Club: £10.

Any questions, contact the Treasurer. Membership cards will be sent out as receipt of subs and plastic insurance cards will be available for paid up members from 2006. Insurance cards for others may take a little longer.

NEWS

Social events

I reckon most people enjoyed the Dinner at Bramhall in November. We had just on 50 people with a wide range of ages and backgrounds. The room seemed to be very suitable with the disco running all evening – no waiting for people to get up and dance after the dinner – and various slides and photos on display at the other end. Chris Widger of the National trust was guest and gave us some insight into his rôle (and the nice thatched cottage he lives in together with his collection of rock guitars – perhaps we book him for the next Stomp). Pete Johnson got the Caver of the Year Award for his quiet but dedicated work at Alderley, his commitment to the Club and his contacts with other mining groups. Chris Gayter got Mighty Miner and Kieran Rooney got Stunt of the Year – read last issue's Matienzo article!

MEETS LIST

Tony is getting a meets list together with a selection of caving, mining and Alderley trips. We're trying not to be too ambitious but the AGM felt that it was difficult to introduce new members if there was nothing to get them into caving unless they knew an existing member already. On the same subject, a pack of information is being put together for new members and a copy of it is attached to this newsletter. Membership is slowly dwindling in common with many other clubs but we do get enquiries through the website. However, we have not always been too clever about responding to these. Direct link to meets list: http://www.laptopbits.co.uk/dcc/caving_meets_list.htm.

NEW MEMBERS

Peter Cairns has rejoined (probationary at present) after 12 years in the non-caving wilderness and Rob McNeil has become a full member. Welcome to them both. Please help them to become integrated with the club and make sure they are included in invitations to caving and mining trips and to social events.

ALDERLEY OPEN WEEKENDS

Next Open Weekend is April 21 and 22, 2007. We can always find jobs for willing volunteers. The Autumn 2007 weekend is likely to be on September 1 and 2 at Wood Mine. For newer members or members who do not get to the main events of the Club, the Open Weekends are a really good time to meet up with the rest of the Club and you could even find something to do to help! There is even the chance to sample some of John Kersey's interesting brews and usually some sort of social event on the Saturday night. Make sure the dates are in your diary.

EXPLORATION AT ALDERLEY

While I have not been able to get underground for a few months, it has given me the opportunity to go back over the history of exploration at Alderley and write up some more reports. One outcome has been that it has jogged my brain into asking a few more questions about places we explored aeons ago and which may have more clues now that we understand the mines better. One such place is the Probationers' Series which Pete Clewes, Tony Brocklebank and Roger Bell have been looking at and finding out facts such as that the main passage was dug from both ends and meets in the middle. They are also looking in more detail now at the Cross Roads junction on the Hough Level. Malcolm, Doug, Chris, Shaun and others have been working at Field Shaft and sorting out what happens down there. The ladder is going to be replaced at the same time which will be no bad thing! Nigel.



THE NATIONAL TRUST

Jamie Lund now has part-time help in our area from Carolanne King, who contributed quite a lot to the AELP work when she worked for the Manchester University Archaeological Unit. She is still finding her feet but will in future be able to give us some real help with archaeological issues. The competence demonstrated by the Club in its activities is now seen as "exemplary", to use Jamie's word in a recent e-mail.

NENTHEAD

Pete mentioned in the last newsletter that Wirksworth would be rigging Brewery Shaft with a winch. That went ahead and the meet was attended by Petes J and C. If anyone wants to see a number of excellent pictures, speak to Pete Clewes or look on the website under Caving & Mining/Mining/Gallery.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

February 2007	5 - Committee Meeting 24 - DCA AGM, Monyash from 10.00.
March 2007	5 - Quarterly General Meeting
April 2007	16 - Committee Meeting 21/22 – Open Weekend: Engine Vein
May 2007	21 - Quarterly General Meeting
June 2007	NAMHO conference in Devon
July 2007	23 - Committee Meeting
August 2007	Matienzo expedition 20 - Quarterly General Meeting
September 2007	1-2 - Open Weekend, Alderley 21/23 – Hidden Earth at Upton upon Severn
October 2007	22 - Committee Meeting
November 2007	24 - ANNUAL DINNER possible date - NOT FIXED YET
December 2007	3 - Annual General Meeting subject to confirmation with the Pack Horse

STOP PRESS

The e-mail broad has bene byus recently wiht discssuion abtou teh nede for cacruate slleping nad ti saw dicedied hatt it ralley dosent mtater waht roder teh lteters papera in. So fi yuo cna rade tish, tehn tis treu.

(PS Try typing this with auto-correction switched on!)

Happy New Year

Any comments, items for the next edition, volunteers to be editor, etc. to Nigel Dibben [✉Dibben@aol.com](mailto:Dibben@aol.com)

CHRISTMAS FEATURES : 1. THE SAGA LOUTS (John Kersey)

Who are the Saga Louts?

Groupies, adventurers, idiots, alcoholics, members of the Lee Valley Maintenance Association or just slightly older members of the community who believe life is for living! All, some and probably other vices may be recalled.



The LVMA became acquainted with Alderley Edge Mines and the DCC through one of our members attending an Open Day. Nigel agreed to lead a trip for us the following March 2003. Little did he know that part of a 'training weekend' required a long first night and hence his subdued expression on the Saturday morning. But amazement and wonder even by these old sods, snottite never seen before, don't know what we were expecting.

Getting the group together (herding cats!) →

However we are allowed back in 2004 and Nigel again agreed to entertain us. His mind must be getting forgetful, because he indicated that West Mine be a suitable venue for exploration. Nigel still looks glum; he thought Friday's in the King's Arms was an aberration, not a habit.



And yet again certain events come to mind, Mike Tolson, reputedly a climber, and still doing it appeared to try and emulate a marine Commando going into battle by forward rolling over a lump, prevented by Nigel's feet from moving too far into the danger zone by a shaft, John never realised that in a previous existence he visited the end of west Mine to add JK to the graffiti, or had he? (Who the hell was 'Rusty' underneath?)

← Peter O'Kane gazing in wonder at snottite.

Knackered by lunchtime, followed by all these strange traverses, chain shaft and finally Nigel gets his revenge; every time we thought we were moving out, we went downhill again and the last pitch was to climb up this cliff to regain the entrance. An inspection?

But yet again we are allowed back again in 2005! This is the trip of Nigel's revenge for the previous two years of Saturday morning's meeting mumbling inchoates. With a chest complaint he looked marginally better than the Saga Louts. It was our fault; 'Lets do Brynlow through to the Hough'. Yep, away we went. This was the trip where Peter and Tony took us in hand. (DCC spreading the pain)?

Everything is fine, except when changing water levels and it keeps repeatedly reaching the parts that Robbie's best bitter doesn't for at least 4 hours.

Going through the wet arch at Brynlow →

After a wet/cold strip off in the Surgery forming a ring of roses to strip off the day was rounded off by, yes you've guessed, tea and cakes in the café, Kings Arms followed by hot pot supper by Wendy, the half of John who doesn't want to know us sometimes, even at Christmas dinners.

Having met up with Paul Stubbs earlier in the day we all went to the Ship at Styal to listen to his impressive 'drumming' along with other members of a music making group. Is there any connection between our visit and the landlord upgrading his facility and not now requiring this pleasing musical soirée?



In 2006 we were again allowed back, Peter and Tony have not yet given us up for lost or maybe it's catching; and an exploration of Brynlow took place, where Chris Gayter kept trying to lose us? With a repeat in parts of West Mine. Peter Clewes doesn't believe that Peter's fingers were really that shape. He only did it to get a matching pair of hands. He'd been waiting ever since football did the first one and the knee delayed him getting married many years ago!



As a footnote we all wondered what had happened to the bath tub boat following three trying to cross over the deeper patch in Brynlow the previous year.

← Peter's fingers

What of the future: The Saga Louts are getting older? Misguided? About to be sectioned? And we wanted to try a proper pothole? Giants was mooted but for once sense has prevailed and hopefully in April 2007 we will be visiting parts of Engine vein and Wood mine not seen. (Nigel says we can even though some repairs may be necessary).

Many thanks to the DCC for some great days out. John Kersey.

(... and to you John for some great entertainment and interesting drinks. Ed.)

2. EMPIRE MINE, CALIFORNIA (Sue Morton)

Earlier this year Tony and I visited California. We spent some time exploring the gold rush area on which the development of California was built. In many of the towns along the base of the Sierra Nevada's there are closed mines and mining equipment scattered around the towns and villages. Many of the pieces are well preserved and documented as part of the area's history.



By far the most sizeable works is the Empire Mine. It is one of the oldest, deepest, largest and richest gold mines in California. It covered a distance of five square miles and 367 miles of tunnels and shafts. By far one of the longest running gold mines of the Gold Rush Era, Empire Mine operated for over a century from 1850 to 1956. It was the largest hard rock mining operation in the state pulling more gold out of the ground than any other mine of the Gold Rush era. The mine still contains millions of dollars of gold. From 1850 to when it closed in 1956, it produced 5.8 million ounces of gold. They reckon that this only represents 20% of the available gold so far extracted.



The Headframe



Steam Donkey



Pelton Wheel

The founder of the mine, George Roberts, a lumberman was surveying some trees in the area and happened to glance at his boots. They had tiny gold flakes on them. He'd found gold! The gold rush had been on a full year already. Miners were used to panning the gold right out of streams and river beds. The gold George Roberts found though was embedded in quartz. The only way to get at it was dig it up and crush the rock, but this was very difficult at the time and there were much better, and easier, finds elsewhere.

George sold his rights to the land for a mere \$350 in 1851. Little did he know he was quite literally standing on a gold mine. George couldn't have known that in a mere 13 years, by 1864, the mine would already have produced one million dollars worth of gold.



Inside the machine shop.



The Mining Offices



Another machine shop

In 1850, Grass Valley, the home of the Empire Mine, was populated by a tiny handful of people. By 1851, it swarmed with over 20,000 residents. The hilltop of present-day Empire Mine pulsated with gold seekers looking for easy pickings. But it wasn't so easy- a new and efficient method of extracting the gold from the quartz was needed. They were rescued with the arrival of Cornish immigrants. They brought with them their knowledge of mining, their work ethic, and their customs. The Empire Mine labour force soon was made up of 90% Cornish miners. The depth of the mine soon fell below the water table and Cornish plunging pump was used to pump 18,000 gallons of water out of the mine- per hour.

During the mines heyday over 400 miners were employed at the Empire Mine. The miners were lowered down the incline shaft in skip loader ore cars 20 at a time and dropped down into the mine at a speed of over 800 feet per minute to a collective depth of over 11,000 feet. Deep in the mines over 44 mules lived their lives pulling ore cars, never to see the light of day.

All the mining outbuildings are preserved and set to show life in the mine at the turn of the century. The assay office, blacksmiths, tooling workshops etc are open and visitors can freely roam through them and talk to volunteers about the history of the mine and methods of extracting the gold.

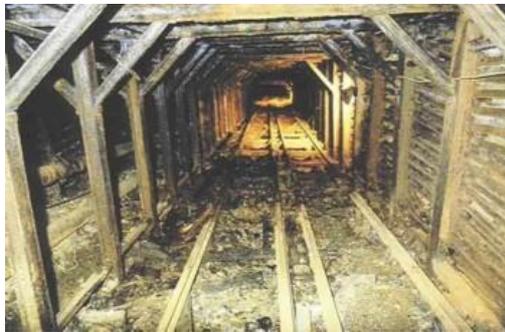


Ore Cars



Ore Crusher

At the time of our visit the only part of the underground tour that was available was a short descent down a flight of stairs along side the rails off the mining cars, below the headframe. Here you could peer down into the descending inclined shaft. As you looked around this shaft you saw that it was propped up with small gauge railway lines. The mining company had in fact bought all of the railway track in San Francisco when the city was scrapping it to make way for the new system after the 1906 earthquake.



You can see railway tracks running vertically on the right hand wall.



Below the Headframe

In March 2006 it was hoped that the mine would gain funding to drain parts of the flooded tunnel (95% of the mine is now flooded) to enable an underground tour to take place. The mine is run nearly entirely by volunteers, (they are called the Over-the-hill Gang), many of whom used to be employed by the mine in the 1950's, supported by some state park wardens.

Their plan is to take visitors into the mine through an adit they are constructing.

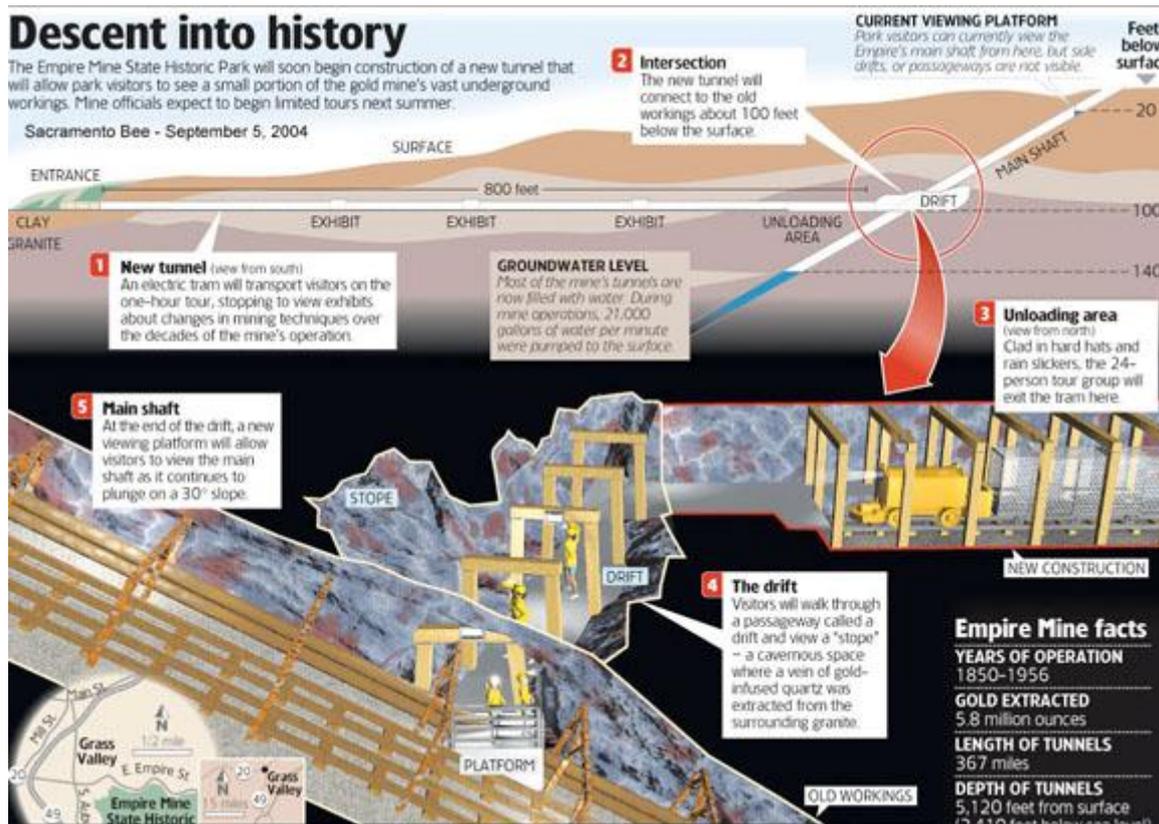


New Adit



New Tracks for electric train

The final goal is to take visitors, through the quartz-laced grey granite until it intersects the main shaft via an 800 ft tram (remember its in USA – they can't walk). to show them mining hard rock techniques over the years and also the stope caused by mining out the mineral upwardly . The diagram below shows the limited tour available at present, current viewing platform, photograph entitled below the headframe, and the full extent of the tour they are hoping to offer in the next coming year.



The author acknowledges that a certain amount of plagiarism has taken place to compile this article. For more information see www.parks.ca.gov and www.empiremine.org/visitor.html.