

# Mining History Society of Ireland

Newsletter

No. 2. Autumn 1996

## PROGRAMME

### National Heritage Day, Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> September 1996

#### *The Mining Heritage of Bonmahon and Hinterland, Co. Waterford.*

A guided tour led by Des Cowman.  
Meet at 15.00 (3.00 pm) on Sunday 8th Sept. at Ballydwan Cove (about 3 miles west of Bonmahon).

This will include the unveiling of a plaque to the 19<sup>th</sup> century mining community in Bonmahon at 3.45pm. (Total duration about 2½ hours).

#### *Iron Mining Heritage of the Glenravel Mines, near Ballymena, Co. Antrim.*

A guided tour led by Kevin O'Hagan.  
Meet at 14.00 (2.00 pm) on Sunday 8th Sept. at the Information Centre in Glenariff Forest Park, south of Cushendall. (1" map sheet 3 grid ref 205206).

#### *Historic Mining at Silvermines, Co. Tipperary.*

A guided tour led by Martin Critchley.  
Meet at 13.00 (1.00 pm) on Sunday 8th Sept. outside Silvermines Church, Silvermines Village. (Duration about 2 hours)

#### *Historic Mining at Cappagh, Ballycumisk and Cosheen, Co. Cork.*

A guided tour led by Tom Reilly.  
Meet at 13.00 (1.00 pm) on Sunday 8th Sept. at Ballydehob (west side of the bridge). (Duration about 3 hours)

#### *Mining Heritage of the Clontibret - Cattleblayney region, Co. Monaghan.*

A guided tour led by John Morris.  
Meet at 14.00 (2.00 pm) on Sunday 8th Sept. at the Car Park of the Braeside Inn, Clontibret. (Duration approx. 2-3 hours)

#### *The Mining Heritage of Ballycorus Lead Works, Ballycorus, Co. Dublin.*

A guided tour led by Rob Goodbody.  
Meet at 15.00 (3.00 pm) on Sunday 8th Sept. at Ballycorus Lead Works, off the Kiltiernan - Loughlinstown Road (Grid Ref. O223218). (Duration about 2 hours)

#### *The Mining Heritage of Glengowla East, Oughterard, Co. Galway.*

A guided tour led by Mr and Mrs P. Geoghegan.  
Meet at any time between 14.30 -17.00 on Sunday 8th Sept. at Glengowla Mines, 2 miles north of Oughterard on the N59.

## Field Meets, Lectures and AGM

(Separate notice will be sent to members of these).

**October 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>:** *The Bronze Age Mines of Ross Island and the Mines of the Kenmare Valley.*

Conducted by Dr. William O'Brien.

**November:** Lecture to be arranged.

**Feb. 8<sup>th</sup> 1997:** AGM

**March:** Lecture to be arranged.

**May 17<sup>th</sup>** (Provisional) *The Newtownards - Conlig lead mines near Belfast.*

Excursion and lecture by Dr. Norman Moles, Queen's University Belfast.

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## REPORTS - FIELD MEETS

### 1 Ballycorus and the Wicklow mines, 26/27<sup>th</sup> May 1996.

"Showers on Saturday afternoon continuing into Sunday, becoming finer in the afternoon." Saturday afternoon saw us in almost continuous sunshine at Ballycorus in the company of Rob Goodbody. He outlined the origins of the smelter there and interpreted the later building work done by the MCI. We followed their 1500m long flue up the hill looking also at where the original excavations had taken place. Various theories were advanced as to the purpose of the steps up the outside of the flue - to allow visitors to savour directly the toxic delicacies issuing from it?



Waste tip and remaining mine buildings at upper lake Glendalough. Over the shoulder of the hill top right is the mining outpost nicknamed "Van Diemens Land" because of its remoteness.

That evening Rob put the afternoon's activities into perspective with a series of early photographs and maps. The first chimney for instance, was clearly evident in the 1843 O.S. map as was some of the rationale for the curving nature of the current flue. Rob then introduced us to the main source of supply to the smelter - the Wicklow lead mines.



"Van Diemens Land". Behind this wall was provision for a small engine with perhaps a winding wheel. Waste heaps nearby indicate that working was by adit and the dressing floors are below. So what was this? Let us have your guesses!

Sunday morning at the Wicklow Gap and the forecast proved accurate. Amidst showers and sunshine we were introduced by William Dick to the wild slopes of Glendesan bestrewn with spoil heaps and roofless ruins. Out of the jumble which collectively is known as Luganure mines a pattern emerged. Thanks to William and his hand out, Moll Doyle, Old Hero, Foxrock, etc., could be discerned to separate workings.

With the promise of fine weather to come we headed for the Upper Lake in Glendalough, and having viewed the mine buildings there, ascended to the desolate shoulder that nineteenth century miners nicknamed "Van Diemen's Land". The

fine ashlar ruins there proved somewhat of an enigma. As we prowled and wondered the rain intensified. Excuses were made for not joining William Dick hiking across Coomaderry back to the Wicklow Gap ("the car park closes at 6.00"). He disappeared off into the moist Celtic twilight; the rest of us headed towards the Laragh Inn, sodden but satisfied that this first field meet had been a memorable one. Our thanks to Rob Goodbody, William Dick (whose book on Ballycorus/Wicklow mines we look forward to in due course) and all those who made spontaneous contributions on the geology, glaciation, mineralogy as well as mining background.



## 2. The Mid-Antrim Mines, 15<sup>th</sup>-16 June

Under a benign blue sky we set off in the company of Kevin O'Hagan to explore the various workings on the inter-basaltic belts high above the Glens of Antrim. His maps and commentary transformed Glenariff, Cromellin, Glenravel, Ballynahowla and Evishacrow from sun-drenched wildernesses into mining entities criss-crossed by mineralogical railways. These were necessary to transport the huge tonnages of iron ore and bauxite from these remote locations to the coast for shipment. The vulnerability of the adit openings to disappearance under rockfall was apparent to us all.

That evening, using a series of unique slides, Kevin provided both wider context and further detail of what we had seen. The failed attempts at iron extraction in the early 1840s, particularly Cromellin's very odd-looking furnace near his "Newtown", gave way in 1866 to the introduction of technology from Barrow on Furnace. We saw the original agreement between landowner Benn and ironworker Fisher which was written on the back of an actual envelope! The slides brought us through the various phases of the exploitation of the mineral enriched area which had been trapped under the last basalt flow. Group shots of early twentieth century miners brought cries of recognition of long dead relatives from the local people present. A final series of slides brought us into various abandoned workings showing their condition at various stages over the past twenty years. The entrances to many of these have since disappeared.

At noon on Sunday a slightly different combination of people assembled and proceeded to Lyles Hill, west of Belfast. This circular prominence is crowned with a bronze age stone alignment and circled by a large embanked iron age enclosure. Beneath it iron and bauxite were worked at various times from the 1880s up to 1945. The last phase was for bauxite to provide aeroplane manufacturers with aluminium during the war. The roads through the mine were easy to negotiate. What was striking about them was how extensive they were in comparison to the

amount of worked area evident. The remains of sleepers and track were clearly visible throughout.

This therefore was a memorable weekend for all who made the trip. Apart from the sun and scenery various vignettes remain such as David Smith's tongue test to identify bauxite (it sticks to the tongue and is difficult to peel away!) or Kevin's provision of his own restored carbide lamps for those unwise v.s who intended to go underground at Lyles Hill ill equipped. What we will treasure however was Kevin's sharing of a quarter of a century's accumulation of enthusiast and information. Thanks Kevin - but do get it down on paper!

### EDITORIAL

Perhaps a Newsletter, by definition should be confined to news of the Society. However, anything members submit will be treated as "news" and published. So please send snippets, queries or short articles before Christmas to be included in the Spring '97 Newsletter which should be ready in late February. It would also be appreciated if those who conducted or attended any of the extensive range of mining heritage field meets on *National Heritage Day* were to send a summary of how things went.

It is also editorial policy in these early issues to publish basic resource material such as lists of mines, engine houses, etc.. The next issue will contain a substantial bibliography of writings on Irish mining history over the last 40 years.

If there is anything else that members think might be useful, let me know.

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