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THE MINES OF SHEEPS HEAD AND MIZEN HEAD PENINSULAS, COUNTY CORK

By Paddy O'Sullivan

Abstract: This isolated peninsula contains a number of small, short-lived mines which on closer examination reveal themselves to be surprisingly complex. These are taken in order going west from Bantry. There is some difficulty in identifying between the third and fourth mines which are close together and both in coves with the name elements Glan and Coosh in common. Explorations of mines on the Mizen Peninsula are reported, in particular, Mizen Head Mine and Brow Head Mine. *Journal of the Mining Heritage Trust of Ireland*, **6**, 2006, 23-36.

SHEEPS HEAD - FOUR UNDOCUMENTED MINES

Lisamerig

Little survives of a short-lived silver working here, nor is much known about its history. By 1884 it was in the hands of a Bantry Silvermining Company who had reportedly driven an 210 yard adit with a shaft half ways along it. A Walter Wood was associated with this along with Col. Hanley Ewart. They claim to have spent £1000 on the mine. (O'Mahony, p. 73-74 and 83)

Rooska and Keleenavenogue

These adjoining townlands were reportedly worked in the early 1840s but closed due to difficulties about the lease. Small tonnages of silver-rich lead ore are recorded from the latter townland between 1849 and 1852 (Min. Stats). They were tested or worked sporadically thereafter and an enterprise of the late 1870s was said to have been abandoned due to the troubled state of the country. In 1884 rich spoil heaps were noted here. (O'Mahony, p. 75-77: SE 14/12/1872)

Local lore has it that an adit runs from the cliff at about the boundary of the townlands but that it is only accessible by sea. When this was done in August 2005 the "adit", not unexpectedly, turned out to be a complex series of large sea caves, flooded at high water. Four shafts in a line were filled in during the 1970s though their location can be traced through subsidence. (Hodnett, 2004).

Caravilleen and Glanalin (also known possibly as Glan).

These represent operations on the townlands on either side of Glanalin Cove (Fig. 1). These had been worked by a Londonbased Glenaulin and Caravilleen Mining Company, established in 1852. Operations finished in 1855 though the company maintained a paper existence until 1862. (BT -/1465). Then in 1863 a "Glan Alan" Mining Company was established, though whether they actually mined there goes unrecorded. A Glen Cove company came into existence in the 1880s (Cowman and Reilly 1988, p. 129). Associated with this were Mssrs Wood and Ewart of Lisamerig. In 1884 a Captain Chipman was in charge of operation which was said to be "Bare preliminary" .Presumably the current remains post-date this. Oral tradition of working at "Cuas, Glaun" and workings at Carravileen suggests that they closed when it was realised that there was only about 250 tonnes of copper in the mines (O'Mahony, p. 75 and 87).

At this latter mine there is evidence of more substantial mining than the stark records indicate. The only way in to the cove is by boat and Carravilleen adit is about six metres above mid tide. It runs straight for 75 metres full of puddles and twelveinch deep sticky mud that seems iron-based. Three branches run from the adit as indicated in fig. 1. Only the middle one has a stoped area with stulls (Figs. 2-4). A flooded winze indicates some lower workings and above the stulls evidence of another level and workings up towards the surface. The two northern levels from the adit end in blank walls. The most visible mineralisation is just beyond the winze.



Figure 1. Sketch survey of Caravilleen Mine and Glanalin Cove, Kilcrohane, Sheeps Head Peninsula, by Paddy O'Sullivan.



Adit B starts about three metres above a pebbled beach. It is unusually wide and high through its 48 metre straight length and ends in a blank where the rock colour changes to a sulphur yellow. It is difficult to know what purpose this served. Two shafts (C and D) indicate that there are possible other hidden workings; most of C is dry but D is flooded to brim.

There are the remains of stone steps towards the top of the cliff (Fig. 5) which must have given access to the adits although whatever lower sections there were have been washed away. The only other surface remains are some undetermined briar-covered stone ruins.

Glanroon (also called Killeen and possibly Kilcrohan)

The earliest mention of this is in the late 1840s when William Connell (also of Gurtavallig) aspired to open a mine here but may not have done so. The same may be true of a Kileen Mining Company established in 1862 (Cowman and Reilly 1988, p. 47 and 129). The first definite account of ore being raised from these locations is by the London-based South Berehaven Mining company, established in 1883, drawing on











Figures 7-9. Top row. Three views of Glanroon adit. Figures 10-11. Above. The miners cottages at Glanroon. Figure 12. Left. A conjectural drawing of Glanroon wheel pit. Figure 13. Below. The remaining walls of the Glanroon

Figure 13. Below. The remaining walls of the Glanroon wheel pit.



reports from the veteran west Cork miner, William Thomas. By 1884 Managing Director Rackbone and Captain Row were supervising operations here and reportedly copper with silver and gold, arsenic pyrites as well as oxides and carbonate of copper were raised (O'Mahony, 1990 p.75). The Mineral Statistics record 224 tons of copper from here, but it was worth only £518.

It is likely that the current adit (Figs. 6-9) just gave access to the stopes as well as being exploratory. The opening section seems to be along a fault as the east wall is completely smooth. It is not possible to get beyond the rubble filled shaft to where the stopes probably lie.

Most impressive here are the surface remains with structurally sound miners' houses (Figs.10-11), the remains of a wheel-pit (Figs. 12-13), possibly used for crushing, and a gunpowder house. These structures have probably survived because of the remoteness of the area which also explains the greater wealth of surface material at the even more remote Gortavallig.

GORTAVALLIG

Something of the post-famine history of this mine is give in Diane Hodnett's accompanying article. Even in pre-famine times Gurtavallig was remote and a road had to be built to give access, known strangely as the "Crimea Road", now gone (O'Mahony, 1990 p. 67). At present the mine is accessible only after a tough trek across wilderness. On arrival at the mine we were greeted by the usual sights - various shafts ringed with barbed wire and danger signs. Less familiar was a water-filled reservoir with man-made stone dam set on the edge of a ninety-metre high cliff. A little further on stood ten ruined miners' cottages, all roofless and some just rubble. The cliff itself is badly broken with loose rock everywhere. Its sheer sides are angled between 80 and 90 degrees; the base of the cliff is littered with fallen rocks, some of them huge.





Figure 15. The reservoir on the cliff top.



Figure 16. The dam wall of the reservoir.



Figure 17. Above. An overview of the cliff top with shaft in foreground, reservoir at cliff edge and miners cottages at far left of view.

Figure 14. Left. The man made dam holding the cliff top reservoir is seen approaching from the south, past the miners cottages. It provided for water supply on the dressing floor below.



Figure 18. The first adit left of picture. Note cliff path with person in upper part, and lower path between adit 1 and adit 2 in lower half of picture.



Two high-level adits are visible on the cliff-face on the same contour line about twenty metres apart (Fig. 18). One runs east into the peninsula while the other runs west almost parallel to the cliff itself. The first of these is floored with sticky mud punctuated with sheep hoof marks. It has two dry winzes but it is not possible to navigate beyond the second due to lack of footing. During a later visit to the mine Martin Critchley rigged up a transit apparatus and successfully crossed the void to explore the level beyond until brought to a halt by a collapse (Fig. 19) Overhead stopes in this adit are very narrow, barely the width of a man and running up approximately eight metres.

The second high-level adit running west is quite different (Fig. 20). Four metres in, a dry winze drops to a then unknown destination. The area ahead is partly filled as a result of a ceiling

winze. Having climbed over the collapse one is greeted by a stope that is both wide and high. Visible from the top of the collapse are stulls straddling a lead-in passage and packed with deads approximately two metres high. This was a chance find as it was not recorded in an 1863 map of Gortavallig so presumably post-dated it. Proceeding westerly under the stulls, daylight floods down from a surface shaft located near the terrace of miners' cottages with further workings beyond.

collapse, much of the rubble having fallen into the



Figure 20. Right. The entrance to adit 2, with author for scale.

> A third adit is located about ten metres above sea level. A muchweathered zigzag path weaves its way from top to bottom of cliff, presumably created by the miners. It is still navigable with some care, a safety rope being advisable. This lower adit runs westward into the cliff for about forty-five metres to a T-junction. The left hand branch runs south under the first high adit. Portions of the floor are flooded to a depth of about fourteen inches. From the roof two dry winzes run to the level above as identified by dropping labelled markers from high to low. Broken planking is littered below one winze, presumably the debris of an earlier bridge or catwalk above. From the floor three flooded winzes descend, some with submerged ladders in place. A cave-in obstructed further progress along this branch. Back to the T-junction and heading north along the other branch we came to a large cavern which seems to act as a hub for a series of levels radiating out in all directions. Two flooded winzes run downward from here. In the middle, almost as a work of art, stands a "rock haystack" of carefully stacked waste material. All around are stunning colours on both side-walls and broken rock, greens, azure and turquoise. One of the radiating levels is covered in a few inches of unidentified snow-white liquid. The stulls here typically comprise heavy timberwork angled at forty-five degrees, spanning a one and a half metrewide stope holding up to five metres of waste rock.



Figure 21. Paddy O'Sullivan at the entrance to the third adit. The distant view from the other side of the inlet shows remnants of paths and possible ore chutes from adit 2 to the dressing floor level below the lower adit.



Figure 22. A view up from near sea level to the lower adit in the centre of the picture, at the end of the abseil rope.

Exiting through the access adit, I clambered over the fallen rocks to the water's edge. Looking back to the cliff I could discern, edge-on, the dressing floor described in Diane Hodnett's accompanying article herein. The paved floor is totally obstructed from view from above as it is heavily overlain with



fallen rock. A few metres out to sea and surrounded by water on three sides stands a large rock stack. Carved into it is a steeply angled slipway leading right down to the water's edge with powder-blast holes evident. This must have been part of the shipping arrangement ingeniously created by Charles Thomas between 1845 and 1848.

Figure 23. Far Left. A view down onto the quay from dressing floor level, with a clearly cut ramp.

Figure 24. Left. The view up the ramp from near sea level.

MIZEN PENINSULA -NORTH

The three mines near the tip of the Mizen Peninsula are Mizen itself, Browhead and Crookhaven. This last has already been reported on (MHTI Journal 4); there were visible remains at Browhead but no sign of anything at Mizen. However on the north side of Mizen also stands Dhurode. A seaward visit to it has already been reported (O'Sullivan, September 2005) and its mid-19th century history is told in Cowman and Reilly. Its later history is recorded in McCarthy and Hawkes (1999) and they also tell a story of the concern Captain Charles Thomas showed for his miners there during the Famine. They state that in 1881 an Atlantic Mining Company Ltd. carried out tests there over two years. From 1900 to 1906 a Dhurode Mining Company was reported to have worked here under a Captain Worseldine about whom an anecdote is told, apparently from oral tradition. The Mineral Statistics have him there in 1899, replaced by H. Portway in 1901; in the former year 48 were employed but by 1901 there were only three surface workers. Four verses of poetry are also given in 1999 in which various local people are named and remarks attributed to them. If these are to be believed, this was a sophisticated operation -

"Now should you enter that fine valley on a dark and dreary night/ You'd think it was a big city all lit with the electric light". There was also "---a fine hydraulic for to turn the big wheel round/ There are stone crushers, water wheels and the finest machinery".

No ore is reported to have been exported! However, they were also said to have worked at Lackavawn, east of Dhurode, and at an unspecified location simply known as Dunmanus West.

While investigating the area, Arthur O'Sullivan told of a mine entrance southwest of Dhurode that he believed he had seen when lobster fishing. He had heard a story of a priest who entered it about fifty years ago and "travelled for miles" underground. We set out cross-country to the approximate site and then went by rope down the cliff. After much clawing across the rocks we located an adit about twenty metres above sea level. We got in and measured it at 118 feet before ending in a blank wall. On our return journey westwards after only thirty metres we spotted a second adit about five metres above a stony cove. This proved to measure 278 feet. However, the level here ended with a U-turn leading back five metres before ending in blank rock. We presumed that this was the "Priest's Adit" and therefore named the other "Short adit" (Fig. 25). Could these have been the "Dunmanus West" trials of the Dhurode Copper Company circa 1900?



MIZEN HEAD MINE

Finding the Mizen Head mine July 30 2006. Whilst information on the Mizen Head Mine is sparse, its origins can be attributed to Col. Hall in the early 19th century. A brief snippet refers to a man and boy working the mine at this time. There is also mention of an exceptionally high tide and storm sweeping away a load of ore ready for shipment. A second and more controversial phase of mining at the Mizen Head mine seems to have commenced around the 1850s with much wrangling and hints of fraud (Cowman & O'Reilly).

I set out to find this elusive mine in July 2006. Not knowing where to look except a belief that the mine was in the area of Cloghane which practically encompasses the entire Mizen region; I duly launched my rigid inflatable boat (RIB) at Goleen slipway - local man Arthur O'Sullivan kindly assisted as we put to sea during our glorious July heat-wave. Our search started on the northern shores of the Mizen Head at a place called Cahir Island. The intention was to look out for any unusual colouring in the steep cliffs of the Mizen or openings on the cliff face that might be adits. Northeast winds are a prerequisite to making a close-in search of the Mizen cliffs. The numerous shipwrecks beneath our boat were a reminder of the bad tempered nature of the seas in this area. Countless sailors have been committed to watery graves by sudden storm or fog in this hostile patch over the centuries. The name of one lucky escapee is immortalised in a narrow inlet just north of the Mizen tip: "Charlie Haughey's Cove".

Our cliff-search dragged on for three sun-burning days which saw us inch our way around the Mizen and proceed in an easterly direction until we found ourselves directly under the newly-built Mizen Vision heritage centre. At this stage Arthur pointed out an unusual feature running in a vertical direction up a sheer cliff face. My unqualified opinion caused me to guess that I was looking at a two-foot wide, iron-stained quartz vein. Slightly to the left of the vein was an enormous sea cave that seemed to be worth a swim; it might hold geological clues. Being already wet-suited I heaved myself over the side in an untidy splash and swam toward the abyss wearing my mining helmet and head-lamp. The cave proved to be quite extensive. Its high ceiling revealed several layers of what appeared to be snow-white chalk veins. By contrast, the northern wall of the cave was heavily stained with rust. As I marvelled at the kaleidoscope of colours on the ceiling I realised that I was not alone but swimming in the midst of a colony of agitated seals. Presumably some were guarding young pups and none too pleased at the intrusion. It was time beat a hasty retreat to the outside world and distance myself from my frenzied companions. Seals have been known to bite divers from time to time; they may also charge at a swimmer and deliver a knockout punch with their snouts.

Clambering up the rocks at the cave mouth. I eventually reached the white vein. I could draw scratch-marks on its smooth surface by merely using my bare finger-nails. I then discovered that the true colour of these veins was dove grey; the thin white coating came away with some light scraping. A few samples were recovered and passed onto MHTI member, Barry Flannery. Barry suggested that the sample might be 'talc schist'. A sampling has gone into MHTI archive.



Figure 26. Mizen Head, at the bottom left of image with mining sites nearby indicated.



Figure 27. On day six of the search for Mizen by RIB and clamber, a simple walk down the steps built by Irish Lights, and there it was, being pointed to by Theo Dalke. Because these steps are so dangerous they have since been rendered inaccessible.

Five metres south of the cave, I was able to confront the quartz vein for a close-up examination - copper staining was evident. About five metres up, I noticed a window-size aperture in the vein. Was this the work of nature or an early trial by man? I rigged a ladder the following day and squeezed into the opening to find myself standing in a flooded sump about six feet deep. It was perfectly circular and could have accommodated about ten men standing upright. Looking upwards from my quartz cold tub, I noticed that the vein had been excavated upwards several metres to reveal daylight peeping in at its highest point. Was this void created by man or the unrelenting onset of the Atlantic? I cannot say!

Day five in pursuit of the Mizen mine was devoted to folklore, with local farmer, Denis Downey, adding many pieces to my mine jigsaw. We trekked the highways and byways with Denis pointing out features of special interest, including an area on the Mizen Head where ore was said to have been dressed at some unspecified time in the past. He also recalled two mineshafts in a field near the dressing area. Both had been filled with rubbish and capped in 1966. Denis had heard that the shafts 'weren't much of thing' and probably only twenty-feet deep. He led me on to the ore-dressing location that was situated in the only valley with a small river on the Mizen peninsula. There were remains of several buildings and a structure that looked like a water- wheel pit.

The area around the building remains was covered in pea-size white chippings which would indicate that dressing had taken place. A cobbled floor was also evident. Denis could recall several derelict buildings on the dressing site and believed that one or two may even have been occupied in his childhood. Unfortunately the flat quality of the stones used in the mine buildings proved to be their downfall; they were much sought after for building in the locality; local stone was said to be 'too round' and therefore useless for building.

Day six saw me back again on the high cliffs beneath the Mizen centre and directly over the chalk-veined sea-cave. I now set about exploring the cliff from the landward side. Local man, Stephen O'Sullivan, knew of a deep hole or possibly a mine-



my eyes, I inadvertently looked upwards to be greeted by yet another surprise: an opening leading into the cliffs about five metres over my head (Fig. 28). I soon accessed my newfound aperture and noted that it merely ran in six metres to a worked-out stope that had been driven on the quartz vein I had noted earlier from the opposite side.

The level I had just entered led to a stope a mere six metres wide, approximately fourteen metres high and approximately eight metres long. Three timber stulls spanned its width. The entry level was set at almost ceiling height. This necessitated drilling a rock anchor into position and rigging up an abseil rope to access the workings. However, it was not possible to 'bottom out' as the floor was flooded to a depth of two metres. Through the crystal clear water one could see planks littering the bottom which presumably had fallen from the stulls at some stage. From my dangling viewpoint I noted a wall of white quartz stones (deads) shoring up the eastern end of the stope and leading off in a drive twelve metres in an easterly direction to blank end. Unfortunately, It was not possible to operate my camera while emulating Tarzan on a swinging rope. However, a future visit with a short ladder would solve this problem by providing a solid base to stand on.

There is more to be done on this site but would require an experienced team to do so. The big shaft on the cliff top has yet to be explored. It appears to run from top to bottom of the cliff and despite being only ten metres distant from the explored quartz-stope (as the crow would fly) there is no internal link.

Figure 28. In from the Irish Lights steps the adit leads to this worked-out area which could not be photographed.

shaft at the edge of the cliff top, he was also aware of a nearby plateau littered with quartz chippings which may have been yet another a dressing area near the open shaft. Both dressing areas were one mile apart. Stephen led me to these new targets, and then departed to attend to his duties in the heritage centre. Descending the near vertical cliff was easy - long flights of concrete steps had been cast into the cliff-face by Irish Lights Commissioners. The steps (now rendered inaccessible) led all the way to the sea to a structure still known as 'the Lighthouse landing'. Nearing the lower reaches of the cliff, a pool of stagnant green water caught my eye. Could this be mine-drainage water? Soon I was sloshing around in the pea-green brew and clambering over gigantic boulders that may have fallen from above during past storms. Cliffs exposed to long days of scorching sun can be blisteringly hot, especially when one is wearing a thick rubber suit.

Energy-sapping heat radiates out from rock faces to add to the torment of the blazing sun. As I paused to wipe the sweat from

BROW HEAD

There are a total of five levels in Brow Head. To the east near the signal tower is Roe Brothers Level running in a straight line for almost 200 metres. Dripped on to its floor was a black carbon-like material a sample of which has been given to MHTI. West of it is Kelly's level, a mere 13 metres (Lings and Watsham, 1987). These seem to represent comparatively recent testing. North west of Kelly's are the main workings comprising three adits plus the haulage shaft from "big cavern" as shown in the accompanying photograph. These represent mainly 19th century workings with extensions made in early 20th century.

Such evidence as survives about the phases of working Brow head, between 1854 and 1862 suggests that more disputation than mining took place (Cowman and Reilly, 1988, p. 95 and 127). However, a description of it in 1872 implies otherwise: "--- *a level (was) driven east on the course of one of the lodes,*



Figure 29. Above. Brow Head "High adit" runs into blank rock at 6 metres with a right hand branch about half way along ending similarly after two metres. "Big cavern" may have been for raising the ore to the cliff-top from the main workings which are 10 metres below. "Low adit" gives access to these 72 metres from the cliff-top. This is linked to the "Sea entrance" adit which is approximately 182 metres long with three minor sinkings and a major one 31 metres below sea level.

Figure 30. Below. Map of the Brow Head Mine site accompanying a 1906 Prospectus for The Browhead Copper Mines Limited - BT 31/11573/893'3





Figure 31. A sketch section of the Brow Head Mine by the author, 2005-6, based on explorations of existing features.

fifty seven fathoms from the face of the cliff, and a winze sunk seventeen fathoms below the sea beach. The sales of ore from this working amounted to £7000; and when the surface arrangements are taken into consideration, consisting of offices, dwelling houses for miners, storehouses crusher worked by a waterwheel, reservoirs, dressing floors roads and other surface works - the mine from the beginning paid its way (letter dated 8th October 1972, first of series reproduced in Skibereen Eagle).

Obviously a great deal of surface work had taken place and the map (accompanying prospectus) of 1906 shows most of these features plus an engine house beside the reservoir and a "power line" going from it to the mine entrance (a raising mechanism?) (Fig. 30). Remaining evidence of this on the surface are a cobbled floor, mine waste, a large reservoir, a gunpowder house mine houses and cottages (Figs. 31-40).

Going by RIB to the obvious opening, above high tide level revealed an adit with an immediate deep shaft and some lesser ones. Overhead were stulls, probably arising from 19th and 20th century phases of working. Then there was a collection of flanged pipes lying horizontally that looked as though they had once pumped the 70f shaft below sea-level. One, however, was later (c. 1906?) used as a roof prop. There were also bits of ironwork and stored ladders that were probably from the later work-



Figure 32. The view from inside the "Big cavern" up to the hole in the roof (of a stoped area?).



Figure 33. Brow Head Mine - man made lagoon, c. 1 acre.



Figure 35. Brow Head Mine - mine houses.



Figure 37. Brow Head Mine - gunpowder house.



Figure 39. Brow Head Mine - mine waste.



Figure 34. Brow Head Mine - mine cottages.



Figure 36. Brow Head Mine - cobbled floor near waste.



Figure 38. Brow Head Mine - gunpowder house.



Figure 40. Brow Head Mine - mine waste.



Figure 41. Collections of flanged pipes.



Figure 43. Ladders stored in the adit, with the author.



Figure 42. A flanged pipe used as a roof prop.



Figure 44. Stulls with stacked deads.



Figure 45. Remnants of a windlass?

ing as per adjoining underground illustrations (Figs. 41-45. A strong wooden base very well secured to the mine floor must once have been mounted by a hand-windless.

The record of production from Brow Head gives 238 tons of ore in 1859-'60 (Min Stats). A company, Browhead Copper Mines Ltd., was established in July 1906 following preliminary work by West British Mining company Ltd. (Prospectus, Kew). An undated early 20th century report (Holmes, c. 1906) suggest that the adit running in from the workings above sea level may have been for test purposes about this time. Two tons for assay purposes were reported to have been exported in 1906. Some of the surface work may date from that time as twenty-five were working above ground the previous year. From 1906 to 1910 only two or three worked on the surface with the maximum actually mining being eleven in 1908. (Min. Stats.)

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[ED NOTE 1: a full collection of Paddy O'Sullivans captioned photographs of these mines has been lodged in MHTI's archive collection.

ED NOTE 2: a new survey of the extant underground workings at Gortavallig will appear in the 2007 Journal]