

Spent a pleasurable day in the company of Mike Bond and his friend, Eric, whereby we motored leisurely up through the green and pleasant valleys to Eisen Hill Mine in Somerset. On arrival at this site we ate our packed lunches, after which we made a quick change into our mining clothes (the reason we hurried was because of the strong cold wind). We then set off for the shaft that we were to descend, whereby on arrival at the said point we attached the ladders and life-lines to the nearest tree trunk. Whereon, Eric, descended the ladders which took a little time due to the fact that they got a bit twisted which meant that it had to be untangled on descent. By this time it was my turn to descend the shaft, which was vertical for the first 70 odd feet with a short drift or trial at 40 feet. However, on reaching the bottom of the 70 foot pitch there was an incline of about 80° for a further 35 feet, which I proceeded to negotiate endeavouring to avoid numerous dead sheep in various degrees of decay along with other agricultural and domestic rubbish. Needless to say by this time the stench was abominable. On reaching a fairly level area comparatively free of garbage, I unhitched my life-line, whereby Mike ran the top end of the life-line through a pulley and attached himself to one end whereby we life-lined him down the shaft. As we were now in a group once more, we set off to explore the workings, which meant squeezing through on top of the rubbish into the level proper, which had about 18" of water in the bottom. The water was at first a little cold. However, on proceeding along the drive we eventually left the water which was obviously caused by a spring due to percolation of surface water.

The country rock being Devonian shales which appeared to be very soft due to exposure to oxygen by mining by the miners in 1877. On sounding out the ground with a hammer the shales became increasingly hard after a few inches. The remaining pockets of ore occurred as soft earthy to ochrous oxides of manganese mainly in the form of psilomelane, which on close examination also revealed micro crystals of manganite. The remaining accessible workings consisted of a drive in a westerly direction stoped above to about 30 ft. After walking along the drive for approximately 60 ft. the drive appeared to be backfilled. However, as there was a crosscut south, we followed same for a further 30 ft. or so whereby we intercepted a further crosscut (on lode east & west) which was stoped above to a height of approximately 30 ft.

On retracing our steps back to the rubbish pile at the bottom of the shaft, we ascended the incline by means of hauling ourselves up on the fixed life-line. However, on careful examination of the footwall and lode at this point, we were fortunate enough to discover ~~psilomelane~~ goethite occurring in a botryoidal - stalactitic form something similar to kidney ore. As this material is highly prized and sought after by museums and mineral collectors, we set to work whereby we all collected some first rate material, after which we made the descent to surface and fresh air after having spent 4½ hours underground. Returning homeward we all felt a pleasant self satisfied sense of achievement at having been fortunate to have made such an interesting discovery.

B. Cooper

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Brown streak
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