

BRITISH MICROMOUNT SOCIETY



NEWSLETTER NO. 26

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EDITORIAL

As you can see this issue of the newsletter is back to our optimum length of 16 pages. Many thanks to all who wrote or provided cuttings for this issue. It was amazing how many items arrived just after the deadline for the last issue! So many that a couple have been saved for the next one. We hope members are not too concerned over the rather intermittent publication of the newsletter; although we aim for general deadlines, the availability of copy is the main factor in deciding to print.

Society activities seem to have been to the fore this year: museum visits and field trips have all been well supported and reported in the Newsletter. The publication of the Reference Collection catalogue and indexes is also an important development. However, local group meetings seem to have tailed

off - at least no one sends in reports of meetings anymore (except the ever faithful Eric Otty). If you have meetings, let's hear about it. Advance warning of forthcoming local meets can also be useful for BMS members passing through.

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CORNWALL

Various bodies including the Rural Development Commission, local councils and Carnon Consolidated, are funding an investigation into the possible development of some of Cornwall's old mining sites and relics into tourist amenities. The plan involves making walks from old mining tramways and the refurbishment of surviving buildings and other industrial monuments. Areas involved in the study will include the Redruth and Chaswater railway, Poldice tramway, the Portreath and Tresavean branches of the old Hayle railway, Basset mines and Great Flat Lode, and the Kennal Valley.

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MINERAL COLLECTING EPHEMERA

Mick Cooper

What do you do with those old dealer lists and business cards, show catalogues and advertising handouts, tickets, labels that you have accumulated from here and there whilst pursuing minerals? Like many collectors you probably hold on to them for a while and then - in a periodic purge of the over-stuffed shelves and cupboards of your rock room/garage/spare room/shed - you bin the lot to make room for more.

But no longer! Now you can send them to me! For over 20 years I have collected just such ephemera - not with any purpose or system, I just find it hard to throw things away. But, in the

last few years as my interest in the history of mineral collecting has grown, I've begun to realise just how difficult it is to find such items in old archives. Those Victorian, and earlier, dealers produced catalogues, letters, adverts aplenty but few were preserved and those that were are scattered in museums and libraries around the country. To improve the situation regarding the modern collector and dealer I'm stepping up my acquisition of mineralogical ephemera in an attempt to create a useful resource. So, if you have ANYTHING - however trivial - that is excess to requirements, or if you visit a mineral show and pick up leaflets, business cards etc; bear me in mind. Think of the future - who knows, one of our successors may end up researching us! Lets give them something to go on.

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BMS FIELD TRIPS

This year the annual field trip over the May Day Bank holiday weekend was spilt into three parts. One each to Leadhills/Wanlockhead, the Caldbeck Fells, and North Devon.

NORTH DEVON

Mike Rothwell

The North Devon trip was centred around the area of North Molton on the south western edge of the Exmoor National Park. Eighteen members and the organiser, David Ifold, met on a pleasant Saturday morning in the tiny hamlet of Heasley Mill ready to visit the first site on the itinerary, Bampfylde mine. This copper and iron mine was active from about 1856 to around 1882 and there are reasonably extensive tips on both sides of the road from Heasley Mill to Simonsbath (SS 739 326). As some fallen trees effectively blocked the parking place near the tips it was

necessary for most of the party to walk the few hundred yards from Heasley Mill to the site but this merely increased the eagerness to start searching. Before long, pieces of hematite-stained matrix with pseudomalachite and malachite on them were turning up with some frequency. Other minerals found were libethenite, brochantite, goethite, and digenite. Unfortunately, no one found gold which has been reported from the site.

After lunch the party moved to the nearby New Florence mine (SS 751 319). Reaching this site involved a short drive through a pheasant-infested wood and a long walk up a very muddy lane and through a wood in which a buzzard had chosen to nest and where at least one pheasant egg was spotted. This part of Devon is still remote and well stocked with wildlife. From the mineral point of view this site was disappointing. Despite extensive - but very overgrown - tips all that came to light was the odd piece of micaceous hematite, 'specularite' and some goethite. There were, however, considerable mining relics scattered around, presumably the scrap metal merchants have not found the remoteness of the site to their liking. Having not found a lot at this site it was unanimously agreed to return to Bampfyld mine where pickings were better and where the afternoon sunshine and the beautiful view from the upper tips could be enjoyed to the full.

Saturday evening was spent enjoying a short drive across part of Exmoor to Simonsbath and the somewhat reluctant hospitality of the Exmoor Forest Hotel.

Sunday dawned wet, heavy mizzle the locals called it; it was to remain heavy all day. Nevertheless we all set off to Highdown Quarry (SS 652 290) to search for good specimens of wavellite and variscite. Wavellite was relatively easy to find, variscite less so. Our leader, trying to remember where he had found said

mineral in the past, gave instructions to dig in certain spots and indeed after excavating a large hole specimens of variscite were found. The morning was enlivened by a wet, bedraggled but very noisy peacock which seemed to be attracted by a member's orange anorak. Eventually its noise attracted its owner who remarked that it had been lost for twenty four hours and he was glad to have it back; so were we.

By lunch time we had collected sufficient wavellite and variscite so the party set off in a long convoy to visit West Down mine (SS 515 398). The trip to this site required navigating through Barnstaple, a feat which caused some difficulties, half the convoy were seen disappearing back the way we had come. Eventually, however, all reached the site and set off across the field to the mine. Such was the eagerness to get at the minerals no one noticed the large bull surrounded by admiring cows. Fortunately the animal seemed to be unable to run so posed no great danger.

This mine, sometimes known as Fullabrook, was a small manganese mine operating during the 1880s. The tips consisted of a reddish sandstone infused with black veins of pyrolusite which occasionally produced cavities filled with botryoidal surfaces and more rarely lustrous bladed crystals.

The intention on Sunday evening was to try a different hostelry, one in North Molton. However, due to confusion caused by the landlady of the Merseyside contingent this plan was aborted and we drove through the mist on Exmoor to Simonsbath once more. (Note: The Merseyside contingent decided that discretion was the better part of valour and did not complain, the landlady's husband being a second Dan black belt Karate champion).

On the last day of the trip the morning was spent further south at Meldon Aplite Quarry. This site by now is fairly well picked over, nevertheless one or two specimens of axinite were found and some colourless crystals of what were to be later identified as bavenite (Neil Hubbard). On this occasion we shared the site with four members of the Harlow Mineral Club who were looking, with some success, for hand specimens of axinite in the upper levels of the old quarry.

Our thanks for a most enjoyable trip are due to David Ifold who did all the hard work of organising and to the following landowners and their agents:

Bampfylde and New Florence Mines

Lady Stucley and her agents Strutt and Parkes of South Molton.

High Down Quarry

Mr H. R. Thomas from Fortescue Estates, Castle Hill, Filleigh, Barnstaple.

West Down Mine (Fullabrook) .

Mrs Hookway, Dean Farm, West Down.

Meldon Aplite Quarry

Mr G.D. Stanbury, Clerk to the Okehampton Hamlets Parish Council.

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SOUTH OF SCOTLAND

David Green

In common with previous years, most of the twenty five or so members on the Scottish tip met on Friday night at the hotel in Sanquhar. Discussions centred around the next day's collecting which would involve an hour's drive further north to Trearne Quarry, near Beith, Ayrshire.

Having successfully negotiated Kilmarnock, we arrived at Trearne at 10.30 on Saturday morning, and were met by Gordon Todd, who had offered to show us the quarry. Trearne is particularly noted for strontianite and fluorite, and almost immediately a limestone block displaying a perfect straw-yellow fluorite cube was found. Strontianite, however, proved more elusive, but by dinner time most members had collected specimens displaying typical white botryoidal aggregates. A stratum containing hollow brachiopods filled with transparent gypsum crystals was found. This provided some of the best specimens of the day, with crystals to more than 20mm, several of which were taken by Bob Reekie for the collection of the Royal Museum of Scotland. By the end of the day, examples of all of the minerals recorded from Trearne (with the possible exception of millerite) had been collected.

Sunday dawned dull and grey, and making our way towards Wanlockhead we drove into drizzle which was to continue steadily throughout the day. This did little to dampen enthusiasm, and it was decided to dig for some slag minerals at Meadowfoot Smelter. A hole was quickly opened, members taking it in turn to dig and rest, and throwing the bright blue-and-green slag blocks onto a communal pile. These were graded by Peter Braithwaite into good, medium, and grot, and shared out when everyone was too exhausted/wet/cold to continue. After a short break it was decided to collect some real minerals: Kemp Meikle suggested the old dumps in Wool Gill were worth a look, and kindly volunteered to obtain permission from the factor. Yellow pyromorphite and hemimorphite were collected at this locality. The day was rounded off, with the drizzle turning to rain, with a walk over the dumps around Glengonnar Shaft which yielded several nice orange pyromorphites.

On Monday, Steve Rust suggested it would be worthwhile digging around the collar of one of the shafts on Horners Vein. Numerous yellow pyromorphite-encrusted galena nodules were soon uncovered. The best specimen of the day, and possibly the weekend, was found by John Bottomley. This was a large oxidised mass of vein material containing some very fine yellow to green pyromorphite (often pseudomorphing anglesite and cerussite), and, in addition, good micro-specimens of descloizite, vanadinite, mottramite, cerussite, malachite, and linarite. Members, collecting bags full, began to drift away around dinner time and the last we saw of Steve was a solitary figure in the bottom of a hole the size of a small room, which was gradually getting larger.

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CALDBECK FELS

Mick Cooper

Saturday - Due to the late arrival of the field trip leader (sorry!) the dozen or so BMS members and friends made their own way by Dale Beck valley, splitting into three parties near the foot of Roughton Gill. Some went to the dumps of the Mexico mine in Todd Gill, others to a recently discovered site in Silver Gill, the remainder climbed Roughton Gill to examine the outcrop of the Roughton Gill vein at the top of the gill. The first site is of interest for the wulfenite first recorded from there (by the writer) in 1987. The Silver Gill site is an old ore pile found in 1988 buried in scree about three-quarters of the way up the gill. Here a quantity of rich Cu-Pb-Zn ore has been weathering for decades, possibly centuries, producing a variety of copper and lead sulphates (including langite, wroewolfeite, linarite, and posnjakite - note that this should be pronounced

POS-NEE-ACKITE, not the tongue-tangling, but popular, POZ'N-JACKITE). Wulfenite has been identified from here too, but is much less common than at Mexico m.

When the leader finally arrived he chose to climb straight to the top of Roughton Gill, having examined the other sites recently. A small section of the Roughton Gill vein had already been exposed and was being worked, at first with little success. Eventually, however, a few respectable specimens containing small lamellar crystals of hydrocerussite (BM(NH)XRD) were discovered, associated with cerussite and massive pyromorphite-mimetite. Apart from traces of hemimorphite and chrysocolla little else was reported by disappointed members hoping to find the mattheddleite, lanarkite, caledonite, etc, recently found here. After back-filling our excavation we returned to the hotel in Heskett Newmarket.

Sunday - The following morning was an average Caldbeck day; lowering skies, a brisk breeze, and the threat of rain, but it could have been worse. We decided to trek across country to the site of the short-lived Deer Hills Baryte mine, between the top of Ingray Gill and the westerly working of the Old Potts Gill Baryte mine. The dumps derived from the baryte workings on Deer Hills are largely quartz with some baryte and 'limonite' and are admittedly almost barren of interesting collectable minerals. Nonetheless the two westerly dumps - the first near the head of Ingray Gill, the second a short way eastward - have yielded a few minute specimens of agardite over the past year. Although at first sight we appeared to find nothing on this trip, one of the writer's specimens from the second dump was found, on closer examination under the microscope, to contain a minutely globular

green mineral associated with sprays of pale blue fibres. The former passed Test One (i.e. it did not fizz in hydrochloric acid) and was thus potentially worthy of further testing. The fibrous mineral was suspected of being agardite-mixite, but was different from material previously found here which was greener. XRD (BM(NH)) showed the minerals to be cuprian adamite and agardite-mixite respectively (XRD will not distinguish the last two species).

From the baryte mine we moved to the site of an old working near an outcrop of the Deer Hills Quartz lode. Here we collected reasonable specimens of beudantite, scorodite, and carminite (all mostly as thin crusts, but occasionally showing minute crystals), pharmacosiderite (as pale to emerald green crystals - but mostly rather weathered), and some needle crystals of pale brownish grey pyromorphite-mimetite (probably mimetite given the large amount of arsenic here). After lunch the party walked over the fell to Short Grain and examined the dumps from a couple of old baryte/lead trials in the bed of the gill. Very little was found unfortunately. The group split up after this, some taking the direct route home, others dawdling by the dumps of the Hay Gill Copper mine lower down the fell.

On Monday the weather was more promising, with fitful sunshine. We went first to the devastated site of the Carrock mine, the recently bulldozed dumps and tailings slimes still looking a frightful mess. The hard quartz matrix yielded a few specimens of molybdenite with ferrimolybdenite, and the occasional apatite prism. Nothing else of special note was reported at the time. Some members then climbed Brandy Gill to the old lead mine site, others trekked off to Burdell Gill. Yours truly strolled over to

Poddy Gill which he had not visited since the bonanza days of the early 1970s when the Carrook mine operators bulldozed the area at the base of the gill, revealing many wulfenite-stolzite specimens. The site is now a waterworn hole with no visible mineralization. So much for progress.

In all, a successful and most enjoyable trip. For some of the party this was their first collecting in the area; for most it was their first opportunity to collect some of the minerals noted above - not world-beating specimens it is true, but rare and interesting for all that. For the rest, well, it kept them off the streets for a weekend.

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NORTHERN GROUP MEETING

Eric Otty

Some 17 members attended the meeting held at Bircotes library on 18 March, where there was much interest shown in new finds from upper Roughton Gill and Mid Wales. Everyone went away with some new material. Plans were also made for collecting trips over the Easter and May day weekends. Jean Spence and Muriel Tissington provided the usual excellent refreshments. The next meeting will be held on Saturday 9 September at Bircotes library commencing 2 p.m.

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OBITUARY

It is with regret that we heard recently of the death of one of our members - Mr Tony Brelsforth from Birmingham. Tony joined the society a few years ago and was an active member attending several symposium and field trips. His Brummy accent will be missed at future meetings.

GLENSANDA GRANITE

Eric Otty

The Glensanda quarry of Foster Yeoman Limited on the western shore of Loch Linnhe will soon be the largest quarry in the world. As well as supplying granite to line the Channel tunnel and make our motorways, the quarry is shipping 150,000-ton cargoes to Houston, Texas for freeway and other constructional purposes.

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PARYS MOUNTAIN, ANGLESEY

Eric Otty

Gwynedd County Council have given planning permission to Anglesey Mining plc who are to develop a mine on Parys Mountain to produce zinc, copper, lead, silver and gold. After a three year exploration the company, which is a subsidiary of Imperial Metals Corporation (Canada), is to sink a 450m deep shaft to define the ore zones and finalise their programme aimed at producing about 400,000 tons a year.

(Mining Magazine - July 1988)

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BMS REFERENCE COLLECTION

Mick Wolfe

Following a suggestion at the 1988 AGM a catalogue of the first 800 specimens in the BMS Reference Collection has been produced and distributed. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Max Wirth on the excellence of the job he has made of it and Mike Rothwell on its printing and distribution (not to mention low cost).

For the first time we have in one comprehensive easy to understand document the various 'additions to the reference

collection' sent out with the newsletter over the last few years. Max has also cross-referenced each specimen by mineral name and by location as well as listing all sites represented in the collection within each Ordnance Survey Grid Square. Max has requested that the 40+ members who have donated specimens so far check their entries for accuracy, especially the OS grid reference as he has received donations from mines located in the North Sea! This request for accuracy applies equally to any new donation.

The issue of this catalogue is a milestone in the evolution of the BMS and one way of thanking Max for the hours of work he puts into the collection would be to sort through your more superior duplicates and send them to Max if they are not already represented. There are over 100 members who have yet to donate single a specimen, so included with this newsletter is a copy of the form that should accompany each specimen. These can be handed to Max at the Symposium in September when the collection will be available for inspection.

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CONGRATULATIONS

Mick Wolfe

We have two members who deserve our congratulations in this edition of the newsletter. Firstly, Gill Weightman, Assistant keeper of Earth Sciences at Leicester Museum, recently gave birth to a baby girl. Both Gill and the baby are doing fine. Secondly, to David Green who only 4 years ago gained a first class honours degree in physics has now been awarded his Ph.D. Dr. Green would like it know that he prefers henceforth to be addressed as David.

VISITS TO MINERAL COLLECTIONS

Mick Wolfe

In the last newsletter (No 25 page 1) the possibility of further museum visits during the winter months was suggested. It is intended to repeat last winter's visits if the demand exists. In addition, I am looking for other collections worth a visit. These need not be Museums or Universities, but could be your own personal collection. I've seen those of several members where I could happily spend several hours being given a guided tour. If you know of such a collection or are the proud owner of one and are prepared to help organise a visit please send me a few details and I will ensure it is published at the September symposium and in the next newsletter.

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STRAITSTEPS VEIN, WANLOCKHEAD

Mick Wolfe

It has been brought to my attention that the Buccleuch Estates Ltd, owners of this site, are advising that no further visits to the Straitsteps Vein dump will be allowed for the immediate future. The Royal Museum of Scotland intend to investigate this particular site in some detail and unauthorised collecting could affect this investigation. We have good relations with both the Buccleuch Estates and the R.M.S. at present so would all members please do nothing to jeopardize this relationship.

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JOHN INGHAM

Although not a member of the B.M.S. John will be known to many members. It is therefore with regret that I have to advise you

that he recently passed away. John will probably be best known for the time he spent after his retirement working at the Grove House Gallery in Keswick where his interest in minerals grew. He had a collection of over 1000 hand specimens, mainly from the north of England. John leaves a widow, Betty, to whom we extend our condolences.

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SYMPOSIUM ORGANISER

Mike Rothwell has been our symposium organiser now for five years. Despite having made such an excellent job of it year after year he feels that an injection of new ideas from a successor would be beneficial for the society. If you have some good suggestions for future symposia and would like to organise the event please contact Mike. He will be happy to remain as joint organiser for the 1990 symposium if required.

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FORTHCOMING EVENTS

- 7 - 8 October 1989 - Bakewell Rock Exchange, Medway Centre,
Bakewell, Derbyshire.
- 4 November 1989 - Warrington Craft and Mineral Fair, Alford Hall,
Manchester Road, Warrington, Lancashire.
- 18 November 1989 - Sussex Mineral Show, Clair Hall, Haywards
Heath, Sussex.
- 6 July 1989 - 15 January 1990 - 'The Kensington Rock Festival'.
Display of superb minerals and works of art using, or
inspired by, rocks and crystals. A must. National History
Museum, London, daily 10-6 (Sunday 1-6pm).

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