

Lost (Under)Worlds

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The writer has visited a large number of mines in the British Isles and elsewhere that are now abandoned and entirely or only partly inaccessible. These include mines in the West Midlands, Derbyshire, Cornwall and the Czech Republic. Glimpses of these ‘underworlds’ are well worth recording where they have since been lost by flooding or backfilling since their mining operations ceased.

West Midlands

Silurian limestones were mined extensively in the West Midlands, and in the Dudley area canal systems gave access to many of the workings, notably those in the Wren’s Nest anticline (Powell, 1999). Workings down-dip from the open galleries known as the Seven Sisters, on the western limb of that structure, gave access to the underground Wren’s Nest Basin from where a canal tunnel ran eastwards and formerly connected with the Castle Mill Basin. *En route* the tunnel passed through the core of the anticline, connecting with workings in more steeply dipping beds in its eastern limb. Extensive backfilling has been carried out to resolve stability problems within the old mines, and has thereby rendered many of these workings inaccessible.



Workings of the Dudley mines in steeply dipping limestone in the eastern limb of the Wren’s Nest Anticline in 1970.



The underground Wren’s Nest canal basin looking east into the entrance of the long Wren’s Nest tunnel in 1970.



Ecton Hill in 1973, when the mine dumps lacked their tree cover and families still went out in Reliant Robins.

Derbyshire

Mines at Ecton were an important source of copper ore (Porter & Robey, 2000). Substantial parts of the workings remain accessible but those below the water table have been flooded since pumping ceased. This is well seen in the Clayton adit, which accessed workings on the extraordinary vertical ore body known as the Clayton Pipe. A chamber close to the eastern end of the adit housed an engine used for pumping and winding (Porter, 2000; Barnatt, 2013). The Clayton Pipe workings eventually extended to nearly 300 m below the engine chamber, the exhaust from which was via a shaft to the surface 140 m above. The dark, sinister outline of the shaft can be seen through the water that steadily wells up from the flooded workings and across the floor of the engine chamber before draining away via the adit.



The Clayton Pipe engine chamber in the Ecton mines, with a shaft in the foreground flooded in 1973.

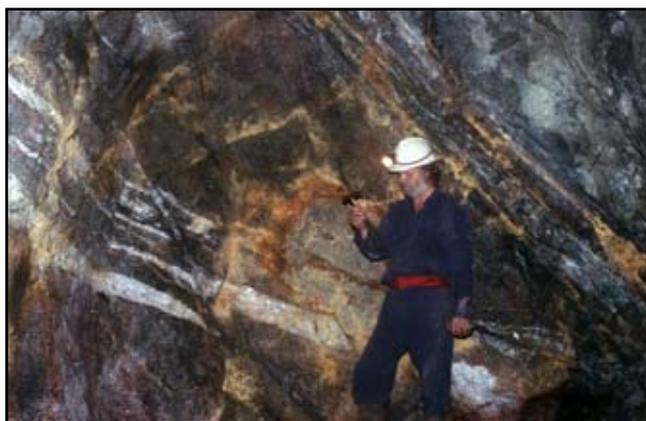
Northern Czech Republic

The western part of this region, bordering southern Germany, is on the south side of the famous Erzgebirge mining region that produced ores of bismuth, cobalt, copper, molybdenum, silver, tin, tungsten, uranium and zinc in huge quantities. In the 18th and early 19th centuries, the supply of cobalt ore in Europe was monopolised by Saxony, on the German side of the mountains. More recently mines at Jachymov (Joachimstal), in the Kruzne Hory district on the south side of the mountains, were worked for uranium ore. They also provided material used by Marie Curie in her study of radium in the 1890s. Today, one of the district's mines is maintained to provide access to a source of spa waters that may truly be described as hot. Farther east, lead, tin and polymetallic ores were worked in the Liberec area, bordering southern Poland. Within that district, a mine at Harrachov was being worked for barite and fluorite in 1990, but is now closed and flooded.



Underground cage station in cramped conditions at the top of a shaft in the Harrachov mine, in the northern part of the Czech Republic, in 1990.

Molybdenite in a quartz vein in the Nova Martyn adit in 1990, at Krupka in the northern Czech Republic.



A hading, banded, ore-bearing lode (on the right) cutting quartz veins in granite, in the South Crofty mine in 1997.

Cornwall

Workings of the South Crofty mine extend east-west for 4.5 km between Camborne and Redruth. They result from the amalgamation, over many decades, of smaller mines. The workings reached a depth of almost 900 m, but were abandoned in 1998, when pumping was allowed to cease so that the mine became largely flooded. Some of these now-lost workings were visited in 1989 and 1997. Many photos, along with an account, plans and sections of the mine, are available from Nick LeBoutilliere, who was Senior Mine Geologist when the mine closed in 1998 (visit: myweb.tiscali.co.uk/geologyofcornwall). Part of the mine was reopened in September 2001, but activity finally ceased in June 2013.



Tramway in a haulage level in the South Crofty mine in 1997.

References

- Barnatt, J., 2013. *Delving Ever Deeper: The Ecton Mines through Time*. Bakewell: Peak District National Park Authority.
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 Powell, S., 1999. The Dudley limestone mines. *Mining History*, **14** 1-68.

Photographs on the back cover

- Clockwise from top left (all photos by Geoff Warrington):*
 Below the Seven Sisters in the Dudley limestone mines, 1970.
 Ore chute into a haulage level in Harrachov mine, 1990.
 A chained-off ore pass in South Crofty mine, 1997.
 Barite vein exposed in the roof of Harrachov mine, 1990.
 Ladderway at 380 fathom level in South Crofty mine, 1989.
 Drilling a shot-hole in South Crofty mine, 1989.



The lost underworld of mines that are no longer accessible; see captions and article on page 256.

