

NAMHO Conference 2007 – Nigel Dibben

The 2007 conference was held at Morwellham Quay in Devon from 15th to 18th June. The site was particularly appropriate having been the quay from which copper ore from Devon Great Consols was sent down river to Plymouth. On site there was a show mine (all included in the conference fee) and a pub, pasty shop and lecture room. What more could be needed?



Figure 1: The copper quays at Morwellham

Accommodation was not a problem either, the site had a field which provided camping for perhaps a hundred or more people and porta-loos and porta-showers were supplied as well.

During the weekend, there was a programme of lectures but there was a wide variety of surface and underground trips available and I took advantage of the show trip to George and Charlotte Mine on Friday morning, a guided trip round

the site on Friday afternoon and a trip down Virtuous Lady Mine on Saturday. On Sunday, I took two trips: Wheal Frementor (iron and tungsten) and the massive Devon Great Consols (copper). I only managed half a day of lectures because the underground attractions were too great.



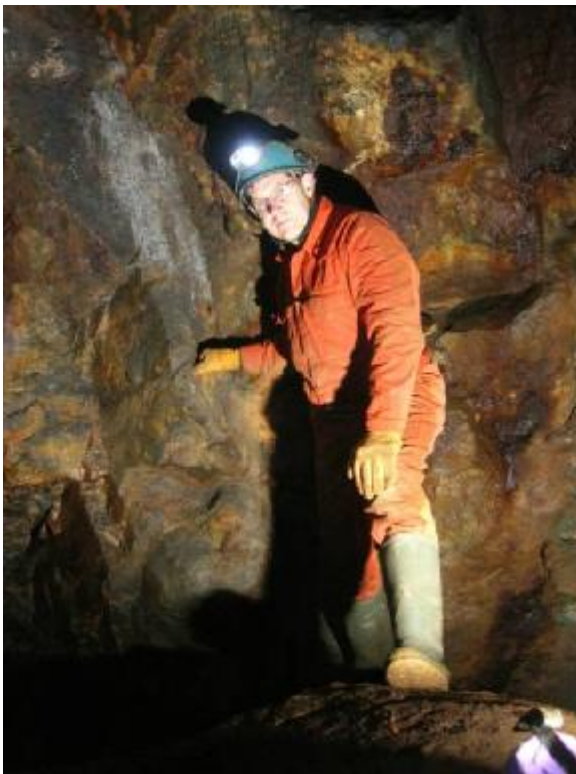
Figure 2: Entrance to George and Charlotte mine

On the Monday, there were coach trips to South Crofty and Geevor mines. The Geevor trip (which I joined) included a visit to Levant Mine to see the steam engine running and a trip down the Victory Shaft and out of the sea adit on level 3 at Geevor. Unfortunately, we did not really have enough time to look around Geevor because of the long coach journey.

I'll now describe the trips in a bit more detail.

FRIDAY

On Friday morning, I did the obligatory trip into the George and Charlotte Mine, the show mine on the Morwellham site. During Friday afternoon, Robert Waterhouse, who is resident archaeologist at Morwellham, led a group around the site. He showed us the routes of the various railways that brought ore from local mines and the Tavistock Canal down to the quay. Many features are still in place such as plate rails and turntables from over 100 years ago. The site includes ore bins for the copper and lime kilns which processed imported limestone. In the evening on Friday, there was a slideshow with the main mines and miners in the region.



SATURDAY

The trip I chose for Saturday left me free to attend the opening lectures which included some insights into arsenic processing, a feature of the Devon mines. The afternoon trip was to Virtuous Lady Mine. This mine was supposed to have been worked for copper in the Elizabethan period, hence the name. It is a rambling place, quite different from the vein formations at Devon Great Consols. We spent about two hours wandering around what appeared to be essentially two parallel veins with connecting stopes. There were some further flooded workings below adit but these were inaccessible as the entrance is only a few feet above the river Tavy.

Figure 3: (left) in Virtuous Lady Mine

Figure 4: (below) arsenic flues at Devon Great Consols



SATURDAY NIGHT

The night was supposed to include a hog roast but the person who was to do this inconveniently died a day or so before so it was replaced by a barbecue run by the caterers in the Ship Inn. This was followed by a considerable amount of beer and some good music performed by, amongst others, the manager of Morwellham site. We drank the bar dry of draught beer by 9 pm and nearly cleared their bottle stock as well.

SUNDAY

No chance to recover! There were half and full day trips so I chose the Wheal Frementor and Devon Great Consols (short trip). Wheal Frementor is on the same sett as Devon Great Consols but was worked for iron and tungsten in a north-south vein. The trip involved an abseil down into an open stope (local name: gunnis) followed by a walk out of the adit entrance which emerges not far above the river Tamar. Three of us returned to the top of the hill before the rest of the group and waited for a leader for Devon Great Consols, looking in the meantime at the arsenic works. In Devon Great Consols, we descended a manway into Wheal Fanny with changeovers on old timberwork. We followed a route up towards Wheal Anna Maria which ended in very bad ground and collapses. Returning to the main stope, we managed to get out before the rest of the group came in. Sunday night was spent in the Ship Inn and again we drank them out of beer.



Figure 5: Devon Great Consols

MONDAY

Two coach trips had been arranged into Cornwall. The shorter one was to South Crofty but, having been there a couple of years ago, I chose the longer trip to Geevor and Levant mines. We arrived at Levant at about 1100 and were shown the steam engine in operation and given a short guided tour of the site before returning to Geevor for lunch. After lunch, we changed (well, most people did) and prepare to descend Victory Shaft down to Level 3. The climb down was similar to the climb down into Olwyn Goch except not quite so deep. At the bottom, most of us expected a large modern level but instead the way to the beach varied from narrow to low. We passed a couple of stoped out areas before passing one of the old shafts. Exit was not far above sea level and required a climb back up ladders to get back to the

mine site. Unfortunately, there was little time to see the rest of the site but maybe that's a way to get us to go back again.

During the weekend, I met up with several friends from the mining fraternity and also made contact with some people who could get us access to mines in the area so if anyone is interested, it might be worth organising a trip in 2008. The journey down took about five hours so a long weekend is better. I went down Thursday and returned Tuesday and felt I had made good use of the time.

Figure 6: In the adit in Geevor Mine

