

Minllyn Slate Mine

Access Risk Assessment

1. Introduction

Minllyn Slate Mine consists of extensive workings in which are located numerous industrial mining artefacts including an almost intact steam operated crane. All of the artefacts are detailed and photographed in various publications relating to the mine. Since the mine closed most of the buildings have been destroyed, the adits fallen into disrepair, and fences have rotted away.

The main access level has an impressive arch with a stream issuing. This tunnel leads in about 50m to a quarried pit with a further tunnel easily recognisable as it has a set of bogies from an old ore truck jammed in the entrance. This pit also provides access to and from the surface, with care.

100m further up the hillside is another hole-in-the-ground type of quarry which is easily entered from the surface over slopes of slate waste passing a chain stretched across the easiest route as a warning. There is a blocked adit and also a steeply sloping descent into the upper reaches of the mine which requires rope access.

2. Location & directions

The mine is located over a large area at NGR SH854140. There are several hundred square metres of discarded slate on the surface, some of which is piled very high and is quite loose. That being said, the mine is next to an easily identifiable public footpath.

You can park in the lay-by next to the war memorial on the A470 in Dinas Mawddwy. From here walk about 50m along the unclassified road towards Aberangell. Turn right in front of 1-3 Godre'r Coed cottages and proceed up to the forestry road at a 'T' junction. Turn right and after 200m take the wide footpath, identified by a yellow footpath post, doubling back on the left. This footpath is steep, going from 1:6 to 1:4, and even more steep for the last 100m! The path consists of lots of crushed slate and it is easy to slip when wet. The footpath is around 300m in length. At one point the obvious path turns sharp right. But do not go right, and instead carry on straight up the very steep rough path - you can see lots of slate on both sides of this path.

You will pass an old leat on the right hand side as you arrive at the top of the path where there is a large flat area of slate waste. The footpath crosses an old fence on the right, behind a tree. Having said that, this fence has fallen down along most of its length and beyond it the ruined mine buildings.

Follow the small surface stream which leads to the tunnel with arched stone roof. This is welly deep to reach the first pit described earlier. Alternatively, passing to the right of the first tunnel and climbing uphill a short way you will reach the pit via the surface paths. Scrambling down about 8m (handline advisable) you would arrive at the tunnel with bogeys. In wet weather there is a nice waterfall into this pit which drains away through the first tunnel.

The second tunnel continues from the bogeys at the foot of this pit. This is initially welly deep but soon becomes waist deep, about 120m long in all.

You could continue up on the grass instead and thus reach the top quarry pit.

3. Inside the mine

The second tunnel arrives at a chamber with branch passage to the left leading to another chamber with a lake and an area with a boiler and broken gear wheels on the ground. The pool by the boiler is >10m deep and should be avoided. There is a large square window above the boiler which we will discuss later. The branch passage continues into more chambers and further abandoned mine equipment.

Straight ahead from the tunnel used to enter the main part of the mine, the first chamber has a substantial 10m chain hanging out of the roof and other artefacts.

Branch passages to the right lead of the entry tunnel lead to further chambers, sometimes with astonishingly thin slate walls between them.

You can scramble upwards from the first chamber to arrive behind the high window already mentioned, and continue upwards into further chambers. You will soon arrive at the foot of the steeply sloping descent passage from the upper quarry. This is not climbable upwards because it is slippery, unless you rigged it from above.

As mentioned already, there are mining artefacts. Most of these are very rusty and in a poor condition. Please treat these with respect as they have value and interest as industrial archaeology. Do not climb or sit on them.

There are a few timber props and some pillars made from 'deads'. The condition of these is not known and they should be avoided.

4. Equipment and Techniques

Apart from standard caving equipment, one 40m rope may be useful, either as a handline or doubled if abseiling from the top quarry and exiting via the tunnels.

There are a few bolts with hangers and old hand-lines in situ which should be avoided. There is a substantial stainless steel rope with eyelets closed with a stainless D-ring around a large boulder in the top quarry. At the time of writing this it was quite secure as an abseil anchor, assuming one has the skills and equipment to use it, but it should be checked out before future use. Persons abseiling should be independently belayed by suitably experienced members of any group in case of equipment failure or loss of control.

Generally the mine structure appears to be in a good condition with just a few locations where it seems a collapse may occur in the future.

5. Local & visitor use

There is evidence that the mine does receive visitors and small groups have been seen there by locals within the last few months of the visit to write this assessment. These were understood to include local walkers, Duke of Edinburgh Award groups, RAF Cadets, NAMHO members, other youth groups, and cavers.

6. General opinion on risk

Most of the access route is on public right of way which is, by definition, deemed suitable for pedestrian traffic. The final surface access is across generally flat or easy sloping ground with trip hazards no greater than an ordinary hill-walking day.

The easiest line of descent down to the first pit would rate as low-medium risk in dry weather, rising to medium in wet weather as it is somewhat overgrown. The top quarry pit is simpler to enter being a clearer descending line over slate waste.

The top quarry has 50m vertical walls to the south and west which present a significant hazard if approached from the land above and are to be avoided along with the attractive waterfall in wet weather which plunges over a vertical drop.

The horizontal tunnels inside the mine are straightforward to follow and keep to, but the scramble up towards the top quarry via "the window" is loose with slate waste underfoot that could easily slide, and care should be taken not to dislodge any.

The waist deep water in the 120m tunnel is very cold and unsuitable for novices.

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18 August 2015