

Cwm Orthin Mine / Oakley Mine

NORTH LAKE ADIT is the only route in and you follow the track up around the lake past derelict shed and house and it's the obvious cutting with slightly dodgy looking timbers. Walk in and stick to LH wall and you soon come to a larger area with the BACK VEIN NORTH SINK INCLINE rails going downwards off on the LH side. The continuation of the incline goes uphill and you can climb through a partially walled up area but it closes down soon at a massive run in. Basically all the levels above the entrance adit are blocked or collapsed or the bridges missing.

There are two main routes into the deeper reaches which you can combine to do a round trip, basically a wet way by going down the first incline you come to or a dry way by continuing along the entrance adit past the bigger chambers then you will reach a crossroads. You turn left and scramble over fallen debris to drop down into the area around the top of the OLD VEIN SOUTH SINK. There is water falling here and some timbers wedged across the walls of the passage. Don't follow the water but find the head of the incline going down. This one is not as big or in as good condition as the first one you come to and fair big of gravelly stuff was tipped down it.

Go down this incline one level and turn off right, initially it is a crawl but soon opens up. This is the start of the dry route. There are quite a few chambers to see if you go right to the bottom of this incline rather than turning off at the first level down. The lowest level (Level CwmOrthin 1931) is flooded almost to neck level and the last bit of the incline is slightly mobile gravel slope into the water. You can reach the other side of this flooded level by going down the dry way.

DRY WAY

Entrance adit to top of OLD VEIN SOUTH SINK. Down one level right turn into crawl. Then obvious route through many chambers basically two floors higher up than the "Floating bridges" marked on the survey. (These were wooden bridges that as they started to sag the chamber below was flooded to support them. The water and most of the bridges are long gone.)

Eventually you come to CHAMBER 8 E. You drop down a nice set of stone stairs then right at the bottom (Which is the floating bridges area) to pass below chambers 9E and 10E then left down the DAMS. These are remnants of dams with metal bars across the passage that you duck under. At the end of this passage turn Left then right and drop down a handline and aluminium ladder to reach the area of the COMPRESSOR 1935. There are a couple of big boilers and bits here and the passage that runs below this chamber is LEFEL CWMORTHIN 1931.

If it wasn't flooded to neck level (and higher sometimes) you could turn left and it would bring you out at the bottom of the Back Vein North Sink incline i.e the one that leads up to the entrance adit.

TO DO THE ROUND TRIP FROM HERE, You turn left then right and to CHAMBER 34 where there is an obvious shed/drum house at the head of yet another incline going down.

I cant remember where that incline goes down to but it is in effect a dead end. The way out is to go along floor DE from just past the shed drum house and this level cuts through chambers 33,32,31 then bear left and follow this around a 90 bend to

reach "Lefel Ffrench" You then bomb along this to a short ramp down into Chamber 11E then keep going and eventually you hit knee deep water then the bottom of the BACK VEIN NORTH SINK INCLINE. Straight up this turn left at the top and you've done the round trip, in the Dry way out the wet way.

Worth looking around at the bottom of this incline as a large crane in Chamber 1 west and several cranes packed up in wagons ready to be taken out. Also on the slog back up the incline Two levels up from the bottom take right branch and this leads to a parallel alternative route out to the entrance adit up the remnants of a staircase with iron bars sticking out and a few planks.

THE DEEPER BITS AND ON INTO OAKLEY MINE

On one trip we got as far as the part of Oakley Mine that used to be a show mine but couldn't get out to daylight due to some mega collapses. This far reaches bit has evidence of fresh roof falls. But its worth a look.

Basically get to the COMPRESSOR 1935 area either by the dry route or the wet route. The dry route is quickest, driest and mainly all downhill !

From COMP 1935 .There is a largish passage running below the compressor area FLOOR DE (The same level as Lefel Cwmorthin 931). Head further into the mine that is right at the bottom of the compressors and whilst my recollection is a bit vague you will reach a 45 degree slope down with remnants of stairs that can be freeclimbed down. This drops into even bigger passage but you are off the survey now ! You follow a load of yellow arrows and eventually see a sign HA HA ! on the wall. You then scramble up a 45 degree slope. There is a handline of indeterminate age so best to trust it once then use your own about 30ft I think. This goes back up one level. You then come across lots of IN and OUT signs as you are close to the OAKLEY MINE EXIT that once existed. You can get to the show cave and there is electric cable and lighting. We couldn't find a route out from here but there was one gravel slope we didn't go up. I doubt you can get out this way as the quarry above is untopping the area. There are some very iffy areas around here with lots of shattered rock. I have been told a through trip is possible but I cant confirm this.

There are also passages going lower down into the mine that are dead ends but some good blue pools. There are also dammed up levels used as water supplies so you can wade through water at one level then be completely dry 100ft below !!

The far reaches trip takes about 5 hours but then you will know the way now !

The round trip is about 3 hours.

Take a mega 20w light for the big bits. Screwfix do a rechargeable one that lasts for 20 mins for under £10.

Best to photocopy the excellent diagrams in the Cwm Orthin mine book (Red Cover, A4 sized cannot remember authors name – Isherwood ??)and draw out the route with a marker pen beforehand. This saves a lot of dobbing about.

Steve Joyce