

**Darren Mine, Banc-y-Darren, Trefeurig, Ceredigion (SN 675827; SAM: CD144; NPRN: 33835)**

The open cuts of Darren Mine cover an area some 1km in extent and exploited Darren Lode, a rich silver-lead vein and constitute one of the best examples of such excavations in Wales. Further north, the Cwm-y-Darren and Twll-y-Mwyn mines (NPRN: 33826), together with Cerrig-yr-Wyn mine (NPRN: 404079) also exploited the same Lode.

It has long been suggested that exploitation of this Lode dates back to the Prehistoric period (Bick 1976, 10; Hughes SJS 1990), and there are historic references to this being a 'Roman' or 'Ancient British' work (Pettus 1670). Certainly Twyll-y-Mwyn, is thought to be a prehistoric (Early Bronze Age) mine, the dating based on the similarity between the tool assemblages here and that found within the workings of Copa (Copper) Hill, Cwmystwyth, which have been C<sup>(14)</sup> dated to 1300BC (Early-Mid bronze Age) (Timberlake S 2003).

Evidence for the possible Prehistoric exploitation of Darren Mine also comes from the open cuts adjacent to the Late Bronze Age-Early Iron Age hillfort known as Darren Camp (NPRN: 303592). Whilst the current remains clearly show that mining here post dates the fort, there is evidence to suggest that the initial exploitation may have been contemporary with the fort. Furthermore, lumps of galena (lead ore) have been recovered from the fabric of the rampart and clearly suggests exploitation of the vein. A detailed survey of the fort together with a 350m section of the mine (between SN 6672 8299 and SN 6792 8317) was carried out by the RCAHMW in 2005 and this clearly shows that a section of the hillforts middle outwork underwent modification during occupation of the hillfort, possibly to accommodate what was (then) a small opencast mine trench. Excavation here by the Early Mines Group in 2005 appears to support this theory, with evidence highlighting two phases of outwork construction. The first phase consisted of a small rock cut ditch which was then deepened in the second phase to create a substantial rock cut defence, some 2.8m deep, which followed the line of the vein, pinching out at its base to 0.3m wide. Whether or not the first excavators began by taking advantage of an original hollow, it seems clear that they came upon the vein at shallow depth and then started to follow this downwards, thus recutting the bottom of the original ditch. Both the original ditch cut and re-cut was carried out using some sort of blunt instrument, the rock being effectively 'battered'.

Later exploitation of the mine appears to have followed the Lode further to the south west of the hillfort often known as 'Darren Fawr'. When the Society of Mines Royal first became active in Cardiganshire after 1585 there are no references to Darren and it can therefore be assumed that at this period the mine was either neglected or unknown. Sir Hugh Myddleton is the first recorded lessee in c1618 and after this in 1659 it is recorded that Thomas Bushel drove a small level, mentioning in his treatise that he intended to carry this through the mountain under the 'old works'. The date of these 'old works' is unclear although it is known that patentees in the time of Queen Elizabeth and James I also made slight trials here. Curiously the Company of Mine Adventurers ignored Darren and after Bushel it lay neglected for nearly a century until the southern end was reopened in 1731 by George Jones under Edmund Moore. The lode here proved extremely rich and profits of £12,000 a year accrued 'all within the compass of 200 yards'. The ore occurred near George's shaft where the lode divided, and was worked continuously from the grass to a depth of 127 yards, pumping carried out by hand (Bick 1976, 11; Bick & Wyn Davies 1994, 20-24, 65-66; Hughes 1990).

During Lewis Morris's survey of Cardiganshire Mines in 1742 Darren Mine was said to be situated on common land, thus belonging to the crown. It was however leased out by a freeholder Thomas Griffyth (whose land adjoined it) to several private companies. This led to a law suit between the Crown and Thomas Griffyth as to whether the mine or some part of it was on common land, together with litigation in the court of Chancery between two of the major workers of the mine, a Flintshire Company and Edmund Moore and his Cornish miners. At this period Darren presented an unforgettable spectacle 'There I saw between twenty and thirty miners in a row, stoping about 50 fathoms from the surface....may more miners [were] elsewhere, and on a branch lode going off at an acute angle, this fine rib of ore was generally about three feet wide' (Williams 1789)

Not long after 1742 part of the mine was abandoned and flooded, and although many attempts at revival were made during the remainder of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, these were mainly confined to shallow workings and to driving levels from the deep valley to the north. The mine closed in 1798 but was leased to Williams of Scorrier in 1825. However the old bottoms were not seen again until the firm John Taylor & Sons made a determined trial in 1839-42. But the lode proved worked out and without promise and the venture was abandoned as hopeless with a loss of £14,000. Over the next 30 years a succession of companies including Matthew and Absalom Francis, the Darrens East Mining Company and the Darren Consolidated Company also tried with disappointing results, the first official returns for the mine in 1845 recording an output of only 1,657 tons of lead ore, 21,148 oz of silver and a little copper (Bick 1976, 11; Hughes 1990). Better times were to come between 1870-1884 when the mine was in the hands of the engineer Robert Girdwood, who was responsible for improvements in the design of ore dressing machinery. At Darren about 700 tons of lead ore were raised before 1880 from the west end of the mine. The 1887 25-inch Ordnance Survey indicates flat rods extending for well over ½ mile, probably the longest run ever erected in mid-Wales. The ore was then conveyed by the long tramroad to the dressing floors below Pontrhydybeddau (Bick 1976, 13-14). From 1885/6 until 1890 P Barker was in ownership of the mine, however it is thought that he may have been the liquidator. The final entry in the *Mineral Statistics* records that ownership passed to Thomas Ward in 1890. This Sheffield scrap merchant liberated the final assets before abandonment of the whole site later that year (Hughes 1990)

### **References**

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