
51 Long Meg Mine

Theme: Heritage and mining

Location

51 Long Meg Mine. Take the footpath north from Little Salkeld for 2 kilometres [NY 563 378].

Description

270 million years ago Britain was only 15 degrees north of the Equator and the landscape in Cumbria resembled the arid coastal plains of the Persian Gulf.

Back then, water evaporated in shallow coastal lagoons and inland basins, leaving multiple layers of mud and salts. These sediments became the red shales and white gypsum and anhydrite beds that are found in the Eden Valley and along the west coast of Cumbria. Gypsum and anhydrite are both forms of calcium sulphate and they have been quarried and mined in these areas for years, producing the raw material for the plasterboard and chemical industries. Today only one active mine exists, at Kirkby Thore, and it is not easy to find a place where naturally occurring gypsum can be seen, mainly because it quickly dissolves away in water. But the dilapidated remains of one former mine, Long Meg, beside the River Eden, north of Little Salkeld, are still visible. The mine opened in 1880 and closed in 1976. Its underground workings are extensive and it produced more than five million tons of anhydrite. Beside the footpath which runs between the mine and the river to Lacy's Caves you can still find blocks of gypsum, although the minerals you see are secondary; they have been compressed, dissolved and recrystallised several times.

Native oak, birch and rowan woods fringe the river Eden, adding some stability to the steep banks and cliffs of red sandstone. In many places their exposed tangled-roots grow miraculously from thin soils and rock crevices with the help of their fungal root partners.

Photographs

(Photo 51-1) 51 Block of gypsum and anhydrite from Long Meg mine.

(Photo 51-2) 51 Long Meg Mine.



(Photo 51-1) Block of gypsum and anhydrite from Long Meg mine.



(Photo 51-2) Long Meg Mine.