

BRITISH MINING No. 35

# THE GOGINAN MINES

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Cover illustrations: Goginan Mine in 1882  
(Courtesy of P.J. Challise)

## THE GOGINAN MINES

### Preface

During the past years I have been accused, many times, of writing almost exclusively for one rather expensive and wide ranging journal. Somehow I was persuaded to start a "small" article on the Goginan Mine in North Cardiganshire for a B.M. Monograph. I chose this mine mainly because I felt that it was the prime example of the largest complex with the least interpretable remains. Also, it struck me that remarkably little had been written about the site and there were many inaccuracies in the available, published, texts.

In retrospect, most of the standard sources yielded data but the main difficulty lay in the site having been under private ownership rather than being owned by an estate. The *Mining Journal* shed very little new light on the subject which was useable within the following pages. John Taylor's papers were absolutely vital and it is a great shame that only a small percentage survive, and are scattered through several archives and collections. The "Druid Inn" collection provided much information on the second quarter of the nineteenth century whilst the archives of the British Geological Survey at Aberystwyth shed a considerable amount of valuable data on the third quarter and the years immediately prior to the closure of Goginan in 1886. Whilst those records of Messrs Taylor which survived the blitz have now been dissipated into private or commercial archives and are virtually inaccessible, it is fortunate that immediately after the First War, O.T. Jones made extensive notes on them whilst going about his business of preparing the geological memoir for the area. These notes were of considerable value in piecing together the records of the nineteenth century which were missing from other sources.

Yet again I must thank Peter Challis for providing me with information from his splendid collection and allowing me to reproduce the lithograph illustration of the Goginan Mine — the only contemporary illustration which has come to light prior to the publication of this monograph. Thanks also to Dave Ely-Brown for applying his talents to assisting with not only the survey and field work but also the artistic impression of the surface installations at Bwlchyrennaid Mine about 1860.

There are scores of people to whom I am indebted for their help. The staff in all departments of the National Library of Wales at Aberystwyth and also those of the British Geological Survey at Aberystwyth, members of the North Cardiganshire Mining Club, members of the U.C.W. Aberystwyth Caving Club.

For invaluable assistance, and occasional insanity, and inspiration I must personally thank Steve Colley, Paul Bird, Charlie Hopkins, John Ashton, Tony Jarrat, Jon and Simon Timberlake, Bob Matthews, Ifor Richards, Peter Harvey, David Bick and my brother Toby. All have given their help in my understanding of the area both above and below grass though I am sure that they did not appreciate it at the time.

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July 1985.

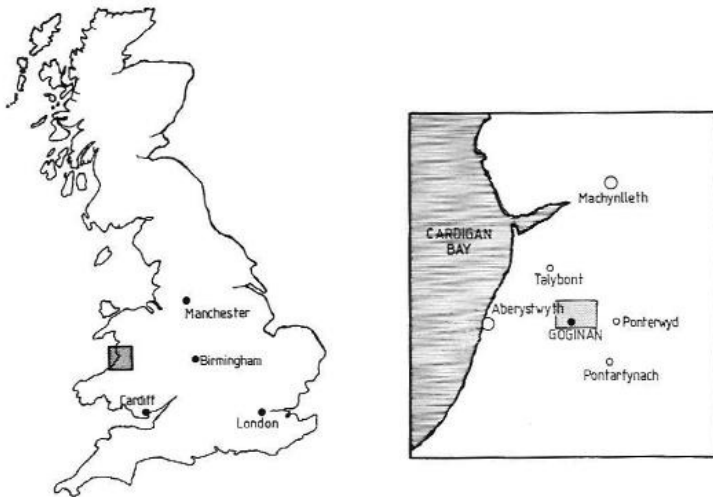


Fig. 1. Location of the Goginan Mines in Mid Wales

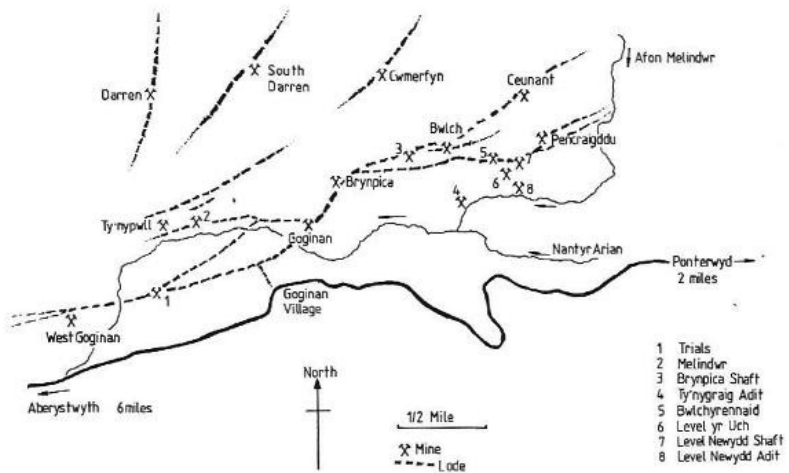


Fig. 2. Location of mine workings & lodes in the Goginan District of Mid Wales

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND EARLY HISTORY

**S**EVEN MILES WEST OF ABERYSTWYTH, MID WALES, THE village of Goginan straddles the main A.44 trunk road. It is now a commuter settlement, with the greater proportion of the inhabitants being employed at the University or one of the many colleges, libraries or local research institutions. It is indeed fortunate that today such employers exist in the area for a century ago there was either agriculture or mining and the allied trades such as smithing or carpentry. Almost exactly a century ago, the hey-day of mining was passed and the once productive mines of Goginan were becoming a liability to their owners and the inevitable closures loomed closer each month until, finally, in 1886 the Goginan Mine closed. The other mines in the vicinity, both major and minor, gradually followed suit as the economics of lead mining worsened until by 1914 the industry was, to all intents and purposes, dead. A few attempts were made at resuscitation but without any measure of success.

There had always been a tendency in the area — and in the industry — of discontinuity in working mineral deposits. A perfectly natural progression of events, as the richest ores were worked out, always to be followed by a speculator with an improved working method who would once more breathe life into mining for sometimes decades but more frequently weeks or months. The Goginan area though, had always proved to be an exception and from the advent of the Society of Mines Royal in the 1560s until the early 20th century there had always been work available in mining and metallurgy.

Circumstance would suggest that there had been mining operations carried on in the area since the Roman occupation of the district in about A.D. 70 or possibly earlier according to some authorities.

Although the major site was at Goginan, it becomes impossible to detach the working of this mine from the other mines in the close vicinity on the same lodes in Silurian and Ordovician grits, shales and mudstones.

Figures 1 and 2 show the location of the Goginan Mine and its geographical and geological relationship with neighbouring mines. The dressing floors for the Goginan Mine during the 19th century lay near the hamlet of Old Goginan at SN 700817 and from here the lode strikes east north east to Penraigddu Mine (SN 713825) about two miles distant. It is on this part of the lode that the oldest workings are located. Between these two sites there is a powerful fracture exposed and worked at the Bwlch and Ceunant Mines. For many years it was supposed that this was the main Goginan Lode but geological research in the earlier part of this century has shown that this is not so and that the main lode probably remained un-noticed due to deep overburden, until it outcropped the Bwlchyrennaid Mine SN 706822. To the west of the Goginan dressing floors, the lode develops several parallel fractures, some of which are mineralised but little exploited; the main lode however strikes towards the Melindwr mine before bending sharply to the south west, finally being exploited at the Tyn y Pwll Mine (sometimes called Bronlangwrda or West Goginan). It then loses its power becoming undetectable near the village of Capel Bangor.

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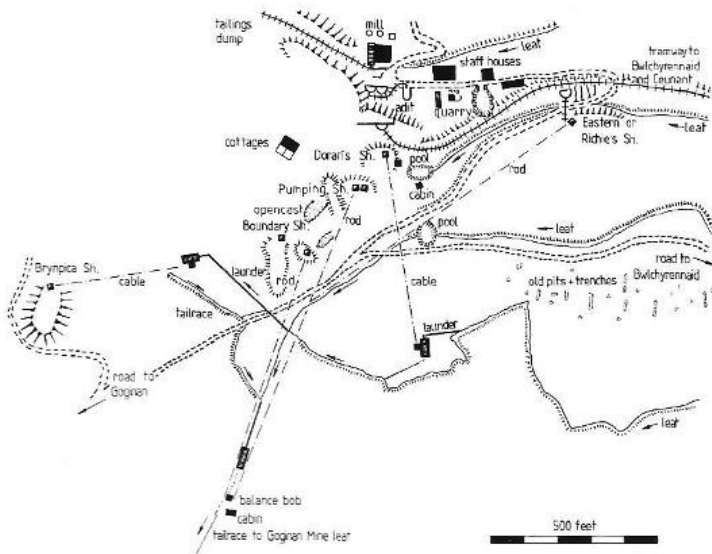
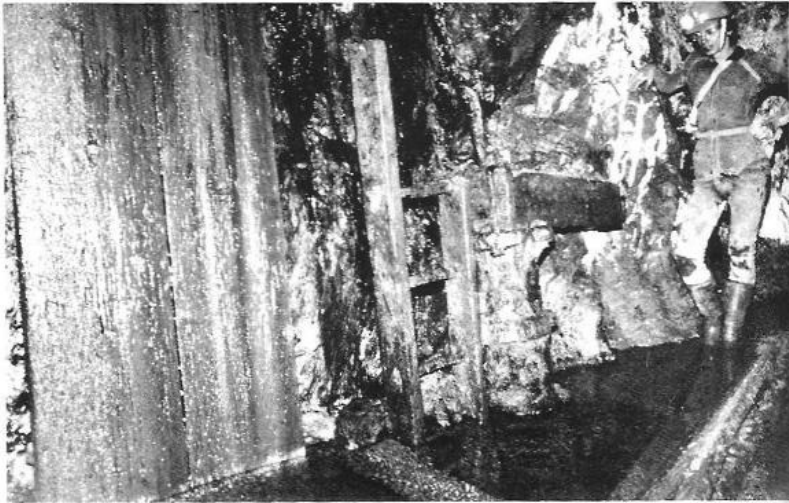


Fig. 15. Surface arrangement of Bwlch Mine

to give him a majority vote on the board. Before the board sat though, he gave Hayward a chance to retain his position on the board by purchasing these shares at a grossly inflated price. Hayward was over a barrel and had little option but to write yet another cheque. Tredinnick was obviously involved, but he had parted with more shares than Hayward thought that he had held. 'Where had these come from?' must have been his first reaction and Francis fell under suspicion for a while but mitigated himself. After the whole incident Hayward commented to Francis "I hope most anxiously that better times are coming".

The better times never really materialised but things never got much worse either. Occasionally a good rich bunch of ore would be found and spirits would rise and then be dashed to pieces when silly and avoidable incidents took place. A case in point was when a laundry blew over one night in the mid 1850s and discharged a considerable volume of water onto the dressing floors. As if this was not enough, the deluge also carried a substantial quantity of fines and slimes into the river. This toxic waste then proceeded to settle out of suspension in a mill pond and leat some miles downstream at Penrhyncoch, causing much distress to the miller, who was unable to run the mill for several days until the slimes were dug out.

In the old Bwlch Mine, ore was found in some quantity in the 40 off Doran's Shaft and in conjunction with the output of the new mine at Bwlchysrennoid a fairly regular output was maintained for a few years. From the start of their operations at the new mine it was obvious that only a limited tonnage could be produced from an operation with such tight boundaries and a limitation on



*Plate III. Timber kibble track constructed on the wall of the underlie shaft in Level Newydd. Note top of ladder road and rising main. (Photo. A.J.B.)*

the depth of working. The realisation of the limited life of the mine was also contemporary with the realisation that there was still a good many tons of low grade ore in the deeper levels at the old Bwlch Mine. Doran's shaft commenced re-sinking in the July of 1852 and some development took place on Richie's Shaft at the same time, but neither operation progressed with the speed with which it ought to have and the result was that Bwlchyrennaid went off stream before Bwlch came back into production.

It would therefore appear that the abandonment of the Bwlchyrennaid workings was due to approaching their boundary and also that the primitive machinery was probably incapable of dealing with any further development. The sinking of Level Newydd shaft in 1863 would have rapidly reached the adit and was then continued down to, firstly, the 60 fathom level and finally the 72, where a run of 30 fathoms of ore was encountered which graded at 3.6%. Stopping was done over the 60 to both the east and west on this shoot but over the 72, only to the west. Taylor soon found discord amongst his miners in the bottom level. They were within about 70 feet of the bottom workings of Bwlchyrennaid and would have faced an inundation had they holed through. The event is not recorded but John Taylor & Son, (in fact probably Captain W.H. Paull of the Goginan Mine), must have made an approach to Francis and Northey for permission to work at Bwlchyrennaid, primarily to drain the sump but exploitation must have also been in their minds. Not even a mutually agreeable arrangement could be reached and in 1870 Spargo states:-

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### CHAPTER 4

#### TOUR OF THE SITES

*Please note before looking at the workings, firstly that most of the sites are on private property and permission ought to be sought in the first instance. Secondly, that old mine sites are dangerous. They should never be considered as playgrounds for young children or even an open area to let the dog loose upon. If your dog worries a sheep it will be shot, probably without warning! If you must take children and pets with you then supervise both in the most stringent manner or you may regret it.*

*Many of the workings are three or four hundred years old and unsafe so for your own sake you are strongly advised not to explore old workings regardless of how safe they appear to be. Nor be tempted to cross fences to look down shafts. Not only will you fall down one at sometime but you will also damage the fence and allow stock to enter. It is probably as easy to fill a shaft — though illegal — as it is to meet the legal requirements of fencing one and this is what ultimately happens when stock starts disappearing down holes in the ground.,*

*Always close gates behind you, unless they are open in the first instance, and use stiles to cross fences. If there is no gate or stile then you should not be there. Take your rubbish home with you. If you see people emptying bins or dumping old cars into workings then please note number plates and report the matter to the public health department (Aberystwyth 617911). It is up to you to actively participate in the preservation of what little is left to see in this area. Removing dumps is another problem associated with old mines; this is illegal, as the old mounds are classified as "Dumps of Toxic Waste"; offenders are sought by the planning authority who may be contacted through the same telephone number.*

**I**T IS MOST CONVENIENT TO SEE THESE SITES BY MOTOR transport in view of the great distances involved. It is not unmanageable by public transport and then on foot (or even bicycle) but be prepared for some steep hills!

Upon entering Capel Bangor from Aberystwyth, progress to the east end of the village and 250 yards beyond the Maes Bangor Arms take the first metalled road on the left. It is between two houses and rather concealed. After half a mile the remains of the West Goginan Mine will be seen in the woods on the left. These are now on private property and there is nothing to be seen apart from some dumps and a very deeply flooded adit.

Two hundred yards further east, this road bifurcates. At the junction, looking north east, some trials can be seen behind Cyncoed farm. These probably represent some of the prospecting ventures of the Melindwr Mine.

Of the West Cwmerfin and Melindwr Mine there is nothing left. The sites are both on private property. Access to both is gained by taking the left fork and following the road to the end.

Bearing slightly right at the junction and following the road for three quarters of a mile, brings one to a cross roads. Turning left here and following the road down the bank as far as the small stone bridge, fine views of the whole of the Goginan Mine can be obtained. The river is the Melindwr — translated, this means the stream of the water mill. Immediately downstream of the bridge can be seen what appears to be a drain. In fact, this is the mouth of the deep adit which was supposed to have been constructed by William Waller in the very early 18th century. It certainly is in the style of Waller in the section which has been examined but its use must have been limited to drainage only.



Turning right after the bridge, the road then winds through the centre of the site and sweeps back on itself towards the hamlet of Old Goginan. The only feature of consequence at the Goginan Mine site is the portal of the inclined plane into the workings. To describe its location exactly is an impossible task, but from the road walk up the quarry dumps towards the quarry face. Out of the quarry there is a road which eventually takes a sweep both up and down the hillside. The incline is located under a thicket of bushes immediately above this junction. It may take you ten minutes or so to discover the location but it is a feature which is unique in mid Wales and worth the effort.

Take the road past Old Goginan but turn up the valley on the metalled road after the hairpin bend. On the left hand side, for a quarter of a mile are 18th and 19th century workers cottages, some of which are still inhabited and some lying in a ruinous state. On the right hand side of the road is a small but deeply incised dingle which is rather overgrown. At the head of this dingle, where a track doubles back on the road, in front of a row of cottages, is the Bryn Pica adit portal. The writer suspects that one — or more, possibly — of these cottages date from the time of Sir John Pettus's visit after the Civil War. Opposite the cottages on the south side of the dingle are a series of grubblings and waste dumps in the vicinity of Gilbertson's Shaft. Better access to this area is gained by following the road for a hundred yards beyond the cottages, to where there is a convenient place to park at the junction of a fairly new access road. The path onto the top dumps of Goginan Mine is quite obvious from here. It is also a good place to observe the gruffy ground stretching to the north east that represents Waller's Bryn Pica mine. These workings date from the early 18th century. Waller's main shaft is visible as a sizeable mound, now grassed over, in the middle of the fields to the left of the road. Beyond these workings, in the woods, you may be able to discern the tell-tale colour of a dump. This is reached by following the tarmac road for a further quarter of a mile, into the woods, and stopping at the first access road on the left. The dump is along this road around the first corner, a distance of about fifty yards or so. Unfortunately much of the material has now been moved and the surface features much mutilated by various contractors. However it marks the site of the new Bryn Pica Shaft sunk in the mid 19th century by the Taylor company.

Returning to the road and heading east, up the hill, after about two hundred yards there is a gate across the road. It is best to park beyond the gate and continue your visit on foot.

To the west side of the gate can be seen the remains of the boundary shaft of the Goginan Mine. From here it is possible to gauge the depth of the shaft to adit level and also the incredible distance driven along the lode; it is actually about a mile to the mouth of the adit from this shaft. South of the gate a fire break runs down the hill; follow this break for about three hundred yards and the remains of the pit for the Bwlch pumping wheel will be seen, though now in a very sorry state.

*\* As this goes to press, the restoration of the incline is to commence — April 1988.*

91. A bundle of 24 letters to Matthew Francis from John Taylor, his son John Taylor Jnr. and also George Fosset (the latter's brother-in-law and co-manager at Goginan Mine for some years), concerning Level Newydd, Goginan, Bwlch and other mines between 1836 and '53. Despite the authors, this collection contains nothing of any great significance to the Goginan Mines.
92. 12 letters from T.P. Thomas to Francis dating from 1847 - 1851 concerning the finance and management of Bwlch and other mines.
102. A bundle of papers of little importance and relevance to Goginan and the area covered by this tome, apart from William Battyc's Circular on British Mines.
110. Assorted letters (18) from the Francis Bros. concerning the Llawr y Cwm Bach Mine and Goginan between 1840 and 1855.
113. Various enquiries regarding shipments of ore and leases.
116. A bundle of 49 letters concerning mining generally from 1842 to 1852 and the Bwlch Mine in 1848.
102. Two bundles of share certificates for various mines but include
119. 37 Pencraigddu & Ceunant Lead Mines Co. certificates issued to Matthew Francis of Goginan in January 1848. One of these certificates is reproduced, along with others, within the volume.

## APPENDIX VIII

### Goginan Anecdotes

#### *"The butcher's black dog"*

Many years ago there were two brothers living in Goginan one of whom was a miner, the other a butcher by trade. By all accounts neither was prospering but the butcher was having a particularly hard time. His life was further plagued by a large black dog that had taken a shine to him. The dog, whenever the chance arose, was somewhat prone to running off with the butcher's goods, which was further whittling away the profits. However the dog also had a rather playful disposition and was fond of chasing anything which was thrown. One night a plot was hatched between the two brothers for disposing of the dog, the mining brother would bring a cartridge of explosive, a cap and some fuse home from work the following afternoon. This having been aquired it was handed over to the butchering brother who primed the cartridge and left it on one side in his shop. Later in the afternoon the black dog made an appearance, the butcher lit the fuse and threw the cartridge for the dog. True to form the dog ran after it and the butcher pulled the door closed expecting his troubles to disappear, this was the start of the real trouble though! He had not a clue as to the burning time of the fuse and time went by without incident.