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## SOME 19th CENTURY COMMENTS ON THE ENNERDALE MINES

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### SYNOPSIS

*The iron mines of Ennerdale never came to much but there are quite a lot of them. Numerous little levels pockmark the hills around the Lake. No comprehensive history has been written on them, though John Adams covers many in his Mines of the Lake District Fells, Dalesman 1988. There were several proposals to build railways into the area during the 1870s and 1880s. Nothing was ever done, excepting the Rowrah and Kelton Fell railway built to serve the only sizeable mines at Kelton and Knockmurton.*

These mines were in slate rocks. In 1884, an Ennerdale Railway Bill was before Parliament and a Commons Select Committee heard evidence from Mr Dixon. Mr Dixon was the manager of the Salter and Eskett iron ore mines and mining consultant to the Leconfield Estates.

Dixon said that many mines had been tried in the granite rocks of Ennerdale and Eskdale. All had been unsuccessful over many years, even though iron was worked in all the Lake District valleys many years ago. In the granite the ore is found in narrow veins and the rock is harder than the slates of the Knockmurton mines. Typically the ore is only found in pockets, called bellies by the miners, which soon nip out. In the past, mines have been left at their best and then sold or leased to companies promoted by the mine owners. Ore could cost over £3 a ton or £2 a ton to extract from the Ennerdale granite (it would sell for about 10/- a ton at this time).

Dixon said he had advised the South Cumberland Co. not to take a mine in Eskdale and it was now shut up (the Gill Force mine run by Donaldson and Allport). Any mine waste would have to bypass the lake and the Ainsworth bleach works at a cost of £10,000 so as not to pollute the lake with mine waste.

In the granite the veins could occasionally be 20 feet or more wide as the proprietors eagerly stated. However, the ore was often very narrow, almost disappearing between bellies. Drifts were 5' to 5' 6" wide but the ore was often only 6" to 12" wide and a good vein of one was two feet wide. The widest was at Nab Gill in Eskdale where six feet of ore had been found at one place. The ore was found in greater quantities in the limestone and it was a much easier rock to work with than granite. Mines in the granite had no local capital invested in them.

Moreover, Dixon said he had been to inspect the mines in Ennerdale. The railway was being promoted to serve Gillerwaithe mine which was just some trenches on the fellside. The other mines in Ennerdale were just short drifts. He had been able to inspect them without needing artificial light.

This evidence and some in similar form from the former secretary of the mining company in Eskdale helped ensure that the proposal to build the railway came to nothing. The mines in Ennerdale were developed a little but not much iron ore was ever produced.

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