Rookhope Old Smelt Mill, Rookhope, County Durham: results of the 1995 survey
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ABSTRACT: Rookhope Old Smelt Mill (Scheduled Ancient Monument No 29010) was abandoned some time after the construction of Rookhope Smelt Mill 1km to the E by the Blackett company between 1730 and 1740. In 1995, the authors carried out a survey of the site and were able to confirm its use for smelting lead ores. There were one and possibly two smelting mills on the site together with evidence of slag crushing and ore dressing operations. There is a system of leats to supply water to the various operations. The site is overlain to the W by the dam of the newer Rookhope Smelt Mill and the shafts and outlet from the Tailrace Level to the E. In August 1999, the Environment Agency commenced work to build a lagoon to intercept silt carried by water overflowing from the nearby Fraser’s Grove mine further up the valley. This work has destroyed much of the old smelt mill site.

Introduction

Rookhope Old Smelt Mill (Scheduled Ancient Monument No 29010, NY 915428) is situated on the south side of Rookhope Burn (Fig 1) on an area of level ground approximately 1km W of the later Rookhope Smelt Mill (NY 925429). The Old Smeltmill site consists of a series of leats and earthworks, most of which are less than 0.3m above ground level. The only appreciable masonry remains are the foundations of a two-roomed building at the SW corner, which almost certainly housed an ore hearth. In August 1999, the Environment Agency commenced work to build a lagoon to intercept silt carried by water overflowing from the nearby Fraser’s Grove mine further up the valley. This work has destroyed or overlain much of the E part of the old smelt mill site.

The SE corner had previously been surveyed by Alan Blackburn and Tom Gledhill some time before 1995. It was decided to carry out a survey of the whole site in early 1995 and this was completed by Blackburn and Smith during July and August 1995. The site was protected as a Scheduled Ancient Monument in 1997.

History

The lead veins in the Rookhope Valley run approximately NE to SW. The line of the East Scarsike Vein is marked by a series of shafts (Fig 2) and the emergence of the Tailrace Level at the NE, just above Rookhope Burn at the foot of the steeply-sloping fell side. Although the mouth of the level has collapsed, a very strong stream of water issues from it. The Tailrace Level is driven in the Little Limestone and after approximately 300m, turns NW to cut the parallel West Scarsike Vein and further on, the parallel Rispey Vein at Rispey Shaft. Tailrace Level also drains the more

Figure 1: Location map