

The Quarrymen

The quarrymen prided themselves on their ability to understand the rock. It was held that 'you must be a Welshman to understand the stone, for the rock does not understand English'

The quarrymen made up 50% of the workforce. With gunpowder, crowbars, hammers and chisels, they blasted and quarried the slate from the mountain. They worked in crews of between four to six men, and struck a bargain with the quarry managers. In the crew there would be two rockmen, a splitter and a dresser. The rockmen worked the quarry face, and were responsible for drilling holes and placing the explosive charge. Then, with



Rockman at work

a crowbar they would lever off the giant slabs loosened by the blast while they hung off the rock face secured by a rope looped around their legs. Striking a bargain was intended to take account of the variation in the quality of the rock and both sides claimed that it was biased in favour of the other. But the arrangement could result in the quarrymen owing money to the mine management after deductions for ropes, chains and tools had been made. Equally, management claimed that it lead to restrictive practices in the quarry reducing productivity. The bargain was not abandoned until after the Second World War.

The quarrymen were known for the fondness of tea drinking. A doctor at the Penrhyn quarry hospital commented 'they are fond of tea and coffee at the quarry and never think of taking anything else'. The tea was stewed for half an hour or more before the men came to drink it.



Penrhyn quarrymen, 1913

THE SLATE TRAIL

Follow 'The Slate Trail' along Lôn Las Ogwen, where you can find a series of information boards recounting the unique story of Ogwen slate, Penrhyn Quarry and the people involved in its production.