

# COUNCIL OF NORTHERN CAVING CLUBS

## Important safety information about using CNCC descriptions and rigging topos

**This MUST be read and understood by anyone using a CNCC-provided cave description or rigging topo**

These descriptions and rigging topos are provided by the CNCC for use by experienced cavers only in assisting with trip planning and route-finding on some of the popular sporting routes in our region. They are not exhaustive, they do not cover every passage or feature, and details may have been greatly simplified to try to keep them concise and clear.

Great efforts have been made to ensure the accuracy and integrity of the information. Nonetheless, there are likely to be errors and (over time) an increasing number of inaccuracies due to changes in the caves and the replacement of resin anchors. The descriptions may also contain subjective viewpoints which could be open to misinterpretation. It is entirely incumbent upon all cavers to exercise appropriate care and caution when going underground using these topos and descriptions, and to have researched the trip from several other sources. Never make any safety critical decisions based on the information in these descriptions or topos.

Pull through trips must only ever be undertaken by cavers who are confident in finding the lower route out of the cave without a description, and who understand the extra precautions demanded of such trips (e.g. carrying multiple ropes).

The rope lengths stated in the rigging topos are considered the minimum length required based on average rigging. There may be errors, or your rigging may use more rope than anticipated. Therefore, it is critical that all ropes that are deployed for use have two tightened knots in both ends, to mitigate against the risks associated with the ropes not reaching the bottom of pitches.

Difficulty ratings, or 'grades' have been omitted from these descriptions. All cavers must make their own informed judgements of whether the cave is suitable for their capabilities, backed up by thorough research into the nature of the cave from numerous sources and an understanding of the capabilities of others in your group.

Many in-site ropes and ladders are mentioned throughout the descriptions. These should only ever be considered navigational markers and not safety critical belays. The CNCC does not install or maintain any fixed aids in caves other than the resin anchors shown on the topos. Never trust your safety to a rope or ladder which is left in a cave. For resin anchors you must understand the importance of belaying your rope to multiple anchors, including full traverse ropes leading to pitches, and always performing a pre-use inspection on every anchor. If any resin anchor shows movement, or fracturing in the nearby rock, it must not be used.

Rigging must always be performed to avoid any rub points or other hazards. Rigging exactly as depicted in the rigging topos does not guarantee a rub-free descent; this must be assessed and ensured by each individual caver on each pitch in every cave.

Many caves which are susceptible to danger from flooding have been highlighted in the descriptions. However, all caves, even typically dry ones, can flood in various circumstances, and it is therefore critical that the experienced caver using these descriptions makes their own judgement based on experience, extensive research and weather forecasts. Decisions to descend any cave after or during wet weather, or when wet weather is forecast, should be made based on an informed judgement backed up by thorough research from multiple sources. The critical moto which should be adhered to is "If in doubt, stay out!"

Although warnings are provided where there are some specific known hazards, the absence of a warning does not indicate that there are no hazards. Caves can (and do) change over time. Furthermore, the CNCC does not perform routine inspections or surveys of caves to look for specific hazards (e.g. loose rocks). All cavers are strongly advised to view the webpage on the CNCC website for their chosen cave to check for any warnings that have come to our attention. Experienced cavers using these descriptions must make their own evaluations for hazards throughout the duration of their trip and act appropriately to mitigate any risks.

Neither the author of the descriptions/topos or the CNCC will accept any responsibility for any damage, injury or loss (however caused) resulting from the use, misuse or misinterpretation of information in these cave descriptions or rigging topos.

# EXCALIBUR POT AND JENGA POT

October 2023

The Excalibur/Jenga system is the only known extensive, active cave system in the North York Moors. The traditional trip involves entering and exiting the system at Excalibur Pot, enjoying a two-hour return trip to view the fine Main Streamway. Those seeking further exploration can enter the system at Jenga Pot.

**Warning:** The entrances to both caves are at active sinks in Hutton Beck. In settled, dry conditions, the entire river sinks upstream of the entrances, however, following prolonged wet weather, a single heavy downpour, or snowmelt, the river can rise rapidly, overflow the top sinks, and reach the cave entrances, making them impassable, and sumping many of the passages below. At the north end of the field, 300m upstream of the Excalibur Pot entrance is a large swallet. If you have any doubt about the water levels, you should check this swallet; if this is anything other than dry or immediately sinking an incoming stream (i.e., if it is pooling any water) you must not go down the caves, as this swallet can go from starting to pool water to overflowing in just a matter of hours. Summer is generally the best time to visit the system as water levels from October to April are typically quite volatile.

## Excalibur Pot (SE 7105 8781)

From the Keldholme to Hutton-le-Hole road, turn down the small road towards Lingmoor Farm. This goes downhill for 100m (please drive slowly, the suicidal pheasants are the landowner's livelihood) to a dirt area on the left where cars may be parked. Please park tightly and leave room for other vehicles, including large agricultural vehicles, to pass and turn around. Excalibur can be found by passing through the gate (always close even if found open) and following the left-hand side of the field to reach the dry streambed.

**Entrance pitch:** 7-8m ladder (20m lifeline). Scaffold/natural belays available. Do not try to free-climb this pitch as one of the walls is of delicately stacked blocks and should not be subjected to unnecessary force.

### Navigation:

The constricted scaffold-supported entrance shaft lands in a tiny chamber, from where two small slots lead immediately onto the narrow pitch head where the ladder may be rigged from scaffolding. Depart the ladder after a 7m descent onto a balcony. Through an archway is Beyond Belief Aven, with the Main Chamber 5m below, although this is not the way down. Instead continue to climb 4m down a rift immediately below the ladder. This becomes progressively narrower before emerging at floor level into the Main Chamber.

From the Main Chamber there are two routes onwards. Ignore the route leading up over a large block and instead take the more appealing sandy-floored crawl at the opposite side of the chamber. After only 6m the crawl reaches blocks, and a tight slot drops 3m through the right-hand wall. Descending this slot (awkward) gains low and wide bedding. Ignore the most obvious direction leading off into the far distance (into some unpleasant crawls) and crawl the other way instead. Turn left after only a few metres to quickly reach a 2m climb up through blocks into Breakaway Chamber, a block-floored chamber.

From Breakaway Chamber, drop down a slot (next to a survey marker) into an awkward grotty crawl which turns right and reaches a standing height chamber. Continue crawling straight ahead for several metres then turn left to a wriggle through a moist constriction. Continue straight ahead through a low crawl for a further 10m to reach a 2m climb up into the spacious Parallel Passage Chamber. The way on from here is across the chamber to enter a meandering stooping passage (not the more obvious passage beyond the floor trench). After 50m this suddenly enlarges, and the sound of flowing water can be heard.

**Please take extreme care along the following passages (the formations, including the chert nodules in the roof, are delicate and unique).**

Holy Grail Junction is soon reached. The passage on the right leads to a dead-end balcony over the stream (no way down) and has some modest and vulnerable formations (ideally avoid this passage but if you are keen to see the formations then please follow the taped route one at a time with care). Instead, continue ahead at the junction, ignoring a passage on the left, to reach an easy climb down to the Main Streamway.

Downstream, the passage meanders for approximately 200m in superb stream passage, often well stocked with fish. The streamway then disappears under a muddy choke where most groups turn around. A passage on the left of the choke allows a continuation to Laura's Demise, a breakdown chamber. A route down through blocks only metres into Laura's Demise reaches a slot back down to the streamway (now only 60cm high and often sumped) and a thrash in the water gains access up into to a final lonely chamber, Primal Scream, where the water is lost.

**The upstream passage has fine formations and crumbly chert ledges: Take great care to avoid damage!**

Upstream from the climb, the Holy Grail Flowstone is passed and the floor gains dark cherty ledges (these crumble easily, so for safety and conservation, please progress in the water). Continue upstream to enjoy 125m of fine progress in a splendid cascading river passage. Just after an inlet shelf on the left, the stream narrows and a stoop in the water under jammed blocks emerges into Oxbow Hall, a fine stretch of river passage strewn with boulders. After a large dry oxbow on the right, the stream splits into two terminal inlets. Just prior to the end of the right-hand inlet, a crawl under a wall of ghastly gravity-defying blocks (extreme care) enters Fossil Chamber, the most upstream reaches of the system.



## Jenga Pot to Excalibur Pot

Park as for Excalibur Pot. The entrance to Jenga Pot is approximately 300m downstream of Excalibur Pot. From the car parking area follow the track leading down the valley in the opposite direction to Excalibur (i.e., sharp right at the bottom of the hill) for 100m to where it crosses Hutton Beck streambed. Follow the streambed downstream (right) for 25m to find the entrance of Jenga Pot on the true right bank. **If planning to exit later via Excalibur Pot, you must first open the Excalibur entrance and pre-rig the entrance pitch with a ladder. The Sandpit in Jenga Pot sumps instantly if the river floods and may take up to a week after a flood to drain sufficiently to get through. The route from Jenga Pot to Excalibur Pot entrance takes about 90 minutes and is strenuous with lots of awkward muddy crawling and some squeezes.**

**Rigging:** Jenga Pot itself does not require any rigging (however Excalibur Pot will need to be rigged if exiting there later).

### **Navigation from Jenga to Excalibur:**

The lid hinges on a metal bar and will happily sit on the bar when open, however it is **not physically attached to the bar and frame**. Therefore, please take care when opening to not lift the lid off the bar which could cause it to fall down the shaft!

Climb 8m to the bottom of the entrance. Do not rely too heavily on the in-situ ladder! Drop straight down under a large block below the scaffold frame into a short crawl leading into a second rift. Here, drop into the rift and follow the stepped passage leading downwards on the right to the top of 'Scaffold Rift', named for obvious reasons. Climb 6m to the floor where a low crawl leads on at floor level (this goes in two directions; take the most obvious, which is flat-out over wet gravel). After a few metres ignore a tiny route going off on the right (this is the original way in, now silted up) and straight ahead rise into a standing height small chamber. Climb up 2m on the left into another large rift, where straight on a floor level is flat-out crawl. Follow this crawl down a couple of steps and a few puddles to an obvious T-junction at Chert Alley.

At Chert Alley, turn left and after 8m drop down 1m on the right into the Main Chamber (which is not as impressive as the name suggests).

***Route to Sumps and the Covid Extensions:** Keeping left, across the far side of the chamber the passage continues as a well-worn muddy crawl. After 10m, the passage bears right, but the route is straight on through a muddy puddle, and then only 1m after the puddle, up a slope on the left into a more spacious chamber (Chertnobl). Descend the chamber and then continue straight on into a spacious hands-and-knees crawl, reaching Sump One after 20m, which us the start of the route to the Covid Extensions (more research needed, contact York Caving Club).*

Immediately after the 1m drop down, not actually entering the larger part of Main Chamber, keep to the right wall and into a sandy crawl. Easy crawling for 25m emerges through blocks into Sandpit Chamber where at the far end a slope down leads into an excavated undercut (The Sandpit). The Sandpit may be a wet/muddy wallow for 5m before sloping up. Another 5m ahead a tall rift is reached. At the end of this rift, crawling resumes, a mixture of hands-and-knees and flat-out, for 40m (ignoring an inlet on the left after 20m) to reach the Sandpit Choke.

Climb up the choke through the scaffolding. Once through, drop back down 1.5m into the continuing passage. A few metres further is a left-hand corner and then almost immediately a partial blockage of the passage with boulders is reached. This is easily passed by stepping through and over the blocks (staying as low as possible), and into the passage beyond, but tread extremely lightly and mind your head to avoid any disturbance of the gravity defying big blocks above! Beyond the blocks is a fine tall chamber and the way on is a dug hole in the floor. Before continuing, it is worth exploring up a climb just around the corner which leads up to three excellent chambers each connected by short crawls.

The hole drops into a very wet low crawl. The first few metres may require some excavation of mud. After 30m this opens out at a low wide junction with a hole in the floor and a route going off to the left. Ignore these and continue straight for 2m more to a short, narrow but tall rift just after the hole. On the right at chest height is a crawl into JDM Chamber (the biggest chamber in the cave and well worth a look). However, the way on is at floor level straight ahead, into a crawl over bedrock, which becomes gradually tighter before popping out at a tiny chamber. **Larger cavers (particularly those with very broad chests or hips) may struggle with this crawl, although if you have got this far, you will probably be fine!**

Bear right and follow the obvious and varied crawls for about 40m to reach a standing height chamber. The only way on is the unobvious (and unappealing) slope down at floor level at the end, which plunges into a rather aquatic excavated canal. After 20m, cross a trickling stream and crawl straight ahead over the mud banks until the passage widens and reaches a 50cm deep trench. Going right here (before dropping into the trench) leads upwards to an exit to the system called The Secret Dig, an escape route intended only for flooding or exhausted cavers.

Down the trench is a trickling low streamway (Shit Creek). Go upstream (left) for only 6m to where the stream passage bears right, however the way on is the less obvious dry route straight ahead (take care not to miss this). Follow this somewhat bruising passage for 30m to a tall rift where a blockage must be passed by a short climb up and over. Another 20m of crawling (ignoring any low beddings on the right and left) reaches a small enlargement where the only way on is now left into flat-out wet crawl. About 10m into this crawl bear right around an obstructing block and then turn left at an obvious tiny junction. Several metres beyond this Shit Creek ends with a 1m drop into the larger Honey River Streamway.

Follow this upstream for 15m to a wide junction with several ways on. Beware the hanging slab on the roof straight ahead which is not obvious from the approach. Bear slightly left to depart the stream and then identify a permanent survey marker on the right-hand wall. Keeping right (and not being tempted by the more obvious arched crawl on the left), a low upward crawl emerges into a spacious tall rift. A slither over a slab on the left enters the Excalibur Main Chamber with Beyond Belief Aven above.

Across the chamber is the obvious sandy floored way onwards towards the Main Streamway (as referred to in the Excalibur navigation guide). Hidden discretely on the opposite (far right) corner of the chamber at floor level is the sideways squeeze and chimney up to the bottom of the Excalibur Pot main pitch where you can exit the system later using your pre-rigged ladder. After enjoying a nice wash in the upstream sinks of Hutton Beck, **please don't forget to return to the Jenga Pot entrance to secure the lid as you found it before your descent.**