

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.

TATHAM WIFE HOLE

June 2019

A splendid and often under-rated pothole.

Tatham Wife Hole is an active stream pothole, descending with the water for the entire journey. It can be explored in slightly damp conditions (in fact this is when it is most spectacular). In wetter conditions however the pitches are hazardous. As the entrance is directly under the gritstone cap of Ingleborough, Tatham Wife responds very quickly to sudden heavy rain. A descent should only be made if the weather for the day is settled.

Parking: If travelling away from Ingleton, park in a large layby on the left (just before the quarry) approximately 800m after White Scar Cave.

How to find: Grid reference SD 73180 74707



Tatham Wife Hole is notoriously hard to find in poor visibility; GPS and/or compass and map is highly recommended.

Only 30m from the car park, go through a gate into the field where there are some derelict buildings. Take a route towards the upper far corner of this fell, where an indistinct path commences a very steep ascent up the limestone scar via a gorge. At the top of the scar is a wall which can be crossed at a rock stile which is not very well built and quite loose (take extreme care not to damage the wall further).

After the stile, continue to ascend via a few false summits to reach a limestone pavement. In good visibility the gritstone cap of Ingleborough comes into full view here. Take note of your location, as finding the stile on the return journey is difficult if the visibility has deteriorated. Walk for 600m across the limestone pavement and fell on a bearing of 115° or towards the mid-point of the southern (right) slope of Ingleborough, keeping a 5m high embankment nearby on your right. In good visibility the large Tatham Wife shakehole can be seen in the distance for the duration of this walk, at the start of a shallow grassy valley, only a short distance before the steep ascent towards the Ingleborough summit.

Rigging: The rigging topo is available on the CNCC website.

Navigation:

A small stream rises inside the shakehole and then flows down the entrance which is a 3m drop down a triangular slot. Check carefully for any loose blocks prior to descending. Climbing down the entrance may involve getting slightly wet (any wetter and the cave may be impassable).

Below the entrance climb, the passage descends with the water a short distance into Ogden's Chamber, a large impressive river chamber, where more water enters on the right. Follow the water downstream for a few minutes to reach a 3m climb down. This can be descended without rope by confident climbers, but can also be rigged (single anchor in place, deviation required; 10m rope shown on topo).

Continue downstream in fine passage via a few cascades to the first pitch. A descending traverse reaches the Y-hang, which is followed by an optional deviation from a flake a short distance down to pull away from the falling water. This lands in a very draughty chamber with lots of spray in all but the driest conditions. Remaining on the same rope, continue a few metres down the slope to the second pitch. The rope can be belayed from a large rock bollard in an alcove on the right (very long sling needed or two joined), and then to a traverse anchor followed by the Y-hang. There is a deviation 3-4m down, which is essential to get away from the water, and an optional second deviation (via a non-CNCC approved stainless steel hanger) a further 3-4m down which may be useful in wetter conditions.

The passage leading away from the bottom of the pitch develops into a fault rift. This involves several minutes of easy crawling in the stream or slightly awkward sideways movement, but nothing too strenuous. It enlarges on approach to the third pitch.

The third pitch starts with a Y-hang from two anchors (no traverse needed). A 2m descent reaches a deviation to avoid rope-rub and water. This pitch lands on a large shelf and the way onwards is with the water down a spectacular steep 'ramp' which is best treated as a continuation of the pitch. Belay the rope with a sling via a convenient overhead chockstone. This allows a memorable wet descent down a hading (sloping) rift, which is part of a significant fault, giving Tatham Wife its unique geological character.

At the bottom of The Ramp, continue onwards in the narrow rift to reach a small chamber. The ongoing passage is too narrow, necessitating a short (2m long) duck, usually involving a serious wetting. The duck can be by-passed by a very awkward 3m climb up immediately above, followed by an acrobatic manoeuvre to insert yourself sideways into a tube. A short wriggle along the tube leads to an easy climb back down beyond the duck. This bypass is not an easier option; it is quite a tricky and exposed climb/manoeuvre. There is a single spit and hanger installed (non-CNCC approved) of unknown age which should not be trusted as sufficient protection.

Beyond the duck, traverse above the stream for a short distance to reach a 2m climb back down to the water. The passage then enlarges dramatically into an impressive tall rift. A couple of inlets are then passed, one on the right and then one on the left (these can be explored for about 200m and 50m respectively if desired but are not part of the main route).

Following the water downstream, the fourth pitch is reached via a short traverse to a Y-hang in a rift. A deviation from a chockstone only 1m down pulls the rope clear of the water. From the bottom of this pitch the water flows through a large chamber (the turnaround point for most cavers) and into a gradually diminishing sized passage. A lengthy series of ducks leads onto the final (seldom visited) sump.