

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.

ROWTEN POT

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Rowten Pot is an extremely active pothole and carries a tremendous volume of water. Despite this though, it can be carefully descended by very experienced cavers via the Eyehole and Flyover routes (utilising the full traverse on the Main Shaft) in moderately wet conditions. All other routes require much more settled weather.

Parking:

Park on the Kingsdale Road in the layby about 500m north of the track to Braida Garth Farm (just beyond a gate on the left leading into some sheep pens).

Location: Grid Reference: SD 69810 78000

Go through the gate by the sheep pens and up the steep hill (keeping about 30m from the left wall, up the side of a dry valley). At the top of the hill, a gate opens onto the Turbarry Road footpath. Through the gate on your left is the huge fissure of Rowten Pot next to the track.

Rigging:

The rigging topo from 'Northern Caving' is available on the CNCC website (courtesy of CNCC Technical Group).

Navigation:

Two routes are possible from the surface to the bottom of the Main Shaft:

Big Gully route: This descends the entrance shaft alongside the water entering from Rowten Cave (on the side nearest to the gate). A steep scramble down into the pothole above the Rowten Cave stream should be protected by a traverse rope. A staggered and very slippery descent on rope via multiple rebelay leads down to a slippery shelf where a high traverse over the stream commences. The traverse follows the right hand wall and ends at a Y-hang, with a deviation from the opposite wall. The pitch drops to the stream passage.

Downstream leads to the Main Shaft, with a traverse out over the pitch commencing shortly before on the right hand wall. This leads to a multi-rebelayed descent of the main shaft requiring some fun aerial acrobatics. Careful study of the rigging topo is essential!

Eyehole route: At the far end of the main hole (furthest away from the gate) is a secondary, smaller hole which is the classic Eyehole entrance to Rowten Pot. For newcomers to Rowten Pot this route is recommended. This commences as an abseil directly over the edge of the hole leading immediately to two re-belays and a 20m abseil onto a large and impressive balcony.

At this balcony, belay the rope for the start of a traverse across the rock bridge to the next pitch, commencing with anchors on the left wall. This pitch drops over the edge of the main shaft; however, a complete descent from here is not possible due to the proximity to the waterfall. Instead, you will find a re-belay just below the edge, and then, just below this, an entertaining swing into a crack in the roof. This is a very exposed place indeed and those with any concern about heights will find this more than a little exciting.

Traverse along this crack, high up above the main shaft. After a 5m (at the end of the traverse) a Y-hang for the Main Shaft is found. These anchors allow a stunning and unbroken descent. This is definitely a moment to enjoy! In low water you can descend all the way to the bottom of the Main Shaft before climbing up 3m out of the river onto a balcony. However, in high water you should not descend all the way into the river at the bottom (this can be very hazardous) and instead swing over onto the 3m high balcony where the rope can be belayed.

Routes onwards from bottom of the Main Shaft:

Direct Route (dry conditions only): Climbing down from the balcony and crossing the river (extreme care to avoid the holes down which the water is falling) leads to the Direct Route, which follows a gradually descending passage via a couple of climbs. This leads to two wet pitches (each with a prior traverse) landing at the bottom of the cave.

Flyover Route: In the corner of the balcony, the Flyover Route pitch commences. This hangs near the waterfall but is passable in reasonably wet weather, albeit very draughty. About 10-15m down this pitch is a Y-hang rebelay spanning a perpendicular rift. The next rebelay is reached by a 3m descent and then a pendulum along the perpendicular rift (away from the waterfall) to a rebelay on the left wall. Only 3m below this rebelay swing onto a shelf, which is the start of an easy traverse. This leads to the final pitch which requires a single krab deviation part way down.

Both the Direct Route and Flyover route land in the same passage, which can be followed, via the waterfall entering, down to the sumps.

The Rowten Sumps lead through to Kingsdale Master Cave in Valley Entrance via three short, free-divable sumps with in-situ lines. This allows a through-trip to be completed without a return back up Rowten Pot. These free dives are very serious indeed and should only be attempted in low water, by very experienced wetsuit-wearing cavers who have experience of free diving and who have carefully studied the description in Mike Cooper's book 'Not for the Faint Hearted'. The lines through the sumps are not CNCC-maintained or installed.

