

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.

MARBLE STEPS POT

December 2020

An extremely active pothole: Marble Steps can accommodate light showers or general dampness, but heavy rain will cause the stream flowing into the entrance to rise very quickly, several routes to become hazardous and, with persistent rain, all passages below the Main Chamber to fill. Check the forecast carefully!

Marble Steps is a complex but superb pothole with three routes of entry and two routes descending the lower half of the cave. There is potential for multi-group trips including a splendid figure-8 exchange, with a fine variety of passages and pitches.

Parking: A mile or so west of Ingleton on the A65, turn right at the signs for Masongill. Pass through Masongill village and follow the winding narrow road to the junction at the end of the public road by the old waterworks building. Park here without blocking access along any of the lanes.

Location: Grid reference SD 68008 77062

Follow the track heading uphill from the parking area. After 400m, just before the gate, the left wall is crossed at a stile. Follow the footpath across the fell. After about 250m, bear right up the fell towards the copse of trees surrounding the entrance.

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

Navigation: There are three routes down the upper half of Marble Steps:

Wet Route: From the top of the main gully, follow around the left side of the pothole to where the stream enters (which may be totally dry at times). Here you will find the obvious wet route entrance. Roof-level anchors provide a descent to a ledge. The second pitch then drops via a flake deviation to join the Sidewinder Route. This route takes the stream in low water conditions, but will be quickly overwhelmed after heavy rain.

Sidewinder Route: Traverse down the gully using anchors in the right wall for a safety line. At the bottom, where the Gully Route abseil commences, take an exposed rope traverse around the left edge of the hole and up onto a shelf opposite leading into a short fossil passage. Remain on the rope along here as there are various holes in the floor (if anyone is on Gully Route below, take extreme care not to knock loose rocks down). After a short distance, only just out of daylight, take a 5m abseil/climb down into a lower passage where the Wet Route joins.

Continue downstream to the next pitch where anchors enable a high traverse. A Y-hang through the vadose trench in the floor commences the descent with a single anchor rebelay 4m down to reposition the rope (and to avoid any water if the pothole is carrying a stream). A further 15m down, pendulum across onto a large buttress of rock. The rope can be rebelayed on the opposite side of this buttress and then a Y-hang initiates the next drop down a steep incline with two deviations from the opposite wall. In dry conditions you can continue directly to the Lower Main Chamber without any further rebelay, however if a waterfall is present, a rebelay may be installed on a shelf after the second deviation to reposition the final section of the descent away from the water.

Gully Route: Traverse down the gully using anchors in the right wall for a safety line. At the bottom, the Gully Route commences from a Y-hang at the top of the shaft. This multi-rebelayed route descends to the Upper Main Chamber. Although this route is often dry, deviations may be installed to pull further away from any waterfall. At the far side of the Upper Main Chamber, anchors can be found to commence the descent down a slope to a shelf where an abseil to the Lower Main Chamber can be made. Alternatively, this pitch can be bypassed by taking the North-West Rift from the upper Main Chamber. This leads steeply downwards, and doubles back, emerging obscurely through boulders in the Lower Main Chamber.

Lower Main Chamber onwards (particularly flood-prone beyond this point):

The route onwards from the Lower Main Chamber is a traverse along a large passage leading after 20m to an exposed drop into a chamber. About 5m back from this drop is an easy climb down between boulders into a trench which emerges into this chamber, still with an exposed climb down. It is usual to belay a rope here for an exposed traverse along the sloping left wall, followed by a short descent to the floor.

Continuing onwards is the 240' rift, ending, not surprisingly, 240 feet (75m) later at a sharp left bend and inlet. Just beyond here, stay high and traverse over a pit to reach the top of Stink Pot. The top of this pitch is somewhat constricted by calcite, but it soon opens out, landing in a small chamber where the two routes to the Lower Streamway diverge:

The Intestines: This route is awkward and not recommended for larger or less experienced cavers. Continue on rope down the fissure immediately beneath below Stink Pot to land in a passage which gets progressively smaller. This becomes flat-out crawling to the head of the next pitch. Rigging this pitch is technical and very challenging. The pitch soon opens out however, and the passage at the bottom leads quickly to the next pitch. The final pitch is reached after a section of narrow meandering passage and drops to the Lower Streamway.

The Ninety: Traverse over the fissure at the bottom of Stink Pot into a passage which quickly reaches the head of 'The Ninety' pitch. This is a fine 28m descent which may be quite drippy at times. Exiting this pitch on the upward journey may benefit from a long sling attached to the traverse line as a foothold. At the bottom, the next pitch is very quickly reached, and just around the corner at the bottom of that pitch is the final pitch down a potentially wet chimney leading down to the Lower Streamway. This final pitch may be bypassed by continuing in the passage to a descending muddy tunnel also leading down to the Lower Streamway.

Lower Streamway: The lower streamway is a disappointment after such a magnificent pothole. A narrow crawl, which easily sumps, connects the bottom of The Ninety and The Intestines, enabling an exchange between the two routes. The passage sumps both upstream and downstream.

