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!"

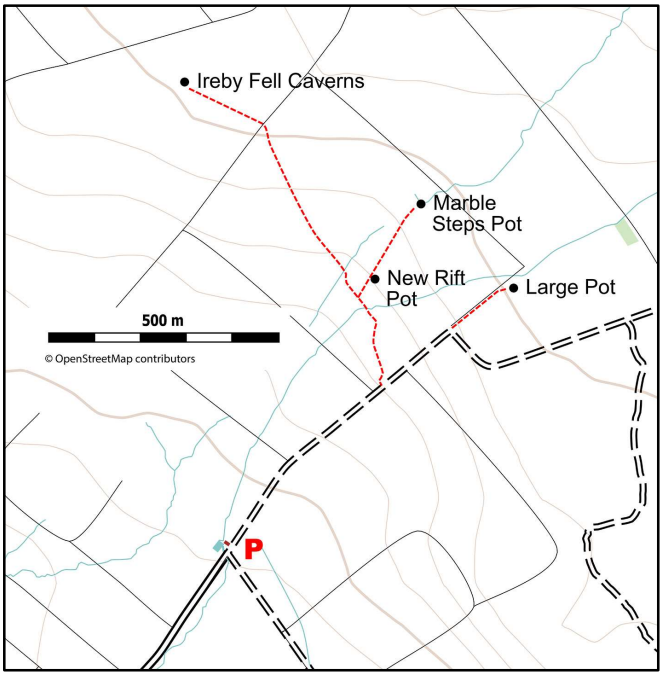
Although warnings are provided where there are some specific known hazards, the absence of a warning does not indicate that there are no hazards. Caves can (and do) change over time. Furthermore, the CNCC does not perform routine inspections or surveys of caves to look for specific hazards (e.g. loose 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.

IREBY FELL CAVERNS

January 2020

Although Ireby Fell Caverns can be cautiously explored in slightly damp conditions, it must be emphasised that a heavy shower particularly onto already wet ground can cause a very rapid rise in water levels, with all the SRT routes and the lower streamway quickly becoming impassable. Thus, do not descend Ireby Fell if water levels could rise during your trip.



Ireby Fell Caverns is a true northern classic. A trip to the much-loved Duke Street combines some splendid pitches with excellent stream passages, and a good sense of journey. Those seeking longer adventures can enjoy a round trip via Cripple Creek (see overleaf) or an exchange with New Rift, Low Douk or Large Pot (further research is required if considering an exchange).

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 67372 77340

A compass or GPS is useful in the event of exiting in the dark/fog.

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 vague footpath across the fell to a stile over the far wall. Beyond this stile, walk directly away from the wall for 200m until the huge, deep sinkhole of Ireby Fell is located.

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

Navigation:

Climb down the pipe in the bottom of the shakehole and descend steep boulders and shoring to locate anchors for a traverse down to Ding Pitch. Note that a few cascades of water entering this passage are normal, however if the water is thundering down it may be time to turn around!

Ding/Dong/Bell (traditional) route: Traverse down the final step and then a few metres out over the head of Ding Pitch, where a Y-hang can be rigged for a descent into the chamber below. Then, remaining on-rope, traverse along the wall to a further Y-hang at the top of Dong Pitch. At the bottom of Dong, follow the water down a chute to quickly reach the top of Bell Pitch. This is a little awkward and requires a narrow traverse over the pitch with limited footholds to a right corner. Here, an uneven Y-hang can be rigged from anchors on the left wall, one just before the corner and one lower down just after the corner. A deviation 4m down helps to pull the rope clear of the wall and falling water.

Shadow Route: Continue the traverse to the end beyond the top of Ding Pitch. Here, an exposed Y-hang commences Shadow Route. The initial descent is immediately above Dong Pitch, but 5m down it is necessary to swing around a corner to locate a rebelay. Descend further, traversing along a narrow rift, to a rebelay. A further short descent and pendulum reaches the Y-hang for the final section of the pitch which is a splendid shaft, initially sloping but with a deviation at the point the shaft becomes vertical. This lands only metres from the bottom of Bell Pitch.

Bubbles route: Part way down the boulder slope in the entrance a third SRT route is available connecting to the stream passage downstream of Pussy Pitch. This is not fitted with resin anchors and anyone wishing to explore this route should consult Descent 191 p14. **Note that this route is sometimes referred to as a dry route in older literature, but this is not always the case following some more recent hydrological changes.**

Upper and Lower Streamway to Duke Street:

A short distance downstream from the bottom of Bell/Shadow is Pussy Pitch. Owing to some hydrological changes in 2019, this may be much wetter than it used to be, and a short traverse above the water may be required before descending.

Below Pussy Pitch, an excavated crawl leads into the upper streamway which steadily gains height and should be followed for several minutes, soon passing the inlet from Bubbles Route on the right (ignore). Along the way, you are treated to some excellent caving including meandering streamway and a wet crawl/duck under a calcite obstruction (it is usually possible to keep upper body dry). This passage ends at Well Pitch.

Well Pitch involves two short and simple descents separated by a short traverse. Only a short distance further downstream, Rope Pitch is reached, which is a 4m descent rigged from a natural belay on the corner above the drop. This might be quite a wet descent in higher water conditions.

Downstream from Rope Pitch, the lower streamway emerges through boulders into an aven with an upward slope of blocks at the far end on the right. Keep left at the foot of this slope into a short and typically dry crawl. The stream is rejoined and the following 300m of caving is easy walking along a fine meandering stream. The water is then lost through the floor as you enter a large passage called Duke Street. Upon joining Duke Street, you are now directly underneath the cave entrance having completed a full circle! Duke Street is an excellent passage and can be followed for a few minutes (250m) heading underneath Leck Fell, until the terminal sump is reached. For many cavers, this is the turnaround point.

Route to Duke Street II: A short distance before the sump is a roof-level tunnel. Accessing this requires the use of an unmaintained in-situ rope. Cavers are reminded of the risks of using in-situ ropes and must make their own informed decision on whether to ascend. At the top, a long crawl has been dug out to bypass the sump (takes 10-15 minutes). This crawl reaches a balcony with a short pitch down (8m rope needed), landing in waist-deep water which can be followed upstream (left) to emerge into Duke Street II, with plenty more splendid large passages to explore.

Ireby Fell Cripple Creek Round Trip:

The Cripple Creek Round Trip in Ireby Fell Caverns is a varied and challenging excursion, with an excellent sense of journey. The trip begins just off the usual Ireby Fell route via the Glory Holes, with two fairly long and strenuous crawls, before joining the varied obstacle course that forms the main Cripple Creek passage. A section of smaller squeezes and climbs leads to Jupiter Cavern, where a descent via Escalator Rift leads to the familiar trunk route of Duke Street II and out of the standard Ireby Fell route covered above.

It is important to recognise that progress on this route is dependent on several short pitches, both up and down, most of which are likely to have in-situ ropes installed by the original explorers. These are not CNCC-endorsed and as always, cavers are reminded of the risks associated to the use of in-situ equipment which is typically of unknown age and integrity. The CNCC advises that cavers using this description should identify their own means to safely negotiate all climbs and pitches, which may include prior recce and pre-rigging trips to make this possible. Overall, this is a challenging route, and it is essential that additional research is performed by all cavers undertaking this trip (including a survey).

Navigation:

The Cripple Creek route begins just downstream from Pussy Pitch in the Glory Holes. However, before commencing it is essential to continue down the classic route to rig Well and Rope Pitches to enable completion of the round trip later.

A few minutes downstream from Pussy pitch, the streamway turns sharply to the left, and an inlet on the right with a low wall is the entry point into the system from Bubbles Route. At this junction, an easy climb straight ahead leads up to a traverse above the streamway, and soon gains the Glory Holes, an abandoned passage running perpendicular to the main streamway.

To the right, a step up leads into approximately 30 minutes of crawling to Cripple Creek. The crawl begins at hands-and-knees height before degenerating into a mixture of flat-out and slightly more forgiving passage. At around the halfway point, a series of larger cavities are encountered, before a small inlet is met coming from straight ahead. After following this inlet for a few minutes, the impenetrable source of the inlet is reached, and a right turn leads into Turtle Crawl. This final section of crawling is the most arduous, as it is very low and very dry, and many cavers may find themselves getting a little warm. Toward the end of the crawl there is an enlarged rift chamber, containing the eponymous turtles and a few tortoise intruders. From the end of the chamber, a few more minutes of sandy-floored crawling finally reaches Cripple Creek.

Cripple Creek itself carries a small stream, and this is met running right to left. The way on is left on exiting from Turtle Crawl (downstream). The first half of Cripple Creek continues downstream as multi-level, often narrow stream canyon with various boulder obstacles. Generally, staying high in the rift is the easiest way to proceed, though there are often other choices for the thinner or especially masochistic cavers. Descending to the bottom of the rift should be avoided if possible, as regaining the high levels can be especially strenuous.

The following sections contains several short pitches and climbs which probably have abandoned ropes on them. As ever, none of these ropes are CNCC endorsed or maintained, so cavers must make their own arrangements for safely negotiating these various obstacles.

The nature of the passage abruptly changes at an obvious climb down over boulders to a wider section. Here, a climb/pitch leads up and into another chamber. At the far end, the smaller passage to the left is the way on, ignoring the climb on the right. This passage leads to a small hole in the floor, which opens into a climb down. A handline is necessary here, as the footholds are underneath the lip of the climb and hard to see from above. The climb lands in a lofty passage, and just ahead another pitch up is encountered, which is exposed at the top. A crawl with a puddle of water leads away from the pitch head, which is best tackled feet first, as the crawl abruptly ends at a 1.5m drop over a calcited edge. Just below the drop, a slot in the floor leads to an exposed climb down, where a rope is required.

The foot of this climb is well decorated, and an easier passage with an uneven boulder floor continues towards Jupiter Cavern. After a short distance, at a large fallen block just after a scramble over a boulder, a small hole to the left at floor level regains the streamway in a winding and gravel-floored passage. The passage bends to the right, and soon after begins to decrease in size. Removing SRT kits at this point will make the next section somewhat easier for larger cavers. After a very short low section at stream level, the water is followed down a drop into a pool, with a tight squeeze in the water the only way on. This is known to become impassable in wet conditions and can be made more pleasant for following cavers by dredging from the other side, depending on the leader's temperament.

Beyond the squeeze another small drop leads to a calcite tube with the water. Beyond the tube the stream is lost, and the way on is short series of climbs, which require doubling back for the first and again for the second, finally climbing through a small hole at head height. The passage then develops into a large rift with a deep hole in the floor. A slippery traverse on the left wall (rope essential) allows the hole to be passed, gaining a low passage with a pool of water, traversed on calcite ledges. This leads to a climb down into Jupiter Cavern, where a handline is essential.

Jupiter Cavern is an impressive, high-roofed chamber with a boulder floor. There are various routes leading off, but the way to Escalator Rift involves following the left wall from the climb down to a straightforward climb up calcited blocks, which is easily identifiable by the low arch it passes over. At the top of the climb, a low crawl with a smooth floor leads to a drop down into a smaller chamber. On the left is a pitch up, but the route leads down to the right to the top of the pitches in Escalator Rift (8m, 11m and 12m). As ever, there is likely to be in-situ ropes here which should not be trusted; Bring your own equipment to negotiate these pitches.

The final pitch lands in a streamway, and following the water downstream leads to the magnificent trunk passage of Duke Street II. The route turns right here to keep following the water downstream. Duke Street II ends the sump through to Duke Street I, but a short distance before the sump a passage leads off to the left (downstream) over a pile of blocks. This passage begins with knee-deep water but soon becomes waist deep. After 60m, a climb up on the right gains Whirlpool Crawl (in-situ rope may help to identify this).

Whirlpool Crawl is a sandy-floored crawl taking around 10-15 minutes, which progressively improves from being flat-out to hands-and-knees crawling. The passage ends with a short pitch down into Duke Street I. From here the standard route out of Ireby Fell can be followed upstream via Rope and Well pitches (which you rigged earlier), providing an excellent antidote to the confines of Cripple Creek, and a splendid end to the trip.