

NEWSLETTER

Issue 13 May 2023

Editorial

Welcome to the 13th edition of our newsletter, reporting all of our work since issue 12 back in October 2022. As you will read inside, it has been a rather eventful winter and spring, with several cave entrance repairs, two major access developments including at High Birkwith and Stump Cross, conservation work including more problematic trees plus a packed training schedule. We are also pleased to welcome Jill Bolton, our new Secretary. This issue is a record 12 pages of content, thanks to the efforts of our hard-working volunteers. As always, CNCC relies on volunteers to make stuff happen, so if you are interested in getting involved, see details on our back page.

Matt Ewles (Editor)

Your CNCC

www.cncc.org.uk

[/CouncilOfNorthernCavingClubs](https://www.facebook.com/CouncilOfNorthernCavingClubs)

twitter.com/cncc_uk

[instagram.com/cncc_uk](https://www.instagram.com/cncc_uk)

Chair: Andrew Hinde
chair@cncc.org.uk

Secretary: Jill Bolton
secretary@cncc.org.uk

Treasurer: Pete Bann
treasurer@cncc.org.uk

Conservation: Kay Easton
conservation@cncc.org.uk

Access: Adele Ward
access@cncc.org.uk

Training: Ian Patrick
training@cncc.org.uk

Webmaster: Gary Douthwaite
webmaster@cncc.org.uk

Anchor Coordinator: Alan Speight
anchors@cncc.org.uk

PR and Communications: Matt Ewles
pr@cncc.org.uk

Northern Explorers' Forum 2023



Following the success of the first event in 2019, the second Northern Explorers' Forum was held on Sunday 26th March at Clapham Village Hall. This was a sellout, with people coming to hear talks on exploration across our region.

John Cordingley and Rupert Skorupka opened with talks on Austwick Beck Head, and projects around Leck Fell and Wharfedale.

We heard about the opening of Curtain Pot on Fountains Fell, work in Barbondale and Dentdale and some major extensions to Jenga Pot in the North York Moors.

The Northern Dales took pride of place with the discovery of Draughting Hole in Gretadale, major extensions to Fairy Holes in Weardale, and insight into the potential as-yet undiscovered systems around the Swale catchment.

We were updated on the ongoing work around Stump Cross and Malham, and the recent efforts of the Leck Fell Chums who continue to convincingly demonstrate that you don't need to leave the Three Peaks and Three Counties region to make some excellent discoveries.

This was a first-class event, including an ample buffet lunch. Thank you to Sam Allshorn as the primary organiser, and to Gary Douthwaite and Adrian Turner as the 'tech team' plus Hidden Earth for loan of their projector.

Hopefully, if we all discover lots more cave, there will be another event in a few years. In the meantime, the popularity of the event has also inspired a new Derbyshire Explorers' Forum to be held on 30th September, which we are sure will be just as successful.

Welcoming our new Secretary - Jill Bolton



Jill Bolton, our new Secretary, is a relative newcomer to caving, however, she has plenty of experience in various committee roles, both in canoeing and in local politics. This includes a local access forum and an Environment Agency advisory committee for recreation.

Jill did a bit of caving in 2006, after a friend invited her to Great Douk, and she was too embarrassed to admit to being scared. Since resuming last year, Jill has taken part in several CNCC workshops, plus SRT training with the Yorkshire Dales Guides. She has recently joined Craven Pothole Club, as well as Derbyshire Caving Club, which is nearer home.

Jill hopes that being a beginner has given her an insight that more experienced cavers might have long forgotten.

Jill has told us that the CNCC has proven to be a valuable resource for her, with an informative website, and an excellent programme of training workshops. She is therefore pleased to support us, and northern caving in general, by taking on the role of Secretary.

AGM 2023



On 11th March we held our Annual General Meeting at Clapham Village Hall. This was attended by 35 people, including representatives for 18 of our member clubs, to discuss several aspects of our work. By CNCC AGM standards this is a fairly healthy turnout.

In particular, our Treasurer's report initiated a discussion about the £10K of funds CNCC have and what more we could be doing to spend this rather than it depreciating in bank accounts. We agreed that we should identify ways this money could do some good for northern caving, beyond the usual and BCA-reclaimable areas of access, training, anchors, and conservation.

One option we decided to explore was grants to facilitate new exploration. The Committee for 2023 have been tasked with enacting this, and we hope to bring you more news later this year.

We heard updates from several people who have been involved in the access issues at High Birkwith. These reports helped put in perspective the scale of the challenges we face here and how quickly access that we have taken for granted for years can be withdrawn, but also the influence of coordinated caver campaigning.

We also had a lengthy discussion about the access situation at Stump Cross following the recent opportunity to renew the access agreement. This is reported elsewhere in this newsletter.

We move forwards with two unfilled Committee vacancies, but we are very pleased to welcome back 13 of our Committee clubs:

- Bradford Pothole Club
- Craven Pothole Club
- Earby Pothole Club
- Grampian Speleological Group
- Kendal Caving Club
- Northern Boggarts
- Northern Pennine Club
- Red Rose Cave and Pothole Club
- University of Leeds Speleological Association
- White Rose Pothole Club
- York Caving Club
- York University Cave and Pothole Club
- Yorkshire Subterranean Society

Finally, we welcomed our new Secretary, Jill Bolton, replacing Josh Young who has stood down after serving a three-year term. During this time, Josh has delivered first class administration to CNCC, for which we are extremely appreciative. Josh will remain on the scene, helping with minutes and as a club representative, so he will continue to bring a voice of experience.

Leaving ropes in a cave?



In response to a recent proliferation in ropes being abandoned or left rigged for long periods in several of our well-used potholes, CNCC has published the following guidance (which can be found on the fixed aids section of our website). This revolves around courtesy, safety and conservation, and we hope it will be thought-provoking for anyone who is thinking about leaving a rope underground for longer than the duration of their single visit:

1. Do you really need to leave the rope in the cave?
2. Does leaving of a rope for your own convenience really justify the inconvenience and reduced enjoyment it could cause others who might visit the cave?
3. Is the site appropriate for leaving a rope? Sites on the surface, near waterfalls, rub-points or in muddy/gritty locations can result in very rapid deterioration of ropes.
4. If you must leave a rope, ensure you remove it promptly when it is no longer needed.
5. If you leave a rope somewhere that it may inconvenience other visitors, we suggest that it is courteous to include a small, robustly attached waterproof label to clarify the purpose of the rope being left in the cave and the expected duration.
6. The CNCC supports any cavers who choose to remove a rope that is confirmed to be dangerous or abandoned and not in use by anyone presently underground.
7. Anyone leaving a rope in a cave should do so expecting that others may use that rope or that it could be removed at any time by well-meaning individuals.

Road to Bull Pot Farm

In recent months, we have heard of a number of incidents and near misses on the small road (Fell Road) leading to Bull Pot Farm. These have involved vehicles travelling at speeds unsuitable to the road, posing hazards to horse riders, pedestrians and dog walkers, not to mention oncoming cars on the many blind corners!

It is certainly not for the CNCC to be telling qualified drivers how to drive on a public road, and nor do we have any evidence that these near misses have involved cars of cavers.

Regardless of blame, these incidents could sour relations with the local community. Hence, we have been asked by Red Rose Cave and Pothole Club (who no doubt suffer the brunt of the complaints) to circulate this polite request.

Please set an example by driving sensibly along the road to Bull Pot Farm, and showing to others what a responsible bunch cavers are. We know the road seems to go on forever, but please do your bit to help Red Rose sustain good neighbourly relations.

Description and topo updates

We are pleased to announce two new route description on our website since the last newsletter:

The Mistral (Ease Gill)

This new description covers the route to Gour Hall, including three optional excursions to extend the trip, including Pippikin streamway, Hall of the Mountain King and Canyon Streamway. A great trip for novices, or a good starting point for anyone wanting to start learning this side of Ease Gill Caverns.

Remember, last year we added a description for the neighbouring Link Pot, covering the route to The Mistral, for anyone planning a through-trip, as well as the splendid route to Serenity.

Bull Pot of the Witches

For many years, Bull Pot of the Witches has been an omission from our catalogue. This new description covers the route to Long Gallery which follows the CNCC-anchored route, plus a few optional excursions. Bull Pot of the Witches is a very complex cave, however, for those wanting a simple and novice-friendly trip, our route description is a good starting point.

Ghar Parau Foundation

If caving was an Olympic sport we would win gold every time! This is part thanks to the Ghar Parau Foundation, a charity providing support to British-organised overseas caving expeditions.

One initiative to raise money is the sale of caving greeting cards, each with a different beautiful cave photo. We have been asked to remind you that they can be purchased on the Ghar Parau website shop, and cost only £8 for a set of 12 cards with envelopes. What better way to personalise your greetings message, while raising some money to support our caving expeditions?



ACCESS

Changes to Stump Cross area access



Shackle Shaft, Stump Cross, by Ian Patrick

For many years, CNCC have held an agreement with the owners of Stump Cross Caverns enabling caver access to Mongo Gill Hole, Great Expectations, Hell Hole and other nearby caves. For more than three decades, this agreement has been facilitated on behalf of CNCC by Ric Halliwell, whose long service to CNCC and the wider northern caving community remains an inspiration.

Several years ago, Ric reported that demand for trips to several permit-facilitated sites outside of the Three Peaks/Three Counties area was reducing, with the Stump Cross area receiving as little as one or two visiting groups each year. Perhaps cavers are losing interest in sites with more complex access requirements?

For many decades, the owners at Stump Cross have been very caver-friendly, thanks in great part to the efforts of Ric and the Craven Pothole Club, who have helped to foster these great relations.

For years however, we had known that the Stump Cross access agreement was outdated. The wording was reflective of its original era, expecting CNCC to discipline clubs breaching the agreement and with no provision for access to individuals. Furthermore, it goes against our current procedures to support unreasonable restrictions particularly to caves on CRow access land.

The dwindling interest of cavers in the Stump Cross area meant that for years we have turned a blind eye to the outdated nature of this agreement. This has allowed us to focus our resource on Leck Fell, Casterton Fell, Ingleborough, Penyghent, and more recently Birks Fell where similarly outdated agreements have been completely removed over the last nine years. However, the Stump Cross situation had always remained in the back of our mind.

When the opportunity arose in January to renew the status-quo annual Stump Cross access agreement, we decided that was the right time to discuss this with our membership. At our recent AGM our members voted in favour of stepping back from the agreement because it went so far against modern access principles that we have stood by elsewhere.

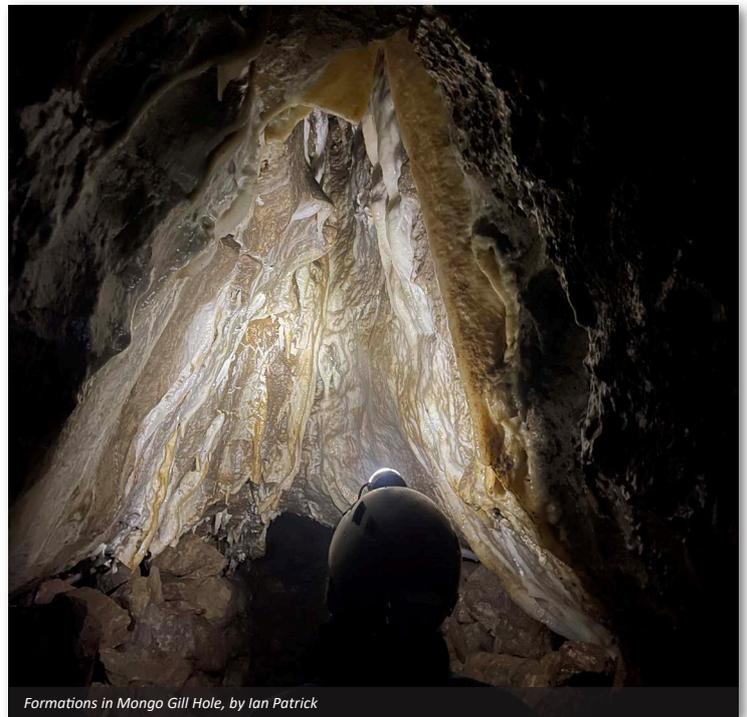
We would like to clarify that this is not because CNCC or the owners of Stump Cross had insisted on the outdated wording of the agreement. This wording was perfectly normal when it was written, in a pre-CRoW era, when countryside access and outdoor recreation were not supported in the way they are today. The issue is simply that the agreement has got older, and nobody has had the time or willpower to address this until recently.

With the old agreement having expired, our Chairman, Access Officer, with members of the Craven Pothole Club, met the owners at Stump Cross Caverns in early May. During a productive meeting, the owners expressed their concerns, but were very amenable to allowing much greater access, specifically to Mongo Gill, preferring to administer this themselves using their own system.

Effective immediately, access to Mongo Gill is facilitated by Stump Cross Caverns. They have set up an online booking form for groups wishing to visit, with a link to this on the Mongo Gill page of the CNCC website. Access is available all year round for insured groups of no more than eight people.

It is a requirement that visitors are covered by the BCA's public liability insurance scheme to ensure Stump Cross Caverns are indemnified against any claims arising from caver visits to their land. At the time of writing, this only needs one person in the group to be a BCA member to fulfil these insurance requirements, however, this may change as BCA amend the scope of their cover.

Once your booking has been made, you can collect the key during Stump Cross Caverns opening hours (it can be returned via a post box if exiting after the show-cave has closed). The person making the booking will need to show a valid BCA card to collect the key.



Formations in Mongo Gill Hole, by Ian Patrick

Parking is only permitted in a layby outside the premises, and not in the show-cave car park, as this gets very busy during peak times. We assume directions will be provided upon collection of the key. Refreshments are of course available in the shop.

This represents a significant improvement on the outdated agreement, as it enables all-year round access to Mongo Gill for all BCA members. The new booking system looks to be simple to use.

We must emphasise that this is not a CNCC-facilitated agreement, so if you have any questions on this arrangement, or if you require permission to access any of the other caves or entrances in the vicinity, please contact Stump Cross Caverns directly.

Access to the caves of High Birkwith



Looking down the entrance of Calf Holes, by Mark Burkey

Back in November, we issued a statement about the ongoing access issues around the High Birkwith area, which includes caves such as Calf Holes, Browgill Cave, Dismal Hill Cave, Old Ing Cave and Birkwith Cave, amongst others.

These are sites of interest to novices and experienced cavers alike and have been enjoyed by hundreds of people each year thanks to the generosity of the previous landowner. Sadly, following the sale of High Birkwith Farm in 2018, and despite our best efforts to build good relations, the new owner (Paul Hallam) is completely refusing all access to the caves on his land. Furthermore, efforts seem to be ongoing by the owner to limit other forms of access around High Birkwith too, even via established public rights of way.

These caves are on moorland or pasture which is already transected by two major public rights of way (Ribble Way and Pennine Way). Furthermore, the owner will receive sizable countryside stewardship payments, funded from the public purse. Therefore, we are not willing to accept that denial of some kind of reasonable public access to these sites is justified.

We would like to clarify the exact access situation here on a cave-by cave basis. The following sites can be accessed with no prior permission:

- Calf Holes *
- Red Moss Pot *
- Canal Cavern (access land)
- Coppice Cave (access land)
- Fairbottom Caves (access land)
- Poverty Gill Cave (access land)
- Foxholes (access land)

** Not on access land however the landowner (Scales Farm) has been unobjectionable to access without calling at the farm.*

The problematic situations remain those caves on non-access land, and which are owned by High Birkwith Farm:

- Birkwith Cave
- Old Ing Cave
- Dismal Hill Cave
- Browgill Cave

Birkwith, Old Ing and Dismal Hill are very close to the Ribble Way, however access to these caves incurs a minor infringement from the public right of way. We are aware that cavers have been actively turned around from these sites and the stile used to reach Birkwith Cave has been removed, so we know the landowner is proactively policing his refusal of access.

The landowner is aware that he cannot refuse access to Calf Holes. However, if exiting at Browgill Cave (where access is not granted), a few hundred metres walk down the stream will reach the public footpath at God's Bridge. In the unlikely event you are challenged doing this, be courteous and return to the nearest public right of way (which is where you would be going anyway). If you are challenged when on a public right of way, we advise courtesy but do not offer any information that could antagonise the situation or get involved in unnecessary discussions.

The access details and cave descriptions on the CNCC website for each of these caves has been updated. Please check before any trip in case of any changes.

With respect to parking, CNCC has an informal arrangement with Low Birkwith Farm for a small number of vehicles to be parked for a modest fee. Low Birkwith Farm can be reached via the track on the left just before High Birkwith land.

Park in front of the stone barn wall next to the honesty box. The fee is £5 for cars, £15 for minibuses. Put the cash into an envelope, write your registration number on the front and post this into the honesty box. There is no need to call at the farm, but if anyone is around, do say hello (they are very friendly).

Parking at Low Birkwith means it is only 1 km /15 min to most of the High Birkwith area caves via a footpath that runs initially along the side of Coppy Gill (avoiding the need to walk back along the farm track to the road). This is instead of the 3 km approach from the free parking on Alum Pot green lane at Selside.

The CNCC supports any cavers accessing any of these caves, providing you do so according to the countryside code and with respect for anyone you meet.

At the start of Winter, we urged cavers to write to the Yorkshire Dales National Park to express concern about the loss of consented access to these sites. You responded on mass, generating the most communication the National Parks have received about a single issue for some time. This has been noticed at the highest level and has resulted in the National Parks offering to help facilitate discussions with the landowner. Sadly, as the sites in question are private land, there is nothing they can do to force any access, but we are hopeful that continued pressure will eventually yield results.

CAVE MAINTAINANCE

Wretched Rabbit



The temporary sealing of the Wretched Rabbit entrance pending work commencing, by Sam Lieberman

Two years on from the original issue being reported, work to regain safe access to the Wretched Rabbit entrance is now underway.

Work commenced on 22nd April, following an extensive period of planning and arranging permission, including for the delivery of equipment to the site by vehicle. We are grateful to Alan Middleton at Leck Fell House for his help with this.

Currently, the unstable cliff face above the entrance has been shored up with scaffolding and work is underway to dig a trench for a pipe, which will then be backfilled to support the cliff above. The Red Rose Cave and Pothole Club team are reporting progress on the UKCaving forum, but once work is complete, an announcement will be made via CNCC's usual media channels too.

Our thanks to the team involved and we look forward to more news as work progresses. Until then, please do not use the Wretched Rabbit entrance.

Aquamole

In December, we heard the worrying news that the scaffold bar across the entrance to Aquamole had come loose, and fallen down the entrance shaft, hitting a caver below and hurting their thigh and foot, and narrowly missing another caver further below.

This is a timely reminder that non-standard belays or shoring such as scaffold bars need additional checks to ensure their integrity before descending beneath them. This is particularly relevant when they are exposed to weathering, which in this case had caused the bar to come loose from its concrete base.

A few days later, Ian Patrick visited on behalf of CNCC and performed a temporary fix using some rope to secure the bar and the entrance grille. Sam Allshorn then went up a few days later and was able to complete the job by fixing the bar securely to the concrete and securing the lid to an anchor with a chain, to prevent it from going far should it accidentally fall down the hole.

Thank you to Ian and Sam for responding so quickly to this!



The entrance to Aquamole with re-secured bar and security chain for the lid, by Sam Allshorn

Top Sink scaffolding

In February we received a report that the scaffolding in the entrance of Top Sink in Ease Gill Caverns is badly corroded and of compromised integrity. Following a request for a volunteer to have a look, our former Access Officer, Tim Allen (who is no stranger to scaffold-support for cave entrances) and Frank Pearson went up to assess the situation and see what work might be needed.

Their report confirmed the corroded state of the scaffolding, but that it was not holding back anything of immediate concern, and the stacked walling behind appeared to be mostly self-supporting. The scaffold is nonetheless useful for ensuring the walling stays in place and as a foothold for descending cavers.

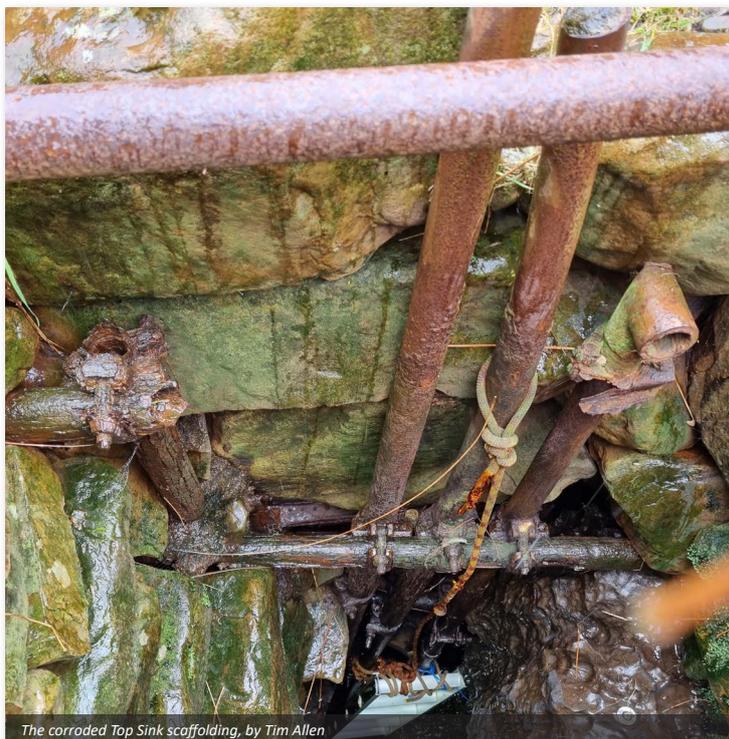
Although not particularly urgent, we would happily support any individuals or groups who would like to take this on as a pleasant summer project, with CNCC able to cover reasonable costs. Please email our Conservation Officer if you are interested.



The corroded Top Sink scaffolding, by Tim Allen



Tim Allen inspecting the Top Sink scaffolding, by Frank Pearson



The corroded Top Sink scaffolding, by Tim Allen

Coal Hole

Coal Hole on Leck Fell is a more sporting route into Short Drop Cave, for those seeking a bit more adventure.

In April this year, we received a report that the entrance had collapsed and was impassable. By good fortune, our Chairman, Andrew Hinde, was up on Leck Fell that week with a spade as he was planting trees around Death's Head Hole (see our separate article), so he went to have a quick look.

Andrew was able to clear enough spoil to make the entrance passable with care. However, there is still some of the original collapsed spoil to clear and further slumping is very likely.

This is not a well-used cave entrance, but it would be a shame to lose it. Therefore, we are pitching this at any volunteers who would like a pleasant summer project, to dig out the entrance and see if anything can be done to avoid further collapse.

If this is a project you would like to take on, please email our Conservation Officer. We would be happy to support you with advice and funding of reasonable costs.



Digging out the Coal Hole collapse, by Andrew Hinde

Lancaster Hole



Concrete mixing for the Lancaster Hole entrance, by Ian Walker

Shortly after the last newsletter was published, we received reports that the cobbles behind the bottom of the Lancaster Hole entrance pipe were coming loose and starting to slump. We issued an immediate warning telling visiting groups to be aware, as loose material was poised to fall down the pitch.

A team from the Red Rose Cave and Pothole Club quickly assessed the situation and identified that a weekend or two of work was going to be needed to stabilise the void with cement.

Initial work was planned for the weekend of 10-13th December, and the team braved horrendous freezing conditions on Casterton



Piping the concrete down to the void, by Ian Walker

Fell. They built the framework ready for pouring of some concrete, but the temperature was too cold for that.

Work resumed under some milder condition on the 5th February, and the concrete was successfully poured, leaving only a few tidy-up operations to be completed over the coming weeks.

We hope that this work should help ensure the integrity of the much-loved Lancaster Hole entrance for many years to come. Our thanks to the Red Rose Cave and Pothole Club team for dealing with this so professionally and quickly.

CONSERVATION

The Ash Dieback issue

Over the last few years, Ash Dieback has started to have a serious impact on our region.

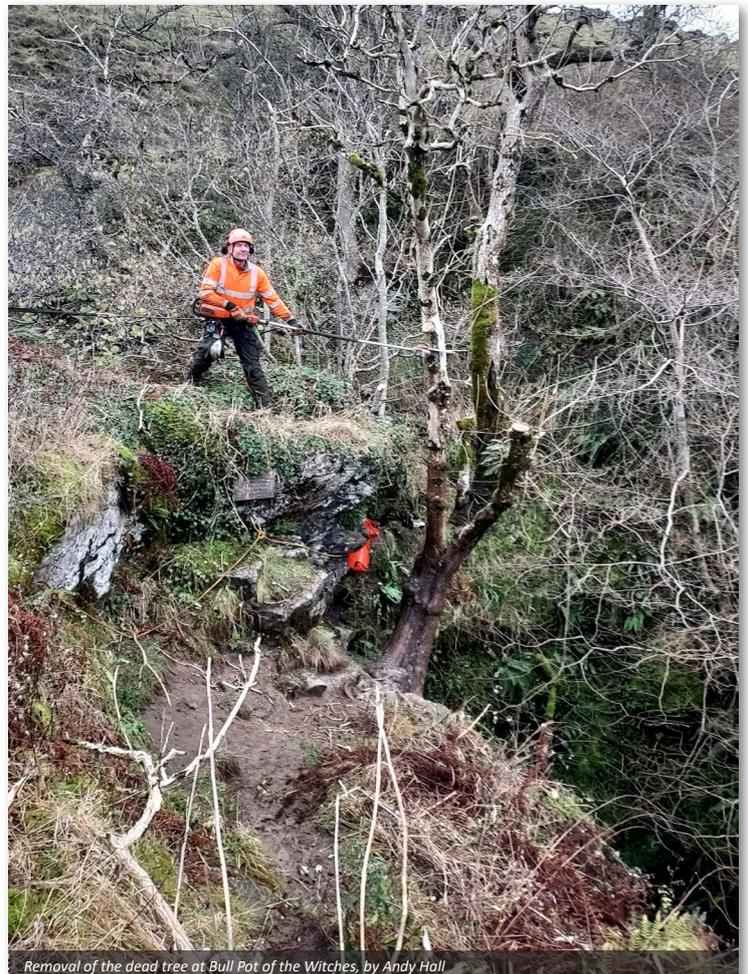
The issue first came prominently to our attention in December 2021, with the loss of the tree often used for rigging of Jingling Pot, followed soon by a few trees around the entrance of Gaping Gill and Rumbling Hole. In each case the offending dead trees posed an immediate hazard as they risked falling down the entrance, so they were removed thanks to Martin Holroyd who has kindly given his time to CNCC on multiple occasions now.

Alum Pot was then found to be badly affected, with several of the ash trees dead and starting to drop branches. This is something to be very aware of when visiting, be observant if you are using any trees as surface belays and watch out for loose branches. Work is planned to remove or prune back the worst of the dead trees in due course before they fall into the pothole.

The tree used to rig the Direct Route of Bull Pot of the Witches was the next victim, which has also been removed. Unfortunately this has left the Direct Route unviable, as there are no other anchors and the quality of the rock prohibit installation of any. Visiting cavers should follow the traverse around the shakehole to the Chimney Route instead.

Clearly the Ash Dieback issue is not going away, and several other trees used either as surface belays or overhanging open potholes are vulnerable and could pose a hazard in the coming years.

If you spot any issues elsewhere, and are unable to safely address them yourselves, please get in touch with our Conservation Officer to report the problem.



Removal of the dead tree at Bull Pot of the Witches, by Andy Hall

Death's Head Hole – conservation meets anchoring

At the end of March we issued a warning about the poor condition of the rowan tree in the Death's Head Hole entrance. This has been used as a belay for descending the shakehole for years (along with some dubious fence posts), so presented a potential hazard.

A team of CNCC conservation volunteers (Hugh Parker, Ged Benn and Tim Sullivan) went to Death's Head Hole on Sunday 2nd April to review the situation. Following prior consultation, it had been decided that instead of removing the tree completely, it was preferable to take just the head off the tree including dead branches to reduce wind-drag on the trunk. Leaving the lower part of the tree in-situ would help preserve the roots which are almost certainly stabilising the side of the shakehole.



Pruning the dead tree at Death's Head Hole, by Ged Benn

Continued use of the remaining trunk as a belay is not recommended, particularly as the approach to the first anchor is a steep and exposed gully above a very deep pitch. We therefore needed another solution, but unfortunately the surface lacked solid rock for additional resin bonded anchors. After considerable discussion amongst the CNCC anchor installers team, the decision was made to manufacture and install ground spike belays instead.

On 7th April, a bright sunny day, a CNCC team including our Training Officer and anchor installer, Ian Patrick, headed up to Death's Head Hole armed with two 38mm x 1.3m galvanised steel thick-wall tubes with pre-cut spike end, plus anchor installation equipment, various rigging kit and other tools.

These poles were successfully hammered 1m into the ground, 1m apart to allow a Y-hang to be rigged from them, just outside of the fence surrounding the shakehole. The rope can be rigged under the fence which conveniently helps prevent it coming off the top of the poles if flicked from below when not under tension.

Work was finished when the sledgehammer-induced mushrooming on the tops of the poles was smoothed off to remove sharp bits and bright green tape was wrapped around the top to help them be seen and avoid anyone falling over them. An old rebar stake previously used as a belay was removed.

Despite best efforts, Ian was not able to install any resin bonded anchors within the shakehole. The ground was too loose. However, he was able to get one extra anchor into the gully 1.5m above the top of the existing first pitch anchor, to serve as a rebelay part way down. The existing single anchor on the start of the first pitch was supplemented by a second to convert this into a Y-hang, which is far more appropriate. The rigging topo has been updated.

The hollow tree trunk is still present, but we recommend that this is not used for rigging.

Cavers are reminded that, unlike our resin bonded anchors, these ground spike belays do not carry years of evidence for their longevity. It is essential that all cavers inspect and be satisfied in the integrity of the ground spikes before using them.

During the week of 17th April, CNCC Chairman Andrew Hinde, accompanied by Ingleborough National Nature Reserve warden, Frank Morgan (who is new to caving) took a morning off to plant a selection of native trees around the Death's Head Hole enclosure. About 20 were planted which will hopefully, in time, help stabilise the steep ground above the old belay tree and prevent any collapses into the pothole.

This has been a significant project for several CNCC volunteers, with input from tree experts, our conservation volunteers, and the anchor installation team, with work spanning three days. Thank you to everyone involved!



The new ground spikes at Death's Head Hole, by Ian Patrick

Barbon Pot tree collapses



Removal of collapsed trees around Barbon Pot, by Andy Hall

The winter storms of 2021-2022 brought down the coppice of fir trees around Barbon Pot in Barbondale. This had completely blocked the open pot making a descent virtually impossible.

A team from Red Rose Cave and Pothole Club acting on behalf of CNCC and Natural England, with Martin Holroyd acting as tree surgeon, visited on Friday 25th November 2022 along with Steve Gray, Hugh St Lawrence, Andy Hall, Colin Jones and Rob Stevens.

The team found at least six trees had fallen across each other over the open shaft. The root balls which were sticking up in the air were reduced in size and some time was spent with chainsaws and other kit pruning back the brash from the trees so the smaller

and lighter ones could be hauled away from the shaft. Eventually the site was made safe so that it is now possible to descend the pothole again (if you can find anything to rig from).

A return to Barbon Pot will be needed to winch out the remaining tree trunks that are bridged across the shaft. The fence on the south side was also given a temporary repair but needs further attention to make fully stock-proof.

This may be a site that could benefit from our new ground spike anchor approach, as recently applied at Death's Head Hole, but this will require further evaluation.

Supporting cavers in conservation

At the start of February, Philip Withnall got in touch with us to say that he had fixed the conservation tape near the start of the crawl in Shuttleworth Pot. It had snapped, been tangled up and thrown into a ball along with some of the supporting pegs. Philip managed to untangle the tape and re-install it along the obvious line.

This was a very quick fix, and Philip only mentioned this to us in case somebody else had reported it. Nonetheless, we think this is a great example of individuals taking a proactive attitude to cave conservation. Just 10 minutes taken out of our sporting trip was enough to fix an issue, which can make all the difference.

We love hearing stories such as this and are happy to publicise them. Alternatively, why not post your work on the UKCaving.com forum to inspire others to do something similar?

If you spot a conservation issue that you can't deal with at the time, please get in touch with our Conservation Officer. Numerous options are available to address the issue. If you would like to take on a project yourself, we can support with advice, funding or to obtain necessary permissions. Alternatively, if you are not looking to be involved, we can potentially pass the job onto our extensive team of conservation volunteers.

Remember, the CNCC has an well-stocked store of conservation equipment which is available for northern cavers to borrow. A full list of this and other assets can be found on our website under the 'about' section. If you would like to volunteer to join our mailing list of volunteers, contact our Conservation Officer.



Conservation volunteers on Ingleborough, by Gary Douthwaite

Successful first new-to-caving workshop



The new-to-caving group ready to explore Long Churn Caves, by Ian Patrick

On 12th February, the first CNCC-supported event for caving novices took place at Long Churn Caves.

This new initiative sees the CNCC advertise a 'New-to-Caving' event and recruit attendees on behalf of an organising club, in this case, the Craven Pothole Club. Close to the time of the event, we hand over to the club, provide them with some optional training resources and any advice, and leave them to do the rest.

The CNCC brings to this arrangement a wide social media reach and mailing list, and a bespoke system on our website for advertising the sessions and allowing people to register for them. The host clubs bring the people-power, and hopefully the appetite to run these events to potentially recruit some new members.

This first event was designed to see if such a collaboration could be successful, which it certainly was!

We also know that many clubs who do not run novice events still get contacted regularly by people wanting to try caving. We hope that these events could prove a useful place where these people can be directed. To make this easier, we have set up an additional 'new to caving' webpage, accessed via the usual training page, where potential novices can be directed.

This first event was fully subscribed (with 9 novices accompanied by 6 experienced members) and went ahead at Long Churn Cave thanks to low water levels.

Ian Patrick, CNCC Training Officer and Craven Pothole Club member reported on how things went:

We met at CPC HQ and spent some time looking at aspects of caving such as conservation, access, equipment and regional councils. At lunchtime we got sorted with kit and had a look around the store. With car sharing arranged, we headed to Selside and up the hill. An enthusiastic chat at Alum Pot made sure a trip to the bottom would be on any future caver's list.

We headed in via Diccan crawl. Having a good number of club members meant that we could position members at strategic points to allow the rest of the group to move efficiently through to the Cheese Press. We split the group here, some going through and some going around, rejoining at the top of the Dolly Tubs pitch.

After an inspiring chat about how good it is down there, we headed back up towards the infamous Plank Pool and Double Shuffle Pool, and out via Dr Bannister's Handbasin.

A quick walk brought us to the start of Wilsons cave where much merriment was had by all who emerged from the damp exit. A quick clothing change and then back to CPC HQ for tea and medals. We had a chat about what next for those who had been suitably inspired. This was a really interesting and enjoyable day which was made better and considerably more efficient by the valuable help from club members.

Thanks to all involved!



Our new-to-SRT workshop, by Ian Patrick



Our new-to-SRT workshop, by Ian Patrick

With our first event now 'in the bag', we would love to know if your club or group would like to host a further event. The CNCC will advertise your session, pitching at those considering caving as a hobby, rather than those wanting a one-off experience-day. We can manage signups and collect any payment to cover costs.

If you would like to host a session, please get in touch with our Training Officer to discuss.

This novice trip was followed shortly after by our two-day new-to-SRT training workshop which ran on the weekend of 4th March, with several very happy faces. This included a father and his 10-year old son who had come all the way from Kent!



Our SRT underground refresher workshop, by Ian Patrick

Only a few weeks later came our SRT underground refresher workshop on 18th March at Sell Gill Holes.

This was a great opportunity for attendees to refresh themselves on underground SRT scenarios, and for a few people who had been on the previous new-to-SRT workshop to do SRT underground for the first time. Everyone seemed to have a great time, and we hope to see all the attendees putting their skills to use again soon.

These new-to-SRT and SRT underground refresher workshops are regular features in our training calendar. Sign up to our mailing list to be the first to hear about any upcoming sessions, and for any questions, please email our Training Officer.



Our SRT underground refresher workshop, by Ian Patrick

Spring and summer 2023 workshops

A few months prior to this newsletter, we published our list of workshops for spring and summer this year. This is perhaps our most comprehensive list yet:

- 11th March: Two-day SRT workshop, beginner level
- 18th March: One-day SRT refresher, intermediate level
- 8th April: One-day SRT refresher, intermediate level
- 22nd April: One-day SRT rigging, intermediate level
- 23rd April: One-day skills for SRT trip leaders
- 29th April: One-day SRT rigging, beginner level
- 6th May: One-day SRT rescue workshop, intermediate level
- 7th May: One-day SRT rescue workshop, advanced level
- 20th May: One-day geology tour with Dr. John Helm
- 20th May: Two-day SRT refresher, intermediate level
- 3rd June: Two-day SRT workshop, beginner level
- 10th June: Two-day SRT workshop, advanced level
- 1st July: One-day SRT, intermediate level
- 2nd July: One-day SRT rigging, intermediate level
- 22nd July: One-day ladder and lifelines for trip leaders
- 23rd July: One-day skills for horizontal cave trip leaders
- 23rd July: One-day pull-through caving skills
- 19th August: One-day skills for SRT caving trip leaders

The popularity of these has been as high as ever, and most of the upcoming dates are fully booked, but at the time of publishing this newsletter, some availability remains for the summer dates.

More dates may be added as the year progresses. As always, to be the first to hear about new workshops as they are announced, we recommend joining the >500 people already signed up to our mailing list. There is a link on our website homepage, or you can reach it using the address below:

www.cncc.org.uk/mailling-list

Your details will be used only to send roughly monthly emails with the latest news relating to access, training, conservation, anchoring and cave descriptions, plus any important notices we feel you may need to be aware of as they happen.

CNCC TRAINING

ANCHORS

Notts Pot, Leck Fell

An additional anchor has been added on the entrance pitch rebelay (previously this was a single anchor with a high fall-factor in the event of failure) and the anchors on the small climb down inside the entrance, which were loose, have been removed and replaced with drilled threads.

FOUL Pot, Fountains Fell

A second route down Man O' War pitch has been anchored to provide a safer route of descent in wetter conditions. The rigging topo and route description have been updated accordingly.

Five Ways Pot, Dowlass Moss

This relatively new discovery on Dowlass Moss (the second big discovery there in recent years, after Mayday Hole) is scheduled for anchoring very soon. Work had been planned over winter, but the installers cancelled due to poor weather which meant the entrance was very wet. A return is planned this summer.

Simpson Pot and Swinsto Hole, Kingsdale

We are currently engaged in extensive re-anchoring work in these two potholes. Many of the original anchors are showing movement, damage, or are poorly located for pull-through (which is what most visitors are doing). Surprisingly, the anchors were never actually installed in locations for pull-through, and this has resulted in the proliferation of compensatory 'tat' on various pitches or ropes getting stuck and abandoned.

We plan to replace defective anchors, and relocate others to positions more appropriate for supporting pull-through trips.

If you are visiting either pothole over this spring/summer, the anchors may not appear quite as the topo suggests. We plan to keep both caves able to be descended throughout the work. If you meet one of our installers underground, please be patient while waiting to get past and do say hello. Once work is complete, we will bring you more news and update the topos.

Anchor installer technical forum



Installing anchors in Diccan Pot, by Ian Patrick

Our Training Officer, Ian Patrick, is organising a weekend-long technical forum open to all UK regional anchor installers. The aim of this gathering is to share knowledge on various aspects of anchor installation, including anchor types, resins, general principles, equipment, record keeping, removal of anchors, testing and general tips and tricks. This is particularly relevant now that most regions are standardising on the IC Anchor that CNCC has been using for several years.

The date for this is the weekend of 14th October, in Settle, but this is very provisional and may move forward or back a week.

The event is only open to existing installers of resin bonded anchors and is not intended to train new installers.

If this event is of interest to you, please email our Training Officer to stay in the loop as details of the event are finalised.

Want to get involved?

Being involved in the CNCC can take many forms:

Full membership:

Our full member clubs can vote at our AGM and will be called upon for input on any serious matters that arise through the year. If your club is not already a full member (you can find a list on our website), why not consider joining?

Officers and co-opted volunteers:

Our officers and volunteers work hard to perform the day to day functions of the CNCC. They advise, make recommendations, and carry out the wishes of the Committee. This is a real chance to make a big difference to northern caving.

Committee:

Each year up to fourteen of our full member clubs and a representative for non-club cavers can be elected to the CNCC committee, who then meet at least three times a year to work in the best interests of our member clubs and northern cavers.

Individuals:

We welcome any enthusiastic individuals or groups to come along to our meetings and participate, or just to see what goes on. The more formal matters of voting are limited to our committee and members, but input from all participants is embraced.

For more information on getting involved, contact our Secretary or visit: www.cncc.org.uk/getinvolved