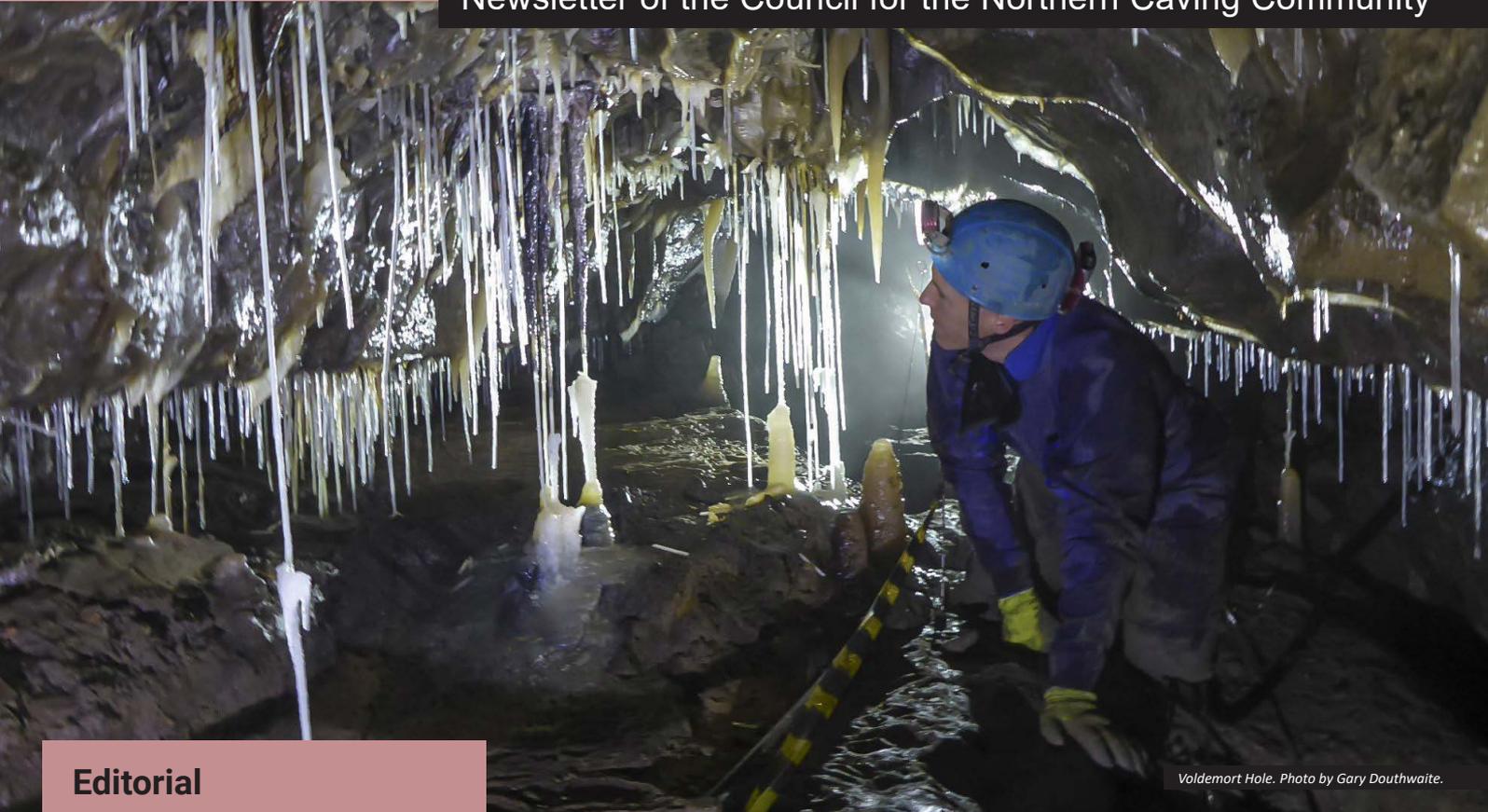


NORTHERN CAVING

Newsletter of the Council for the Northern Caving Community



Valdemort Hole. Photo by Gary Douthwaite.

Editorial

by Matt Ewles (Editor)

Overall, 2024 has been a great year for us. We've had a full team for the first time in many years, including a representative for non-club cavers.

In the six months since the last newsletter, we have really embraced our new name. We have modernised the penultimate access agreement that was available to clubs but not individuals (Robinsons' Pot, reported herein) and started discussions on the final one (Bowland). We have tried to engage as many cavers as possible in our work via UKCaving, Hidden Earth, social media and our own mailing list which reaches over 750 addresses. These efforts to work for the entire northern caving community will continue next year, for sure.

The last six months has also seen several training workshops, anchor projects and conservation initiatives, all reported herein. Finally, we'd like to remind you of our AGM on 22nd March 2025, as three of our Officer team are standing down. If you think the role of Chair, Treasurer or Access Officer might interest you, please get in touch (secretary@cncc.org.uk) as soon as possible to discuss.

Northern Caves & Karst Hydrology Database

This fantastic resource, known as NoCKHD for short, was presented at Hidden Earth, after several months of operation.

This is a simple-to-use online database and catalogue of hundreds of dye-tracing experiments performed across our region. The project is overseen by Dr Phil Murphy, who has the ambition of making often hard-to-find data easily accessible.

Many clubs and individuals over the decades have performed dye traces, using techniques ranging from very advanced to relatively simple, often reporting results in club journals, scientific publications or personal notes. Phil has scoured decades of literature to populate the database with over 500 entries, which are all searchable by area, detection method, tracer, injection or detection point. There is also a really useful map of our area showing directions of water flow from sinks to resurgence.

This is an invaluable resource for any diggers or researchers, but also quite a fun and interesting tool to browse for any caver interested in where water goes.

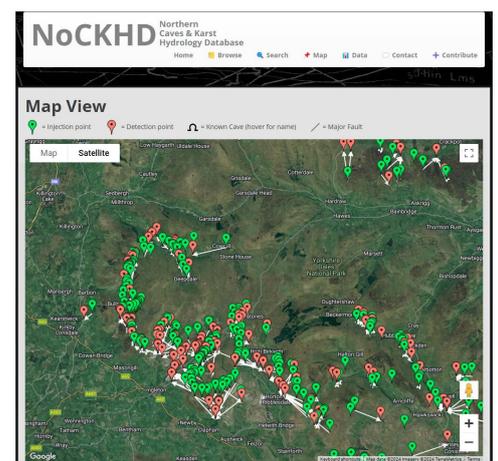
Crucially, if you know of any historic tracing experiments which are not in the database, or if you are performing any water tracing work in the future, you are strongly

encouraged to enter the results onto the site, where they can be preserved for the future and easily accessed by others.

This is an absolutely outstanding piece of work, which has come into existence so far without the fanfare it deserves, so we are here to try to put that right. Thanks to Phil, and also Graham Proudlove and Tom Calpin for their efforts making this happen.

The website is hosted though CNCC (hence our inclusion in the web domain), but we can't take any credit for the project.

watertracing.cncc.org.uk



AGM 2025



Our AGM will be held at 10am, Saturday 22nd March, at Clapham Village Hall. Everyone is welcome.

This will be a chance to elect Officers and a Committee for the 2025-2026 period and hear from our 2024-2025 team about work done through the year and discuss any ongoing matters.

This is also a great chance for any cavers, from all backgrounds, to bring ideas about how we could be better supporting northern caving over the coming year.

This year has hosted an initiative to modernise and declutter our constitution. A team have been hard at work and produced a draft which will be voted upon. We also expect this AGM could be the start of a longer discussion about how we improve our democratic processes to include a wider representation of cavers.

If you, as an individual, who would like to stand for any Officer position or our Individual Caver Representative role, or if your club would like to stand for membership or a Committee position, or if you have something you would like raising on the agenda, the deadline to contact our Secretary is 25th January. The agenda will be published on our website by 8th February.

We are particularly seeking candidates for Chair and Treasurer, as for these two roles, our incumbent volunteers are standing down and we have yet to receive any interest from potential new volunteers. You can see job descriptions at www.cncc.org.uk/contacts

CNCC at Hidden Earth in Llangollen

As well as being a great venue in a lovely town, Hidden Earth 2024 at Llangollen Pavilion achieved top-end levels of attendance.

There were talks spanning UK and overseas exploration (including three talks covering our region and others from regular northern cavers), technical and art, plus a bustling trade hall with several equipment vendors, some of them newcomers to the event.

We were delighted to be there as usual to showcase our work, and our stall was well attended, and staffed for most of the weekend by several of our team. Thank you to everyone who helped out.

The venue was so good that the team have decided to return for 2025, on the weekend of 26-28th September (advert below). Using the same venue will allow the planning to be much smoother and has allowed a much earlier announcement of the date.



HIDDEN EARTH 2025

The UK's National Caving Conference

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Llangollen, North Wales



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The fully reopened YUCPC facility. Photo by Adrian Turner.

York Uni facility update

In our last newsletter, we reported on the extensive efforts of York University Cave and Pothole Club (YUCPC) to fund works needed to keep their training facility going following a health and safety audit. This included girder clamps needed for free-hanging ropes. The money was raised with the help of a significant contribution from CNCC, with BCA later agreeing to cover this.

As part of the agreement to fund this, YUCPC were able to get the university to agree to fund both the upkeep and regular inspection of the new girder clamps, and to fund the reinstatement of a number of wall-mounted anchors which were also decommissioned during the audit.

The University has stayed true to its word and has now invested the necessary money re-instate the wall anchors, allowing for deviations and against-wall rebelayes to be rigged (a much better simulation of a real pothole). This brings the facility back to the capacity it was before the audit, and hopefully now fully future-proofed too.

Two years without access to their usual facility took its toll on the club, but we are pleased to hear that they have bounced back brilliantly this year. The club, which is now in its 43rd year, introduces dozens of new people each year into the caving community.

The YUCPC team put in an admirable amount of work to identify, develop and present this proposal. We would like to remind all student clubs that help is available, for similar scenarios or for training or equipment, if a well-costed proposal is presented. Please get in touch with us (or whoever your local regional council is) or directly with the BCA Youth Development team to discuss.

SAFETY

Stake Pot, Ease Gill Caverns

We have received note of recent movements to a large stack of boulders on the mud slope of Stake Pot just a few metres below the high-level passage, on the side closest to Stop Pot/Upper Ease Gill.

The popular route here is marked by an in-situ rope which passes immediately next to these boulders. Unaware cavers may even be tempted to use these blocks as a foothold!

We urge cavers to pay particular attention here. Be sure to identify these boulders upon arrival at Stake Pot. Give them a wide berth and avoid being underneath them. Pass the area one at a time, carefully, and with appropriate protection/belay.



The concerning boulder stack at Stake Pot (viewed from the north side). Photo by Ian Walker.

Shuttleworth Pot

In October we received note that the scaffolded climb beneath the first pitch of Shuttleworth Pot is showing some signs of being loose. A further report in November told us that three of the scaffold bars had actually come out and rocks were starting to collapse. This is clearly a rapidly deteriorating situation!

We urge cavers visiting Shuttleworth Pot to take any necessary action to reduce risk, which may include choosing a different pothole until stabilisation works are performed.

We are currently looking into options to deal with this. If you or your team would be interested in taking on some stabilisation work, with CNCC support, please get in touch (conservation@cncc.org.uk).



The new pipe entrance to Stream Passage Pot, with just a little finishing work needed.

Stream Passage Pot entrance restoration

In June, we announced that the oil-drum entrance pipe of Stream Passage Pot was coming towards the end of its life, showing signs of degradation and loosening of the material behind. Rather than wait for a more significant failure, a team of volunteers decided to take on the difficult task of replacing the entrance with a modern plastic pipe.

This was no simple task, as the old entrance extended 3m underground through well-packed rock and soil, so it would need considerable excavation to remove safely without collapsing the entrance altogether.

The team worked wonders through July and August, digging down, stabilising the sides with a scaffold and board frame, eventually reaching the depth to install a new plastic pipe. The new pipe is several centimetres wider than the old one which will come as a relief to taller cavers who struggled to bend their legs in the old oil drum entrance.

The pipe was sufficiently fitted part way into the Craven Pothole Club winchmeet to allow groups to undertake a trip, and the backfilling around the pipe was completed by 10th August, with small amounts of concreting over the following month. The pipe must be rigged by visiting groups with either a rope or a ladder and there is an in-built scaffold pole at the top for this purpose.

This has been an outstanding effort by a dedicated team who planned and executed the project meticulously. Furthermore, they documented their progress through reports and pictures on UKCaving to keep the caving community engaged.

This work should secure access to Stream Passage Pot for several decades to come.

This is an outstanding pothole, with three iconic, classic Yorkshire Dales pitches (plus the entrance pitch), followed by some splendid caving in the huge Stream Passage and then Sand Caverns to reach Gaping Gill main chamber. This really is northern caving at its absolute finest.



Ian Patrick testing the new pipe for size. Photo by Andrew Hinde.

Furness Iron Mine pipe

Our Chair, Andrew Hinde, was recently contacted by Dave McDougle, a caver and member of the Cumbria Amenity Trust Mining Heritage Society (CATMHS), who are a group who help facilitate access and conserve mines across the north west of England.

Dave was looking to source a section of pipe to install into a dig at a collapse 100m into Furness Iron Mine, when a friend suggested he contacted the CNCC for assistance. Given that we are primarily funded by BCA, many of whose members are mine explorers, we were delighted to be able to help.

Report on the work courtesy of Dave McDougle:

“ Tucked away in a small woodland valley in Furness, once the centre of iron ore production in the North West, is a small nick in a mossy wall with some surface mud obscuring an entrance.

As part of a CATMHS trip, we found a wonderfully straight level inside the entrance, with a dense clay collapse blocking further exploration about 100m along. This collapse is actually the site of a previous CATMHS dig which succumbed to the years, pressures and moisture, rotting the timbers and blocking the wonderful further workings.

A week later, with shovels and mattocks, we started attacking the collapse along the line of the level. After digging in about one foot, a draught was felt coming from the left. This turned out to be the original Ray Bland dig from prior to the bigger CATMHS one, over 30 years ago!

This session reopened a small letterbox through the collapse, just big enough for us to squeeze through and have a good explore of the closer workings. But how to keep this open and keep the ominous oozing clay from blocking it again? We knew the perfect solution; a wheelie bin with the bottom cut off. The following week, the sacrificial bin in tow, we dug some more



The new pipe through the Furness Iron Mine collapse, by Dave McDougle (banana for scale!)

grotty clay out, which is easier said than done as this iron-rich stuff is heavy and a nightmare to get off your tools. Finally, we slotted the bin into place and packed the sides with spoil.

Job done. Level open for business for eternity, or so we thought!

That was, at least, until we went back the next week to find the bin had been crushed at the base. Who knew removing the bottom would remove all structural integrity?

Head scratching and moaning in WhatsApp groups led to us being directed to the CNCC Chair, Andrew Hinde, who kindly donated a length of twin wall corrugated pipe. Two intense digging sessions later, the bin was unceremoniously removed, and the dig widened to accept the pipe. Only minor adjustments were required to the bedrock with a hammer and chisel. We got the pipe in, supported by bedrock on the top and bottom, and the sides packed out with spoil to prevent any movement.

This has reopened the gateway for exploration of the workings beyond the collapse. There may even be more digs in the future, although not yet as the team need some recovery time!

Cleanup of digging gear in Notts II

Committee Pot/Iron Kiln is a feat of caver engineering, allowing cavers to explore the wonders of the Notts II region of the Three Counties System without diving, or even ropework.

Exploration in Notts II is far from complete, and just beyond the bottom of the engineered shafts, you pass through Mincemeat Aven. Here, cavers have become used to passing a large pile of digging equipment, including an elaborate complex of pipes.

The cleanup of this disused digging equipment has been planned for several years by the digging team, but last month, a small team including Philip Withnall, Todd Rye and Ian Walker beat them to it by taking on the task in just a single evening!

Philip reports on the work...

“ Having taken several friends into Notts II in recent weeks to give them an introduction to caving, I found myself explaining the fossils in the passage wall, the history of the calcite, the prospect of bolt climbing up the aven, and, when we got to the pile of gear in Mincemeat Aven, something about how people dig in caves to find more caves. I never managed to explain to my friends why this particular pile of hose and pipe at the bottom of the aven had been there for as long as I'd been visiting.

I made a few enquiries on the UKCaving forum and was put in touch with Tony Brown, who explained the history of digging the Mincemeat sump (along the scaffolded passage). They'd used the gear to drain the sump, and although this dig still has good prospects, the pumping equipment was not required for future work. Tony's club, the Northern Boggarts, had planned to remove this equipment, but various things had derailed their plans.

I thought it would be easy enough to remove the equipment in an evening. Conveniently, several of us were meeting up at Bull Pot Farm for the weekend, so I asked a few friends, and we went for a few hours on the Friday evening to haul the gear out.

Helpfully, much of it was bundled up with old rope already, so was ready to haul. We set up a few pulley systems and slowly raised the gear from Mincemeat Aven in five stages to the bottom of the scaffolded shafts, then in two parallel hauls to the top. This included three climbs up the shafts with a coil of drainpipe hitched to our harnesses. Thankfully it didn't get caught on the scaffolding as much as we feared!

After four hours we'd got all the equipment out and to the fell gate, grabbed some mince pies and enjoyed a rare dry night on Leck Fell, before heading to Bull Pot Farm for the weekend.

The next day, Andrew Hinde, CNCC Chair, picked up the waste which is now on its way for reuse, disposal or recycling.



The removed equipment, courtesy of Philip Withnall.



The new stile from the public footpath across to Calf Holes.

Calf Holes stile repair

On the 17th July, a team of volunteers mostly from the Craven Pothole Club (including Martin Swales, Paul McWhinny, Ali Avison, John Helm and others), supported by CNCC for material purchasing, repaired the stile from the public footpath to the Calf Holes entrance near High Birkwith. The stile had mostly rotted away on one side.

The new build is a superb job and should last for decades to come. We're thankful to the farmers at Low Birkwith and Scales Farm for allowing this work to take place.

Remember, access is currently being refused to the caves owned by High Birkwith Farm (Birkwith Cave, Old Ing, Dismal Hill and Browgill Cave), however, Calf Holes is not on their land, and access remains open here without permission needing to be sought.

The owners of High Birkwith are aware that they cannot stop access to Calf Holes, and we strongly encourage groups to continue visiting this fine cave to ensure cavers maintain a presence in this area.

There are more important details on our website (including parking and advice regarding Browgill) for anyone interested in visiting.

ANCHORS & TOPOS

Aardvark Country, Cow Pot

In our last newsletter, we presented two routes we'd added to our rigging topo for Cow Pot, as alternatives to the traditional pitch into Fall Pot. These routes, Sneaky and Devious, have been anchored for years, but never made it onto earlier versions of our rigging topo.

For anyone who has done these, and is keen for yet more variety in Cow Pot, another option is Aardvark Country.

This esoteric route starts from the bottom of the entrance pitch, opposite the traditional route. Although this initially looks large and enticing, it quickly becomes challenging with three short pitches, a quirky traverse and some awkward crawls and squeezes, emerging, after some discomfort, into Ease Gill Main Drain.

This is another route popularised by Mike Cooper's book, but until now, it relied on use of original exploration spits and bolts, which were coming towards the end of their life.

We are pleased to say that Aardvark Country now benefits from CNCC anchors, to complement natural belays. The Cow Pot topo has been updated to include this route.

Cote Gill Pot

This pothole, with two short pitches, has been fitted with CNCC anchors, to facilitate safe descent for any connoisseur visitors.

Yockenthwaite Pot

Mike Cooper's book 'Not for the Faint Hearted' has a lot to answer for, including the rise in popularity of a number of esoteric and more challenging potholes across our region.

With this comes a need to provide safe anchors, as many of these 'black book' caves only have original exploration spits or similar which are degrading and becoming unsafe.

Over summer, CNCC anchors have been installed in Yockenthwaite Pot, Langstrothdale. This involves four short pitches, a collection of squeezes and various challenging situations. A topo is now online, and if you are looking for a route description, Not for the Faint Hearted (p140-141) is currently your go-to place.

Be warned though; the anchors might make Yockenthwaite Pot safer, but sadly they certainly don't make it any easier!

Lancaster Hole

After many years of omission, the Lancaster Hole topo has been updated with rope lengths for Stake Pot, and also the Fall Pot 'climb' route (which is very slippery and best done on-rope). Of course, we are aware that both locations have in-situ ropes to 'demonstrate the route' but as you all know, CNCC, does not endorse use of in-situ ropes as safety critical belays, so it is important for visiting groups to know what length ropes should be taken to rig your own.

AKA Hole



This is a very new discovery by the Misty Mountain Mud Miners, in the area of Leck Fell between Ireby Fell Caverns and Notts Pot.

On 5th October, AKA Hole (which is an abbreviation from 'The Top Sink AKA Uranus Hole') was connected into Ireby Fell Caverns at a depth of 80m in the Blissful Creek area or Ireby 2. We are informed however that this is not an easy route into this remote part of the system, and there are some unstable sections and loose rocks, particularly around the connection point.

Therefore, this is clearly a route into the system that needs to be taken with some seriousness, but it nonetheless seems likely to gain popularity over coming years.

The cave has been fully fitted with IC anchors (reported in Descent 301). We have added the cave to our website and online booking system and uploaded a topo. A route description is currently in preparation and should be published in the coming month.

(Get Down) Shep Pot



This pothole, dug and explored in 2012, descends to a depth of over 80m via only a small number of pitches, so will appeal to those who aren't keen on big pitches. Some strenuous rifts passages, climbs and exposed traverses will present a moderate challenge to determined cavers keen to escape crowds on Leck Fell.

In 2020 it was found that the exploration spits on the first pitch (Legacy Pitch) had already degraded beyond use, and without any viable natural belay, the pitch was undescendable.

Legacy Pitch has now been fitted with CNCC anchors, and a topo is online. The remaining tackle-requiring sections of the cave detailed in Northern Caves include a climb (Challenger Deep), an exposed traverse (Notts Permitted) and a final small (5m) pitch just prior to the termination where the water vanishes. These three additional features each require a 10m rope. They may be fitted with CNCC anchors in the future, but for now, these need to be rigged from whatever suitable belays are available.

The Simpson Pot chain debate

Work to partially re-anchor Simpson Pot was completed over summer. This included repositioning or addition of some anchors, and replacement of existing defective anchors to provide belays which are well suited to both hard-rigging and pull-through trips.

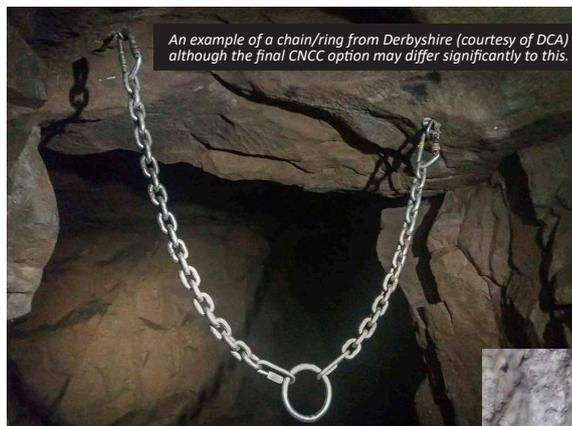
Similar work was performed in Swinsto Hole the previous year, as both of these pots were not well anchored for pull-through trips. We know however that pull-throughs represent a large proportion of all the trips today.

As part of this work, we evaluated the three longest pitches in Simpson Pot, including Slit Pot, the Slit Pot 'overhead alternative' and Swinsto Great Aven. These each represent an alternative route down the final section of the pothole.

Our installer reported that for all sites, conventional anchors are not able to offer ideal pull-through positioning. This is supported by frequent reports of stuck ropes and a large amount of 'tat' left behind (see photo) to compensate for the anchor deficiencies.

Our installer suggested placement of stainless-steel chains/rings, connected by maillions across two anchors for all three sites. This system is commonly used in pull-through scenarios in canyons, overseas and other UK sites (including in the Peak District).

This rigging system can theoretically allow better positioning of the rope to avoid rub, avoid wear on the anchors when pulling through ropes, and reduce risks of ropes getting stuck.



A suggestion was put forward for CNCC to endorse installation of these chains and rings at all three sites. Our anchor installer also engaged on UKCaving to answer questions.

The matter was discussed, both on UKCaving and at our meeting on Saturday 26th October. Some well-considered concerns were presented and discussed, including aesthetics, concerns for safety associated with only a single-point of failure, potential issues of the chains blocking hard-rigging, and risks of implementing a new and unfamiliar system.

However, in an unofficial poll on UKCaving, and a formal vote of the CNCC Committee, there was widespread support for these installations.

You won't be seeing chains appearing immediately. The meeting raised some important points for consideration, particular around the technical specification. These are going to be taken on board before implementation.

We also want to ensure that installation coincides with labelling of these on our topo and publication of training resources on how to rig pull-throughs using the new setup, and how to perform important pre-use safety inspections.

The team may also reconsider any of the locations if there are changes in circumstances.

Thank you to everyone for your excellent engagement on this subject.



INCLUSIVITY

Accessible caving

by Josh White, CNCC Inclusivity Coordinator

For any questions or more information: inclusivity@cncc.org.uk



I've recently been contacted by several university clubs, following enquiries they had received, for advice on taking people with disabilities caving.

First of all, what a great feeling! Some of the disabilities in question would make many people immediately dismiss the idea of the individual participating in adventure activities, especially caving, which may be deemed one of the less accessible activities.

Thank you to the clubs and people who have reached out for advice!

It's worth bearing in mind that the queries I received were all related to physical disabilities, and so this article is mostly geared towards that. Of course, there are so many physical disabilities of differing severity and resulting in different levels of mobility restriction. The advice presented below is focused on those disabilities which are usually considered to be the most restrictive to mobility.

With over 2% of the UK having a learning disability, you may also receive enquiries about how to adapt your trip for this population. Such adaptations are likely to be much more subtle than those described below and will be discussed in a future newsletter.

The world of accessible caving is far more 'in my wheelhouse' than the issues I touched on in my previous article in Newsletter 15, and probably more than I will in my future ones, due to my day job as an instructor at an activity centre for people with disabilities. I loved being able to field these questions and I think it's important that some of this information is shared with you all.

Finally, this advice is aimed particularly at university clubs, from whom I tend to receive the most enquiries. However, it is relevant to any club, group or individual who is exploring options to take someone with a physical disability caving.

I have tried to break this advice down into six areas. These should help anyone looking into taking people with physical disabilities caving to work through all the relevant considerations.

1 Can you gather more information about the condition?

Ten people with the same diagnosis might present in ten different ways with ten different preferred options to help them discover the world beneath our feet.

It is likely that if someone with a physical disability is putting themselves forward to go caving, they have probably already considered the physical challenges, their own abilities, and any possible precautions or assistance they may need to get involved.

They are also likely to be very happy to discuss these abilities and needs, and will fully understand and appreciate the importance of such a clear and honest conversation. They are better placed than anyone else to advise what is within their capabilities.

In summary, don't shy away from asking questions, and don't be fearful of being honest in discussing their limits and needs.

Gather information from this person about their history with the condition. Having lived with a condition for longer allows a person time to develop a clearer understanding of what activities they can and cannot safely do, for what duration, or what may trigger issues. This is useful information for the trip leader. For example, individuals who have seizures will have an idea of how long it would usually take to recover to a state where they'll be able to 'self-rescue'.

2 Has this person undertaken any similar activities?

Having experience in the outdoors will give that person an idea of what level of activity they are able to do before exhaustion becomes an issue, or to understand what specific movements they might struggle with the most.

If they are not familiar with the physical needs of caving, try and describe them using better known activities such as going up stairs, climbing a tree, scrambling, hill walking, etc, or using suitable video footage where appropriate. Knowing this information can help you and them to decide on the next point.

3 Are you, as a club/group, able to support this person?

This should be a two-way conversation. You should have already learned more about their disability (from point 1) and explaining the nature of caving (point 2), so now you need to be honest about whether you believe you can offer them a safe and suitable caving experience, and they may also want to feel assured of this too.

University clubs are generally set up to develop people from no experience to a leadership position, and to safely run trips for the groups they're likely to encounter, including nervous or unprepared freshers. However, it is totally acceptable for a trip leader to say "I don't feel experienced or confident enough to take someone underground who has a physical disability needing extra support".

Many of these conditions can be complex and require leadership skills outside of what many cavers might have, let alone less-experienced trip leaders. To counter this, or because it may deliver the appropriate level of support needed, it might be sensible to adjust the leadership ratios of the trip, to provide additional assistance when it is needed, or to consider inviting a close friend (see below).

Getting to and from caving areas can be tricky enough, something many university caving clubs will attest to. This is even before you consider that people with disabilities might need specific mobility aids, and is there room for those?

Do you have appropriate equipment? Hand-me-downs are how clubs can be frugal with the limited budget they tend to have available. This could mean the range of kit available is not suitable for someone with a physical disability.

4 Share the experience?

Does the individual have a close friend who they trust, who could potentially accompany them on the trip? This may help them be more at-ease and can make things easier for the trip leader.

Of course, this may further impact logistics, and this is definitely not an option that should be 'weaponised' (i.e. avoid saying 'you must bring someone to support you').

5 What venues might be suitable?

This will depend on lots of factors and varies across the country. As this is the CNCC newsletter and I'm the CNCC inclusivity Officer, I will try to gear the answers towards the north of England.

Which caves might be suitable will depend largely on the answers to the previous questions, but you might look at wheelchair accessible

showcaves as being the easiest option to organise. Of those in our area, Ingleborough Cave is the most suited.

Of course, if the individual in question is looking to go beyond just the showcave experience, we need to consider other options.

With a suitably robust (i.e. off-road) wheelchair, it's not unusual to see specialist providers visiting Yordas main chamber, and supporting individuals to see all that there is to see here, from the formations to the waterfall.

Often those with limited mobility can thrive within what might seem like less easy caves than those listed above, by having walls constantly within reach they can use for support. For example, individuals with conditions such as cerebral palsy that can cause a weakness within some limbs, often on one side of the body, find the close proximity of the walls of Thistle and Runscar Caves invaluable, providing spots to partially take the weight off their feet.

Once again, the point to emphasise is communication. Discuss their condition, and what they can and cannot do. Ask and identify what support they will need, and discuss the anticipated physical demands of all candidate venues to reach the best decision.

6 If you are unable to help, what next?

If you decide that your club/group doesn't have the ability or gear to take someone caving, that doesn't mean they can't. Here are a few alternative options in our region for cavers with disabilities.

- Specialist providers such as the Bendrigg Trust (full disclosure - they are my employer). On the first weekend of March 2025 they are running a caving festival, to give those with physical and/or learning disabilities the chance to visit caves.
- Providers such as 'Anyone Can' run more bespoke adventures with a huge background in working with people with disabilities.
- There are also charities such as 'Vision of Adventure' who work with people with visual impairments and look to make the outdoors more accessible, through activities including caving.

Does this advice cover all conditions? Absolutely not! The majority of disabilities that clubs are likely to encounter will be learning or hidden disabilities, or physical disabilities which are less mobility-limiting, which may be a lot easier to accommodate. These are things I'll try and cover in future issues of this newsletter.

NEW CAVE DESCRIPTIONS

North by North End Pot



In our last newsletter we announced the discovery of this relatively new entrance to the Large/Rift Pot system, and publication of a topo.

Since then, we have added a route description covering the route to The Eastern Front, and also towards Coates Cavern, passing where Large Pot enters via Colossus and, later, where New Rift Pot enters.

Enjoy, but remember the loose rocks on the pitches!

Voldemort Hole

For a number of years, Voldemort Hole, like it's neighbouring pot, Cupcake, has offered a less popular route into Notts II and the Leck Fell Master Cave. Voldemort Hole is not fitted with CNCC anchors, so we haven't published a topo, but it does have fixed anchors of a usable standard, providing cavers take precautions which appropriately reflect their uncertain integrity and provenance.

Voldemort Hole offers a great route, without too many difficulties, dropping into Notts II at Oliver Lloyd Aven. It is not a glamorous route into the system, and a 70m long wet crawl will deter many. Nonetheless, it's a great choice for something different, so since November, we have been pleased to include a route description on our website, including a reverse description from Notts II to Voldemort, for trips with two teams undertaking an exchange.

Middle Scar Cave

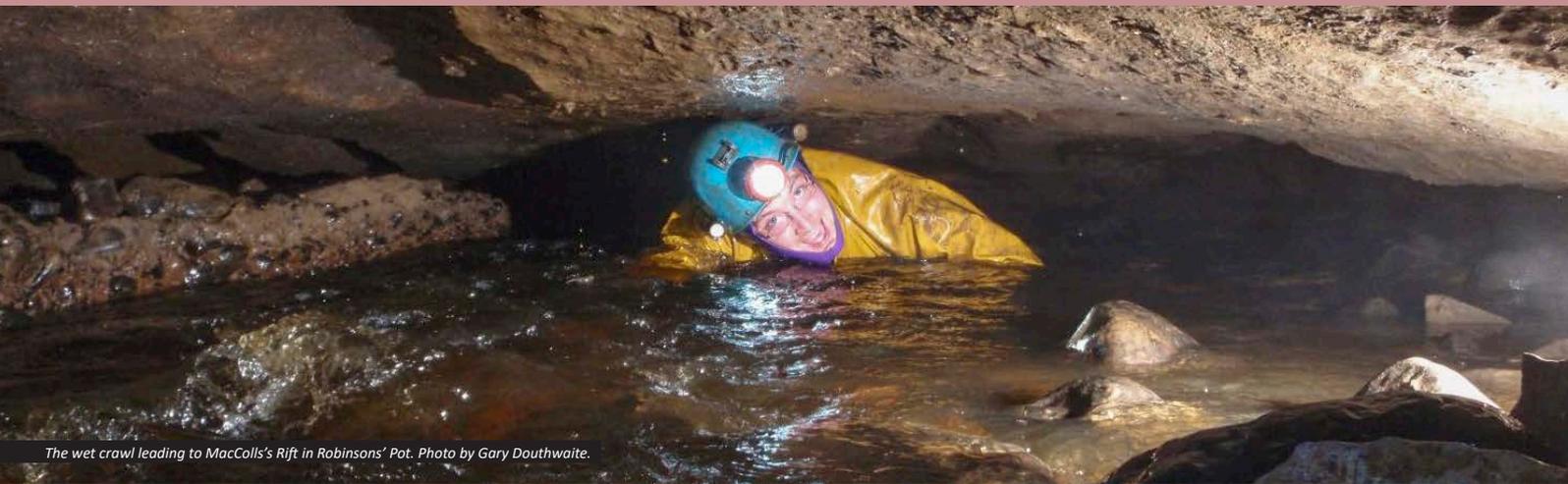
This is not a well-known cave, sitting just a short distance across the fell from the more traditional Ribbleshead caves of Runscar and Thistle. However, Middle Scar Cave offers a real quirky and challenging adventure for experienced cavers who are not deterred by a swim. If you are a conservation-minded caver looking for an off-beat adventure on a dry summer afternoon, this could be for you.



Middle Scar Cave, courtesy of Alex Ritchie.



Matt Ewles departing the second pitch in Voldemort Hole. Photo by Gary Douthwaite.



The wet crawl leading to MacColl's Rift in Robinsons' Pot. Photo by Gary Douthwaite.

Individual access to Robinsons' Pot

Robinsons' Pot in Darnbrook is certainly a cave with one of the quirkiest entrances in our region... a manhole cover over a pothole situated directly underneath the main building of Darnbrook Farm!

As well as not being on access land, cavers visiting this site are naturally rather conspicuous to the friendly tenants, who often need to move their parked vehicle from obstructing the entrance. For all of these reasons, access to Robinsons' Pot is always going to come with some restrictions to maintain good relations.

Robinsons' Pot is a great 3-4 hour caving trip. A series of passages lead down to a streamway, where a crawl in the water reaches the

magnificent MacColl's Rift, an enormous chamber. From there, varied passage leads to a short pitch/climb down into a fine section of streamway which can be explored for a few hundred metres.

For many years we held an agreement with the National Trust to allow clubs, but not individuals, to be granted access permits on eight Saturdays through May to September.

A few months ago, we reviewed the Robinsons' Pot access agreement. As well as several sections having become outdated, we wanted to ensure that individuals are not unfairly excluded from access due to outdated insurance interpretations.

A requirement of National Trust is public liability insurance, something we know from discussions a few years ago about Birks Fell Cave. With Birks Fell Cave being on access land, this naturally afforded a right to access, as well as protection from liability for the landowner, hence we were able to bring this site out of access restrictions altogether.

However, due to the location of Robinsons' Pot, insurance would remain essential for consented access.

We are thankful to The National Trust, who were supportive of updating the agreement, so we can now issue permits to all BCA members, both individuals and clubs.

Our Access Coordinator can arrange permits by email, but please be mindful that the tenants at Darnbrook Farm need to be given advanced notice of which dates cavers will be visiting, so they can ensure the entrance is unobstructed. Please try to plan your trip in advance. All the details of how to do this can be found on our website.



The quirky location of the Robinsons' Pot entrance. Photo by Gary Douthwaite.

Bowland

Bowland is now the only area in our region where individuals are excluded from an access arrangement that we facilitate.

Bowland offers a few excellent short caves, including Whitewell Pot, Hell Hole and Whitewell Cave, and a visit to all three is a fine day out, particularly on a nice summer day.

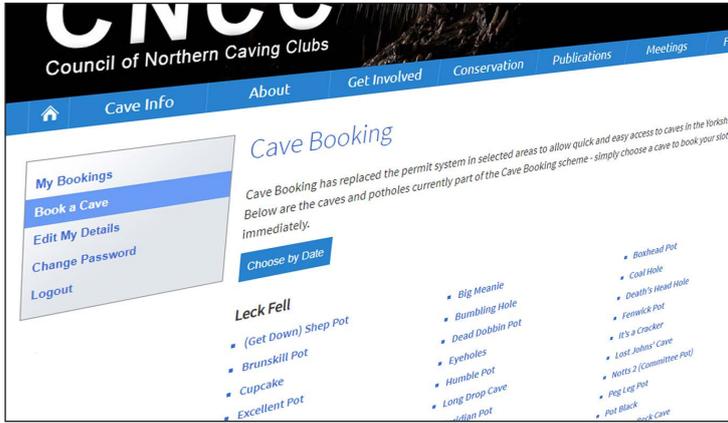
The access agreement, with the Duchy of Lancaster, was drawn up at a time when the belief was that only clubs offered the necessary public liability insurance to ensure the landowner was covered.

A review of this agreement is underway, and we hope to present more news in a future issue of this newsletter.



Whitewell Pot, Bowland, by Gary Douthwaite.

Our online cave booking system



booking.cncc.org.uk

For several years CNCC has maintained an online booking system for the caves of Leck Fell, Casterton Fell (for the Ease Gill entrances on the north side of the river, e.g. Lancaster Hole, Cow Pot, County Pot, Wretched Rabbit, Pool Sink and Top Sink) and Ingleborough Estate (Gaping Gill, Newby Moss, The Allotment, Hurnel Moss).

This system was introduced as a replacement for the old permit systems for recreational cavers on these fells, and was a goodwill gesture and compromise to the owners of the estates who wished to maintain some kind of access facilitation on their land.

At our October 2024 Committee Meeting, we undertook a periodic review of the online booking system. The aim was to decide whether it is something we should continue to endorse and support, despite all of the caves involved being on access land.

We decided that, in light of the benefits the system brings to our relations with these three major estates, and the positive feedback cavers have given (many of who like the system), we have decided to continue the operation for the immediate future.

We would like to remind and encourage cavers to use the booking system if visiting caves in these three areas. The system is very simple to register for and use, is open to all recreational cavers, and can allow last-minute bookings.

Most of the potholes allow one booking per entrance per day, but a few less SRT-orientated entrances (Committee Pot aka Notts II, Wretched Rabbit, County Pot and also Lancaster Hole) allow two bookings per day. Please book only what you need, and if you need to book more dates than our nominal limits just contact our admin team (booking@cncc.org.uk) to discuss.

Please use the system out of courtesy to the landowners and other cavers. If everyone uses the system, there are also benefits in helping to spread traffic and avoid multiple groups becoming congested in one pothole (nobody wants queues at pitches).

We also encourage understanding that the system is voluntary, not mandatory, so a booking is never a guarantee of exclusivity to the cave. Please be understanding and courteous if you encounter others in a pothole that you have booked.

TRAINING

Meet the CNCC training team



The CNCC training team (left to right):

Mark Richards

Helen Hooper

*Ian Patrick
(CNCC Training Officer)*

Jo White

Sam Litten

Our trainers are all instructors who run our workshops on a discounted rate, on the basis that their discount is accompanied by CNCC/BCA subsidy - a kind of 'matched' subsidy scheme. The pairing of the subsidies allows us to run our workshops at very accessible prices.

In addition to this, the training team recently gave up their time free-of-charge to get-together to spend a full day going through all of the skills and techniques CNCC is teaching, to ensure trainer-to-trainer consistency, and building a consensus on the best methods of delivery.

We're really proud of the training opportunities CNCC now offers and the framework under which these are provided. We're also thankful to our trainers, and particularly our Training Officer, Ian, who brings all of this together, and to the BCA who contribute to the financial subsidy.

Our workshops are popular not just with northern cavers, but with people travelling from all over the country. We regularly get people at our events who have travelled hundreds of miles. Therefore, we are supporting caving nationally as well as for our own region. If there are any workshops you have been struggling to get a space on please do let us know (training@cncc.org.uk) to help us assess demand.

CNCC's new-to-caving initiative gains momentum



Joanne, one of our new-to-caving participants, enjoying our karst landscape. Photo courtesy of Ian Patrick.

Our new-to-caving initiative is nearly two years old, and over this time we have run numerous events either in partnership with local clubs or, more recently, commercial instructors. We advertise the events, coordinate signup and payment, and then hand over to the organisers a few weeks beforehand to arrange the finer details.

These events are aimed at those who believe caving could become a hobby rather than just people wanting a one-off outdoor experience. To support this, our events include an educational focus, covering safety and conservation, as well as support and advice for anyone looking to take the next steps.

After a slow start in 2023, things are picking up. We produced leaflets and posters to promote these events, and these can now be found distributed all over the Yorkshire Dales and beyond. If you would like any, simply email pr@cncc.org.uk

Our more recent sessions have been selling out very quickly indeed, and several participants have now taken the next steps into caving, including joining clubs, and/or progressing onto one of our new-to-SRT workshops. We're delighted to present here a few great success stories from Amy and Joanne.

Joanne from Manchester

“ I'm Joanna, a 34-year-old lawyer working in Manchester. I live in Yorkshire, having returned to my roots about seven years ago after a decade living in New Zealand.

I enjoy the outdoors, and I do a lot of hiking. More recently I've also got into running, completing my first 10k this year. I also love skiing and did my first trip in Europe this year. I was a bit rusty and definitely more nervous than I was in my 20s. When I lived by the sea I did a lot of sailing, competing nationally in New Zealand. However, it has now been years since I last was on a dingy.

I have a border collie called Tyra Thunderpaws, who likes to join my adventures.

I walked past Bull Pot Farm when on a hike and I popped in to see what it was about. This led to me organising a weekend away there for a hiking club, and while staying there I found a leaflet about CNCC's new-to-caving workshops and signed up.

I loved it, and since then I have also completed the new-to-SRT training and been on some caving adventures with friends.

For 2025, I want to improve my fear of heights, have my first SRT trip outside of the training workshops, and learn more about the geology of caves. My main plans are to enjoy exploring a whole new underground world, that I never considered before!



Joanne (right), courtesy of Ian Patrick.

Amy from Newcastle

“Hi there, I’m Amy, an A&E nurse from Newcastle.

Following a diving trip out to Mexico in January to see the underwater caverns of the Cenotes, I wanted to have a go at caving in the UK and see if I could build skills which would help in cave diving as well as dry caving exploration.

After an awesome CNCC new-to-caving event at Long Churn I couldn’t wait to come back and explore more of the underground adventures on offer in The Dales. I signed up for the CNCC’s new-to-SRT workshop. This provided a relaxed environment to learn the ‘dark art’ of SRT and skills that will allow me to explore the numerous caves in the area.

I took the decision to join the Craven Pothole Club (despite recommendations to look at all clubs), and I have been with

them since the beginning of September. I’ve thoroughly enjoyed getting stuck into everything they have put on offer.

Outside of caving I can regularly be found scuba diving, volunteering with a local marine life protection charity and exploring the countryside.

So far, every trip with the club has been a great learning experience with all of the members being incredibly helpful and supportive, and I have immediately been made to feel welcome and encouraged. I can’t wait to put my SRT training to good use out in the Dales.

In the future I’d like to build on my foundational training with plenty of experience and hope to combine this with my love of diving to allow me to explore wet and dry cave systems both here at home and internationally.



Amy, courtesy of Ian Patrick.



Our intensive (2:1) underground rescue training, June 2024. Courtesy of Sam Litten.



The CNCC training facility at the Yorkshire Dales Guides barn. Courtesy of Sam Litten.

Autumn/Winter 2024 Training Workshops

Back in August, we announced our Autumn-Winter workshop program, spanning August through to March. We saw huge demand for these, with several sessions filling up just from our email to our mailing list (who always get a one-day head-start), and most spaces being taken after they were advertised elsewhere. The full catalogue is shown below, and at the time of writing, there are still several vacancies across a few of the 2025 sessions. Signup is on our website, where you can also join our mailing list to receive regular updates.

17 Aug
SRT rigging 2:1 intensive (underground)

14 Sep
Underground SRT refresher (easier cave)

21-22 Sep
New-to-SRT/refresher (two days)

13 October
Underground SRT refresher (harder cave)

19 October
New-to-SRT/refresher (indoors)

19-20 October
New-to-SRT/refresher (two days)

20 October
Underground SRT refresher (easier cave)

10 November
SRT rescue 2:1 intensive (underground)

10 November
SRT rescue introductory (indoors)

30 November
SRT rigging 2:1 intensive (underground)

1 December
Underground SRT refresher (easier cave)

7 December
New to rigging/rigging refresher (indoors)

8 December
SRT rescue intermediate (indoors)

14 December
SRT refresher (one day indoors)

18-19 January
New to SRT/ refresher (two days)

18 January
Underground SRT refresher (harder cave)

19 January
SRT rescue advanced (indoors)

25-26 January
New-to-SRT/refresher (two days)

1 February
SRT refresher (one day indoors)

2 February
SRT underground refresher (underground)

8-9 February
SRT intermediate refresher (two days)

15 February
SRT rescue foundation/basics (indoors)

16 February
SRT refresher (one day indoors)

22 February
New to rigging/rigging refresher (indoors)

23 February
SRT rescue introductory (indoors)

1 March
SRT underground intermediate (underground)

2 March
SRT rescue intensive (2:1 tuition)

8-9 March
New to SRT/basics refresher (two days)

22 March
SRT refresher (one day indoors)

22 March
SRT rigging intensive (2:1 tuition)

23 March
SRT rescue intermediate (indoors)

Discover the resources of the CNCC website

The CNCC website has a huge amount of information and resources for cavers in northern England and Scotland. Whether you're a seasoned caver or just starting out, the CNCC website has loads of information to help. Here's just a few examples...

Cave information

Information on access to the most visited caves in our region, plus rigging topos, route descriptions and safety notices.

cncc.org.uk/caving

Exploration Grants

Exploration grants available across our area to support those seeking to discover new places that others might enjoy.

cncc.org.uk/resources/exploration-grants

Press and Media

A dedicated page for press/media enquiries to be directed to.

cncc.org.uk/resources/press

Digging guidelines for SSSI locations

Many of the caves in our area are designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Here's how to get permission to dig.

cncc.org.uk/conservation/digging-guidelines

Assets

All equipment owned by CNCC available for northern caver use.

cncc.org.uk/resources/assets

Minimal Impact Caving Guidelines

A thought-provoking Natural England/BCA guide to how we can all minimise the impact of our trips on the cave environment.

cncc.org.uk/conservation/caving-guidelines

Anchor information

Resources on all of CNCC's anchor locations in our region, anchor types and anchor safety/use instructions.

cncc.org.uk/equipment

Reporting issues

Report underground hazards, defective anchors, topo or description errors, cave info errors or cave conservation issues.

cncc.org.uk/caving/report

Spotlight on...

Keldheads Cave, Wensleydale

Keldheads Cave in Wensleydale, this and other photos by Alex Bayfield.

As part of this new periodic feature, we are keen to shine the spotlight on some of our region's interesting but less visited caves, particularly those outside of the Three Counties / Three Peaks area, and especially any which could benefit from some volunteer work to reopen or restore.

We start with a great report by Alex Bayfield from OMUC Caving Group, on Keldheads Cave in Wensleydale. This is 600m long, with a main streamway and a labyrinth of passages to explore. Sadly, Alex's team seem to have been the first visitors in years and found one of the connection points only 100m from the entrance to be blocked with accumulated sludge.

What is clear from his report is that they had a great day, despite the short distance covered - A testimony to the contribution of good company, high spirits and a good sense of adventure to a successful caving trip.

We hope to inspire a team to help re-open access to the rest of the cave. It sounds like a few hours with some simple tools might be sufficient.

Over to Alex...

“We headed over to Wensleydale on Friday, determined to get some mountain biking in before going underground on the Saturday. Actually, we decided to tie the two activities together. The plan was simple: Go and find Keldheads Cave. We cycled up the road and left the bikes, and contrary to expectations, it was very easy to find, just next to the road.

After a resurgence entrance the size of a small shed, a shine of a pathetically weak mobile phone torch confirmed there was good caving to be had up the active streamway.

Saturday came, and armed with a hangover, meat sweats from an epic BBQ, and a can-do attitude, we headed the short distance to Preston-Under-Scar and parked on a wider section of road a short distance from the cave.

We're not used to caving in July and we were concerned of overheating with our equipment. Al went full caving suit, no wetsuit. I went wetsuit and caving trousers from my two-piece, and Ash foolishly went wetsuit with a T-shirt over it to "protect his wetsuit". We felt like 'proper cavers' rather than the barely weekend warriors we actually are, exploring a rarely visited cave.

The only information we were able to find on it was a 50-year-old survey from the excellent Moldywarps Speleological Group. Our club have a moto of "follow the shiny rock", this nearly always being the correct way due to polishing by previous cavers. No chance of this today, as it was clear this cave has not been visited by many people.

We headed up the streamway. The large entrance gave us a false sense that this was going to be easy, but within seconds we were crawling up the stream, the initial crystal-clear water getting disturbed into a brown murky flow so taking a little time to see where to put my arthritic knees. The crawling didn't last that long before it too low for us to even be on our knees!

A few short passages on the left into Inlet Chamber were left for later. Instead, we continued up the main streamway to an area described as Collapse Chambers on the map. This was probably wider than the rest of the cave but still low, and the connection between the two 'areas' of the chamber needed bodily contortion for the larger caver (me). Progress was slow!

Al and I stayed right up Harmonica Passage. Ash went up the left-hand passage. The two soon converged and we met together at a small hole in the ceiling to the next passage.



One of the more spacious sections of the cave!

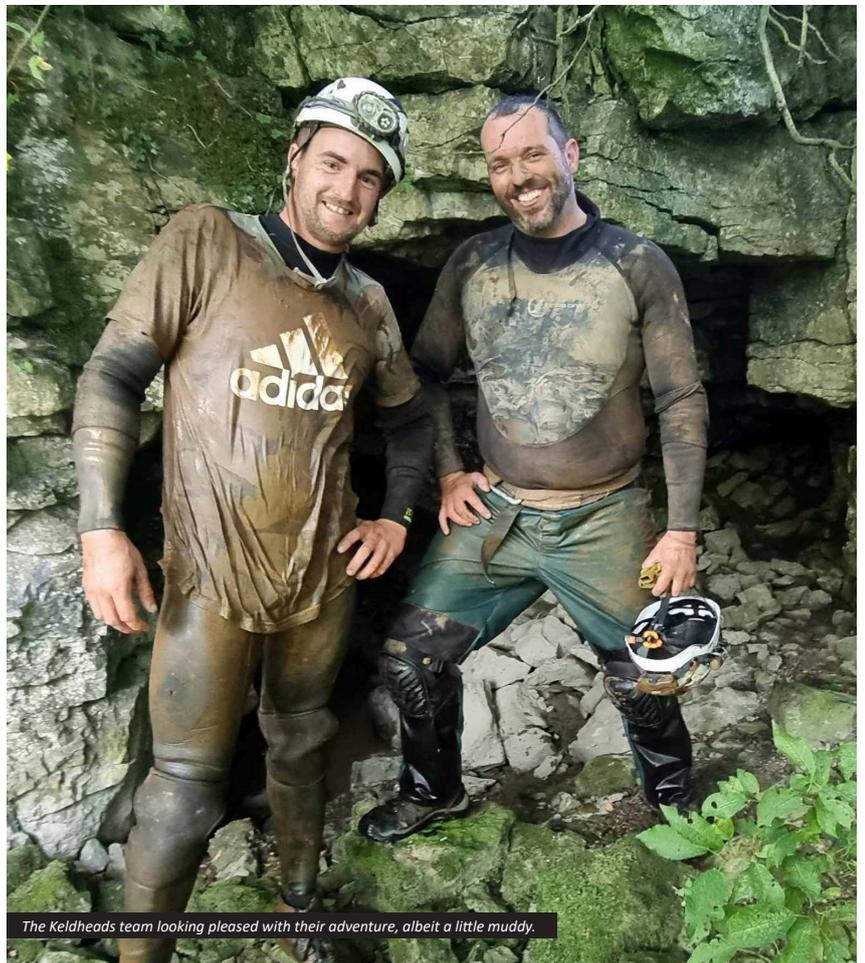
We climbed to find the dig and then the duck (marked on the MSG survey). This area was full of silt and sludge, which we estimated (by putting arms in) to be 10 inch deep. We had neither the time nor inclination to dig this out, so sadly, this was to be the end of our forward progress.

We decided to visit every passage on the way out, ensuring all connecting passages were thoroughly explored, with Ash exclaiming in Inlet Chamber that "there's room to dance up here".

Keldheads certainly is not a beautiful cave, but it's a cave we enjoyed. You will spend the majority of your time on your knees, belly and back and is certainly not easy for a 6'2" rugby player like me! As you pull yourself through, be careful of the many sharp rocks, and definitely wear a full caving suit! Ash's T-shirt to 'protect' his wetsuit had more holes in it than Boris Johnson's Covid party excuses.

To find the cave go north out of Preston-Under-Scar for about half a mile. There is a derelict farm building on the left just after a quarry, and the cave is found on the opposite side of the road, through a gate. To avoid blocking field entrances, we parked on a large verge a short distance up the hill.

Do you have a story to tell from one of our less well visited caves? Maybe a cave where renewed digging interest, or volunteer effort for conservation could be worthwhile? pr@cncc.org.uk



Your CNCC

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: Kai Trusson - access@cncc.org.uk

Training: Ian Patrick - training@cncc.org.uk

Equipment Rep: Mark Richards - equipment@cncc.org.uk

Individual Caver Rep: Tim Allen - icrep@cncc.org.uk

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

BCA Youth and Dev. Rep: Aila Taylor - ydrop@cncc.org.uk

Web Administrator: Gary Douthwaite - web@cncc.org.uk

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

Inclusivity Coordinator: Josh White - inclusivity@cncc.org.uk

Cave info, rigging topos, descriptions & more at : cncc.org.uk

Find CNCC on social media...



Facebook



Bluesky



X



Instagram



Threads



YouTube



Follow the CNCC board on UK Caving: cncc.org.uk/ukcaving

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: cncc.org.uk/getinvolved