

Editorial

It's been a while since our last proper newsletter (Sept 2019). The lack of cavers to read printed copies in usual hotspots has focussed us to online media during the pandemic, but with the imminent reopening of huts, we are keen to get the newsletter going again.

Some of the stories in this issue are pre-pandemic, so we know that many of you will have seen them before via our online media. However, we believe this newsletter provides a great compilation and record of our work over the last 18 months, albeit a little more retrospectively than usual.

During the pandemic, we performed several anchor and conservation projects, we continued to promote northern caving, and we have now launched a catalogue of post-pandemic training opportunities to help people regain confidence to get back underground; all detailed in these pages.

We look forward to seeing you soon.

Matt Ewles (Editor)

Your CNCC

www.cncc.org.uk

 /CouncilOfNorthernCavingClubs

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CHECC's northern guide

At our October 2020 meeting, Rob Watson from the Council of Higher Education Caving Clubs (CHECC) presented a draft guide aimed at student clubs visiting our region who might not be so familiar with our caves and their relative challenges. This is intended to provide inspiration as well as allowing an appropriate trip to be selected for the skills of each group.

We were delighted to support this initiative, and so we worked with Rob to refine the content. The finished guide is now beautifully presented online at:

www.checc.org

Although this is intended to help student groups lacking strong local knowledge, it might also be useful to anyone looking for some inspiration or guidance on the relative challenges associated with our finest caves and potholes.



Press and media

We are pleased to launch our new media page:

www.cncc.org.uk/about/media

Here you will find lots of frequently asked questions which may prove useful for anyone putting together caving related media (article, website, poster, talk, flier etc).

We also include an image gallery portraying the best of northern caving, with photos courtesy of Mark Burkey, Clive Westlake and Gary Douthwaite. These photos are available

for use by anyone creating media intended to promote or give a positive reflection of caving.



Access Officer required

Our long-serving Access Officer, Tim Allen stepped down this year. Tim has been the lead player in the greatest northern access revolution since the CNCC formed. Thanks largely to Tim's work, we have abolished permit restrictions for most caves found on access land, while sustaining good relations with landowners.

As we see from the ongoing issues at High Birkwith (reported later) and restrictions at a few access land caves such as Birks Fell, the role is far from redundant. We are looking for a volunteer to continue this work.

Please get in touch (secretary@cncc.org.uk) if this is a role that interests you.

New mailing list

Although we often email our member clubs, until now we have had no means of emailing interested individuals with northern caving news. This has now been addressed and last year we were delighted to launch the CNCC's mailing list:

www.cncc.org.uk/mailling-list

Anyone can sign up. Simply enter your email address and you will receive periodic emails (check your spam folder) with details that we feel northern cavers should know. This might include access changes, upcoming training opportunities, AGM details, safety warnings and details of new anchors or updated cave descriptions and topos.

More Ease Gill descriptions

One of our most popular online descriptions is Ease Gill Caverns, which previously covered Lancaster Hole, Cow Pot, County Pot, Wretched Rabbit and Pool Sink and the routes between them.

Following a major update, we have now added:

- Wretched Rabbit Spiral Staircase
- Boundary Pot to Stop Pot
- Top Sink to Stop Pot

Boundary Pot is one of the less-well visited entrances. Settled weather is essential, but this SRT-free route takes you on a varied and splendid adventure which joins the main system at Nagasaki, halfway between Top Sink and Stop Pot.

With Wretched Rabbit currently being closed after a collapse (see overleaf), Boundary Pot and Top Sink may see more traffic than usual this year, so we hope these descriptions are useful.

Some winter collapses to note...

Great Douk Cave: A newly opened shakehole has recently broken into the main passage, about 75m upstream of Little Douk Pot. The streamway is still passable, but the collapse is not a place to loiter as the near vertical side are likely to collapse further. We will be discussing options for remedial work in due course.

Simpson/Swinsto: We have received a warning that the boulders at the foot of the final pitch (leading down to the Kingsdale Master Cave) show signs of recent movement and this area is currently a little insecure. We advise anyone visiting this area to be particularly observant to the status of this boulder slope.

Fossil Pot guide

Fossil Pot offers a fun, quirky trip near Grassington with no access restrictions and requiring only modest tackle. The cave is short but has plenty of surprises including entertaining squeezes and a fine river passage. The CNCC is pleased to now offer an online route description for this cracking little cave.

Mayday Hole



Mayday Hole, on Dowlass Moss has been extended to 120m deep and is essentially a new open-access multi-pitch pothole in our region (and the word is that it's actually quite good)!

The team involved have been publishing their excellent story on UKCaving, and CNCC installers are currently fitting anchors, which should be complete a few weeks after this newsletter is published. We will publish a topo and route description in due course.

ACCESS

Online booking update

The CNCC's online booking system was developed to provide a compromise between the flexibility of access that cavers desire, and the facilitation that some landowners requested.

In February 2020, after discussions with Whelprigg Estate, Casterton Fell was added to the system, thereby ending the previous permit system for good.

Online booking is accessed via our website (just click on 'cave booking' in the top right). Anyone can book access to the caves of Ingleborough Estate (Newby/Hurnel Moss, Gaping Gill and the Allotment), Leck Fell or Casterton Fell. One booking per day per entrance is available as standard, although for a few popular and less SRT-orientated sites (currently Wretched Rabbit, County Pot, Lancaster Hole and Notts II), two bookings/day can be made.

Some cavers have said they value the booking system to avoid underground congestion, although this was never the intended purpose of the system.

Ease Gill entrances on the east side of the stream (e.g. Boundary, Link, Mistral, Pippikin) have always been free from restrictions so are not part of the online system. If approaching these from Leck Fell however, a courtesy call at Leck Fell House is still requested.

We encourage use of the system out of courtesy to other cavers and the landowners. For anyone caving without a booking (we do understand that plans can change last minute), we urge courtesy to other groups to ensure everyone can have an enjoyable trip.

In February this year, the booking system was fully revamped to introduce a cleaner, more modern look and a 'friend link' function to allow you to connect your account to friends to see each others bookings (useful for clubs with multiple trip organisers).

Booking system statistics, as of 30th April 2021:

- There are 676 registered users.
- Those specifying gender, 100 are female and 489 are male.
- Those specifying age, the youngest is 18 and the oldest is 80.
- A total of 2146 bookings made since the system launched.

Please use the booking system responsibly; only book what you need and remember to cancel any bookings that are no longer require to free-up availability for others.

High Birkwith access problems

In our last newsletter, we updated you on changes to parking for cavers accessing High Birkwith caves, following refusal of vehicular access to the farm since new owners took residence.

Since then, the situation has deteriorated, and the owners are now denying access to the caves.

Unfortunately, the most popular caves in this area, including Calf Holes, Browgill, Birkwith Cave, Old Ing and Dismal Hill, are not on Access land, so landowner permission is needed.

We will be looking to our Local Access Forum and the National Park for assistance in addressing this matter once the pandemic can no longer be used to justify denying access.

We know that the caves of Birkwith are important sites, not least for introducing people to caving, and we will be doing everything we can to restore permissive access. This will be challenging as we currently have no Access Officer. Therefore, to reiterate our appeal on the front page, a volunteer is needed!

Wretched Rabbit temporarily closed



At the end of March this year, we received news of a major rockfall at the entrance to Wretched Rabbit in Ease Gill. One large block had recently fallen, partially blocking the entrance, and others were dangerously positioned to fall from the cliff above.

Volunteers from Red Rose CPC quickly went to inspect the situation. The roof slabs just inside the entrance were found to be totally unsupported and moving with a finger touch. They would

cause serious injury or worse if they dropped on someone. The entire cliff above the entrance also shows signs of cracking and movement. The entrance has been covered over to discourage entry and remedial work is being discussed, however, this may need considerable engineering and may take some time.

We advise, for your own safety, do not use Wretched Rabbit entrance into Ease Gill Caverns until further notice. Once access is safely restored, the details on our website will be updated. Thank you to Sam Lieberman (RRCPC) for keeping us updated.

Aygill Caverns blocked

Towards the end of last year, we heard reports that erosion of the stream bank just downstream of the entrance to Aygill Caverns had drastically altered the hydrology, with new surface sinks blocking progress through the upper parts of the cave.

In early December, a team built a temporary dam around the new sinks and were able to descend to find the cave now heavily blocked with silt, making it totally inaccessible.

Work has commenced this spring and is being reported on the UKCaving Forum. At the time of writing, the cave is still blocked so visitors are urged to stay away while work continues.

Watch for more announcements on UKCaving and our website.

CONSERVATION

Alum Pot walling



In September 2020, CNCC volunteers spent a wet day rebuilding sections of drystone wall around Alum Pot which protects visitors and livestock. A 5m section was rebuilt completely and another six sections were repaired where the top had fallen.

The CNCC were happy to undertake this work as a goodwill gesture to the Lambert family, who have welcomed cavers onto their land for generations. Alum Pot and Lower Long Churn Caves are not on Access Land, and their approach is not a Public Right of Way, so access here relies on their goodwill.

Mr Lambert charges a modest access fee payable at a box outside Selside Farm (there is no longer any need to knock on the door). We understand that the money raised does not meet the impact cost of maintaining the access.

This site is probably the most important venue for introducing newcomers to caving in the Yorkshire Dales, and our access to this site should not be taken for granted. Thankfully, honesty has given cavers an overall good reputation here over the years.

Thanks to Fred Rattray, Ray Duffy, Andrew Hinde, Andy Hall, Sally Hodge and Ian Hodge. This was supported by Stories in Stone.

Stump Cross cleanup

At the end of October 2019, Craven Pothole Club members borrowed the CNCC's cave cleaning equipment to help clean lampen flora from the show cave at Stump Cross Caverns. A new lid with bat hole was fitted to the original entrance.

Sell Gill Holes fencing

This work was also done a while ago (pre-Covid), but is definitely worthy of retrospective reporting and praise.



On 19th January 2020, in fine but bitterly cold winter sunshine, we had a great turnout from RRCPC, BPC, CPC, Gritstone Club and EPC. The sun shone all morning while the rusty old fence was dismantled and then the new sheep-friendly fence was constructed. Ric and Pat Halliwell then provided soup and refreshments at the CPC cottage. A great project showing off cavers doing their bit to keep popular cave entrances safe and stockproof.



Knacker Trapper Hole

Knacker Trapper, near Chapel-le-Dale, is a popular trip thanks to inclusion in *Not for the Faint Hearted* and owing to its minimalist tackle requirements. In late 2020, a visitor contacted us to report that the entrance climb had moved and was now unstable.



Within a week, our Conservation Officer had assembled a team and done the risk assessments (more complicated than usual due to Covid). The team, including Chris Scaife, Terry Devaney, David Matthews, met on Sunday 20th December, assisted by Andrew Hinde who transported equipment to the site by vehicle.

The entrance was opened out and good progress was made despite cold, wet conditions. Although lots of groundwork was completed, a return trip was needed to install a pipe.

A second team (Andrew Hinde, Tim Sullivan, Alison Avison, Fred Rattray, Russ Brooks, Ged Benn) gathered on 28th December to continue the work.

A 2m x 600mm twin-walled pipe was driven up, while at the hole, rock-chamfering, walling and removal of temporary supports was carried out. The pipe was situated and backfilled with rock to hold it in position, and the soil from the spoil heap was added and topped off with the turf from the original excavation.

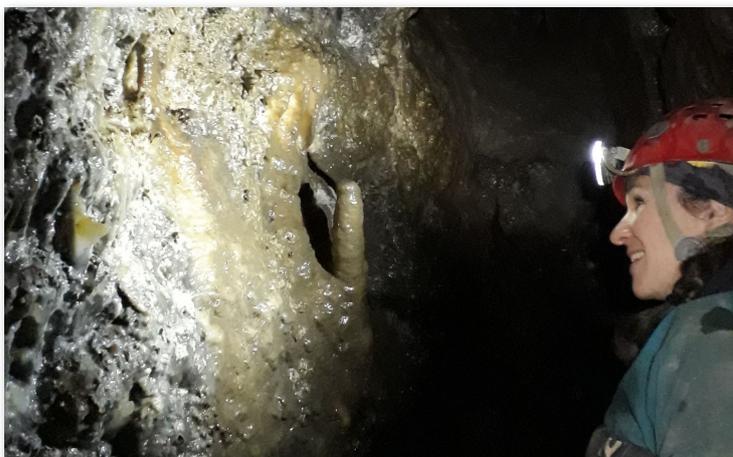
On New Year's Day, Frank Morgan (from Natural England) and Ged Benn took a vehicle up to collect all the rubbish. They also installed a scaffold bar belay at the top of the pipe and a pre-made bat-friendly timber entrance cover was fitted.

We are grateful to the team for their efforts. Despite the Covid precautions, and some foul weather, the job was completed less than a month after it was first reported; an excellent effort from our conservation volunteers. Thank you to the '*Not for the Faint Hearted*' fund for their contribution to the costs.



Lancaster Hole cleanup and remediation

It may be a while ago, but still worthy of capture in this newsletter is the successful Red Rose Cave and Pothole Club conservation day in Lancaster Hole that took place in November 2019.



The event was organised by Holly Bradley (RRCPC Conservation Officer) and involved cleaning formations and removing mud smears caused by careless hands.

Unfortunately, there was also deliberate damage caused by thrown mud, and the team were concerned to see that the conservation tape in the Colonnades had been tampered with and there were footprints on the formations beyond the tape.

We would like to remind everyone that conservation tape is there to protect the cave for others to enjoy; There are no excuses for crossing or removing it; not even for photography.

A few months later, volunteers were back, this time to repair damage to the fell caused by the rescue operation during the tragic January 2020 incident in Lancaster Hole. In total, 14 cavers from RRCPC, York CC, CDG and other individuals turned out and made quick work of filling the rutted areas and flattening the raised areas caused by vehicle access. Nature should now take over and help blend the fell together again.

Those visiting Lancaster Hole are asked to help the fell recover by following the wall to the Cow Pot stile rather than cutting directly to the entrance, particularly when it is boggy.

Tatham Wife stile

This was our final pre-pandemic conservation project!

In February 2020, CNCC Volunteers repaired the stiles in the wall at the top of the steep hill leading towards Tatham Wife Hole. These will no doubt prove a welcome marker to cavers lost in fog on the way back from Tatham Wife for many years to come!



Post-lockdown Kingsdale cleanups

As the first lockdown eased, cavers wasted no time in getting out and about for some cleanup projects in Kingsdale.

Sean and Daisy Latimer spotted lots of rubbish lying around the area of Yordas Wood. They returned with their Dad, Johnny Latimer, and filled two bin bags. A lovely use of a day out to keep this area looking beautiful for others.

Simultaneously, a small team on the opposite side of Kingsdale were tackling a large amount of rubbish in Brown Hill Pot.

Mark Sims reports on the efforts:

"Back in early 2020, three of us had an enjoyable trip down Brown Hill Pot. We were disappointed to see the large amount of abandoned and degrading kit down there, including krabs corroded shut on some of the anchors.

The last pitch was a total mess, with two tatty knotted lines rigged from a thread, and two further ropes rigged from the anchors. We removed two dangerous ropes; however, the corroded metalwork wouldn't budge.

Come spring, our initial efforts at Brown Hill (and Newby Moss Pot) had earned us the donation of a tacklesack from the Not for the Faint Hearted conservation fund. After the lifting of lockdown, it seemed only fitting that the first outing for this should be a return to Brown Hill to finish the cleanup job.



Armed with mole grips and a hacksaw, we enjoyed a smooth trip down to the last pitch, where we rationalised the bundle of fat rope that hadn't fitted in our tacklesack last time.

The mole grips made short work of the rusty krabs, so we moved up to Puits lan Plant. Thankfully, the surplus karabiners here yielded to a couple of blows from the mole grips.

Between Puits lan Plant and the next pitch we added some foul-smelling plastic sheets and some cable to our haul, before removing the last of the surplus metalwork from the restricted pitch head. We made our way to the entrance with some heavy bags but pleased to have left the cave in a far better state than we found it."

Cleanup for Starting Handle

Starting Handle Hole, only a few metres from the Leck Fell road, was dug in the 1970s but explored to 40m depth in the 1990s, where the cave meets a waterlogged termination.

During late summer 2020, Tony Credland was looking forward to a simple short trip, as he reports:

"The mess in the cave was apparent as soon as feet touched down at the base of the entrance pitch. Not much there, but enough to offend Meg Stark who started a quick tidy up whilst I rigged the next pitch. As we descended, it soon became apparent that this was going to be our next conservation project, having recently finished Rough Pot and Calcite Way in Sell Gill. I have never seen such a mess in any cave outside Scotland; nor so many frogs. We nick-named the cave Frog Pot after rescuing a dozen or so."

From September to December, Tony and Meg undertook five trips to Starting Handle Hole, and Tony an additional four solo visits to clear up as much of the digging rubbish as possible.

All the rubbish was brought to the bottom of the entrance pitch, but additional manpower was needed for the final haul up to the surface, particularly given the state of the scaffolding here. This is where Tony contacted the CNCC for assistance.

A conservation team was assembled and in April this year, the team got to work. With lots of volunteers and a six-person limit due to Covid, Tony and Meg were even able to have the day off!

On April 16th Ged Benn met Andrew Hinde on Leck Fell to inspect the shaft since Tony had concerns about the state of the scaffolding at the top. Ged abseiled down inspecting the scaffolding as he went and decided that providing none of the loads caught on the way up, it would be OK to haul the spoil to the surface.

A party of six attended on April 28th and a tripod was erected over the hole to give a straight haul. The CNCC's capstan winch was belayed to the towing hitch of the Hilux and the hauling rope was passed through a snatch block at the bottom of one of the tripod legs and over the pulley at the apex. A jammer was rigged to prevent fall-back when the tension on the winch was released.

With somebody at the bottom tying on and another at the rebelay halfway down the shaft guiding the loads past the scaffolding, we were able to haul all the rubbish out without incident. The spoil was taken back to Colt Park for sorting and disposal.

All in all, a very slick operation. Our thanks to Ged and Andrew, plus Tim Sullivan, Fred Rattray, Pete Bann and Russ Brooks.

This has been an excellent example of caver-driven initiative, with support from CNCC equipment and volunteers. If you know of any other projects or would like similar support for a project of your own, please get in touch; conservation@cncc.org.uk



ANCHORS

Anchor replacements



About three years ago, we introduced a scheme to enable cavers to report anchors which were showing defects, such as:

- Fracturing in the surrounding rock.
- Any physical damage to the anchor itself.
- Movement of the anchor within the resin.
- Movement of the resin and anchor within in the hole.

The reporting tool can be found in the fixed aids section of our website: www.cncc.org.uk/fixed-aids

Cavers really embraced this and over the following years, dozens of reports were received. We examined each of these, but due to limited manpower only the most safety critical were able to be addressed, and the remainder catalogued for monitoring.

Most of the issues were rotational movement of the anchors due to resin shrinkage. One of the benefits of the IC anchors we now use are that they require a smaller (12mm) hole compared to many previous P-type anchors. This reduces the impact of resin shrinkage and is desirable for conservation and practicality. Furthermore, as reported in newsletter 9, we have started using the Fischer Fis EM Plus Epoxy resin which demonstrates reduced shrinkage. This makes it suitable when re-using a larger hole left behind after extraction of an older anchor.

From summer 2020 through to April 2021, several of our approved anchor installers have been working hard to act on our back-catalogue of reported anchors and other issues.

Notts Pot:

The top of the first pitch of Centre Route in Notts Pot had always relied on an almost 90-degree deviation from a natural belay. This presented risks getting on the pitch, particularly for a route often used by new cavers. A team installed a few new anchors in the roof above the pitch to enable safer and more conventional rigging.

Rift Pot (Allotment):

Rift Pot on the Ingleborough Allotment is a splendid vertical adventure, with two routes of descent, one passable in wet conditions. It is even better enjoyed as part of an exchange with neighbouring Long Kin East (for which dry weather is essential).

In June 2020, substantial fracturing of the rock was reported near to the anchors for the third pitch. Two new anchors were installed over the pitch in the centre of the main rift, providing a much safer descent, positioned out of the way of the recently fractured wall. The two original anchors have been removed from service. Our online route description has been updated accordingly.

Alum Pot:

Several reports had been received for Alum Pot, partly due to the volume of traffic this system receives. Three anchors were found to be defective and were replaced.

Hardrawkin Pot:

Hardrawkin Pot also received several reports. All four anchors on the first pitch were found to have movement and were replaced. A few of the wobbly anchors still took quite some force to extract, which may seem reassuring, but should not be taken for granted.

Lost Johns' Cave:

The team audited Lost Johns' Cave. A few defective anchors were replaced, and several discrepancies in the topo were corrected.

Diccan Pot:

Diccan Pot presented challenges. As well reports of movement and resin crumbling due to the lashing of the water over three decades, it was agreed that other improvements could be made. A handful of loose anchors have been replaced, two additional anchors have been added, and one loose anchor relocated to a more sensible position. The topo has been updated.

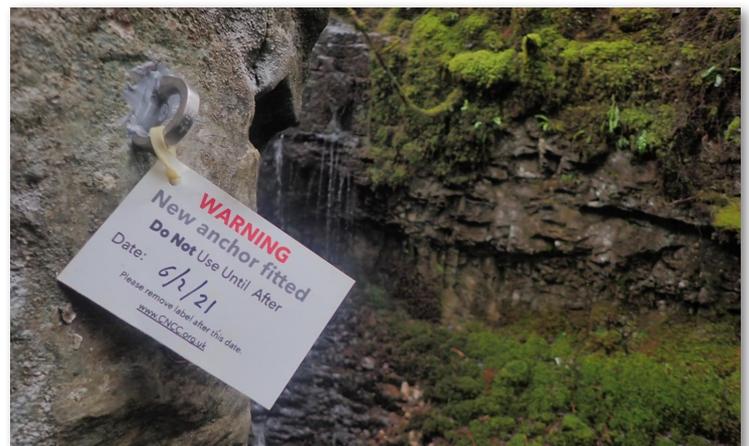
Single anchor replacements at other sites:

From December 2020 to April 2021, one-off anchor replacements in response to caver reports have also been performed in:

- Upper Long Churn (Dr Bannister's)
- Notts Pot (pitch into Three Ways Chamber)
- Simpson's Pot (Storm Pot)
- Ireby Fell Caverns (Shadow Route)
- Marble Steps Pot (top of Gully route)
- Yordas Pot (Middle Entrance and Chapter House)
- Jingling Pot (Gully and Lateral Cleft)
- Swinsto Hole (Spout Pitch)
- Rowten Pot (Eyehole Route)
- Pool Sink (second and third pitches)
- Heron Pot (traditional route)

Credits:

This represents a substantial effort by Ian Patrick, Graham Coates, Kieran Hodgson, Gary Douthwaite, with help from Paul Moore, Tim Bosley, Matt Ewles and Toby Buxton. Thanks to Alan Speight for his continued work to coordinate our anchor scheme.





Our Training Officer, Ian Patrick, had a rough first year in the role, with all attempts to organise events thwarted by Covid.

With things now looking up, we are pleased to offer a comprehensive series of training opportunities throughout this summer, from late May to September this year, including at least 15 sessions.

Topics include (dates correct at time of writing):

- **SRT refresher (May 29th, additional dates can be added if enough people request more sessions):** For anyone a little out of practice with SRT after the pandemic and looking for some friendly, professional tuition to rebuild skills and confidence before venturing underground on rope again.
- **Rigging workshops (June 5th, September 4th):** Aimed at competent SRT users, who are keen to start rigging, including everything from packing the rope to rigging of traverses, Y-hangs and deviations.
- **SRT Rescue workshops (May 30th, June 6th, July 18th, September 5th):** Aimed at competent SRT users who want to expand their skills into rescue techniques. The workshops will cover the kit, prevention strategies, ways to assist a tired caver, hauling, cut and lower or 'snatch' rescue techniques.
- **New to SRT (June 26-27th, August 7-8th, September 25th):** For those new to SRT (or extremely rusty) these sessions will teach everything you need from putting on the kit, pitch head procedures, rope manoeuvres and how to appreciate fall-factors on traverses, pitch heads and rebelay.
- **Trip leadership skills (September 26th):** For those starting to lead trips of less experienced cavers, a thought-provoking workshop discussing trip planning, choices of kit, making rigging more novice-friendly, and general recommendations for ensuring less experienced cavers have a great trip.
- **Advanced SRT skills (July 17th):** Our 'SRT improver' workshop is aimed at cavers who have some ropework skills already but are keen to develop these into more advanced skills.
- **Photography workshop (August 14-15th):** We are pleased to announce a two-day workshop hosted by award-winning cave photographer, Mark Burkey. In this workshop you will learn about the kit you need, how to protect it, and how to use it. Both days will involve an underground session. Bring your own existing kit, but a selection of spare kit will also be available to enable participants to 'play' with alternatives.
- **Geology tour (19th June and 18th September):** Opportunities to better understand the amazing geology of the Yorkshire Dales, hosted by Dr. John Helm.

Up-to-date details for all sessions and signup can be found here:

www.cncc.org.uk/training

Several of these dates were advertised via Facebook, UKCaving, and our mailing list in April. Within a couple of weeks, many of the sessions in May and June were fully booked up.

We are learning what subject matter is most popular and are always adjusting our training offerings to match. As a result, some additional dates have now been added, and at the time of writing, several of the sessions for July to September still have availability.

More will be added, so follow us on Facebook, UKCaving, or our mailing list to stay informed. If there is no space on a session you would like to attend, please email training@cncc.org.uk because, if there is sufficient demand, we will organise more sessions to accommodate.

This is the most extensive series of training opportunities the CNCC has offered for decades and we are thankful to Ian for putting this together despite challenging circumstances.

The sessions have an associated fee as a contribution to the running costs, including professional trainers, and venue hire. In many cases that fee reflects as little as half the actual per-person cost of running the event, with CNCC subsidising the difference.

Any questions, please email: training@cncc.org.uk

Please email to let us know if you have any suggestions or requests for training that the CNCC can help with. We are open to ideas and keen to help with any training needs of northern cavers.

Want to get involved?

Being involved in the CNCC can take many forms.

Full membership:

Our full member clubs can vote at our AGM, will be called upon for input on any serious matters that arise through the year and will receive email notifications and updates. If your club is not already a full member (you can find a list on our website), you can contact our Secretary for information on how to apply.

Officer:

Our officers 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, and anyone interested should contact our Secretary for more information.

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. If you are interested in standing for the Committee, please contact our Secretary for more information.

Find more information at:
www.cncc.org.uk/getinvolved

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