

NORTHERN CAVING

CNCC
Council of Northern Caving Clubs

Newsletter of the Council of Northern Caving Clubs

Issue 14 December 2023

Editorial

Since our last newsletter several months ago, we have been busy. The evolution of our 'New to Caving' initiative, accompanied by expanded training workshop offerings have both been a major focus. Efforts to promote caving in our region, plus conservation and anchoring projects have continued unhindered by the wetter than usual summer. These stories have already been shared as-they-happened via UKCaving, other social media platforms, and our mailing list, but this newsletter, with it's new-look 'Northern Caving' branding, provides a compilation to nicely showcase our work.

Matt Ewles (Editor)

Your CNCC

cncc.org.uk

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New to Caving initiatives

Over the last year, the CNCC has been leading an initiative to support local cavers and clubs to run 'try caving' events. The inaugural event in February was run by the Craven Pothole Club, and was reported in our last newsletter. More recently the Yorkshire Subterranean Society have run two further events, and the Red Rose Cave and Pothole Club have run one.

We are now looking for more clubs to host events. Thank you again to the Craven Pothole Club who are kicking off 2024 with an event on 2nd March. Signup for this is available on our website.

These events provide an opportunity to try caving as part of a friendly and educational day with local cavers. They are pitched at individuals or small groups who are seeking to try caving as a potential hobby, and not at the parties or corporate events market.

To promote future sessions, we have produced some glossy leaflets and A3 posters, which we are keen to get into appropriate venues and to anyone who frequently meets people looking to try caving. If you would like some, please get in touch with our PR/Communications Officer.

We hope these will be particularly useful at future Gaping Gill winchmeets and at the show-caves across our region, but we are keen to get them into any venues where



people might be pondering caving as a hobby. A significant number were distributed at the recent Petzl Underground Session at the Kendal Mountain Festival, which hosted a roundup on northern cave discovery.

For anyone wanting to share the leaflet digitally, it is available to view on our new-to-caving page (cncc.org.uk/new-to-caving) and on our publications page.

If you would like to partner with us to run a future event, please contact our Training Officer (training@cncc.org.uk). We welcome clubs and individuals alike, although please note that currently we rely on you to provide spare caving kit for participants, as CNCC does not have stock. We can advertise your event, organise signup, collect any payment, and provide educational materials. You can then contact participants before the event to introduce yourselves and confirm final arrangements.

AGM



16 March 2024 - Clapham Village Hall

Our 2024 AGM will be held on 16th March, 10am at Clapham Village Hall.

Our full member clubs are encouraged to come along. Please email our secretary in advance of the meeting to nominate your voting representative.

We welcome anyone to attend, regardless of whether you are affiliated to a club. If you are keen to participate, have anything you

wish to say or any ideas you wish to put forward, or even if you just want to spectate to see who we are and how we work, you will be warmly welcomed.

For clubs wishing to stand for committee, or individuals wishing to stand to represent non-club cavers or for an officer position, you must email our secretary no later than 20th January to give notice. If you have any questions, our Secretary is happy to help.

In-person attendance is recommended, but online joining will also be possible via Zoom or similar platform. If you would like to join remotely, please email our secretary during the week prior to the meeting to receive the joining details.

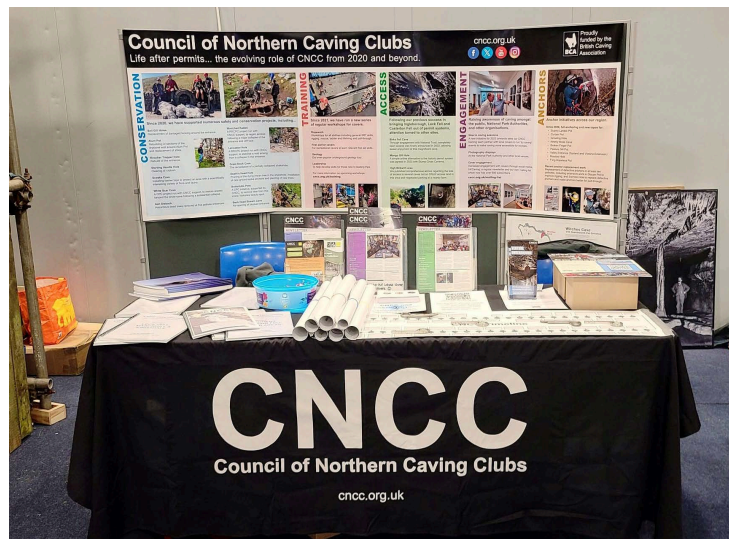
CNCC at Hidden Earth 2023

Hidden Earth was back this year for the first time since 2019, held 15-17th September at Portishead near Bristol.

The whole weekend didn't disappoint, and despite concerns that attendance might be muted due to the long gap since the last event, and the relatively late notice of the date, it turned out to almost be a record-breaking year, with lots of new faces.

The lecture schedule (organised by our Webmaster, Gary Douthwaite who also runs the Hidden Earth website) was packed. There was an excellent balance of talks, and northern England was well represented by Frank Pearson's northern roundup covering F'ing Hopeless Pot, Mayday Hole and Five Ways Pot amongst others, Fleur Loveridge covering the big new discoveries near The Stang Forest close to Gretadale, Adele Ward explaining the recent big extensions to Fairy Holes in Weardale, and Matt Ewles highlighting the recent work in the North York Moors. North of the border also got well-deserved coverage thanks to Alan Jeffreys' enthusiastic Scottish roundup to wake us up on the Sunday morning.

The CNCC were present once again, with a stall in the trade hall including a bespoke poster to showcase all our work since 2020 (available to download via the publications page of our website).



This was also the perfect opportunity to launch our new 'Venture Underground' leaflet shown on the front of this newsletter. Plus we had printed copies of our cave descriptions and rigging topos for passers-by to peruse, while chatting to our volunteers.

We look forward to seeing you at Hidden Earth next year!

New youth development representative

We are pleased to welcome Aila Taylor to the CNCC team, as our new Youth Development Representative.

Having started caving with Newcastle University CC and then continuing with Cambridge University CC, Aila has been heavily involved with student caving, including CHECC, for the last five years.



Now living in the Dales, Aila caves regularly with the BPC and RRCPC. She has a strong understanding of the challenges young cavers face and the measures necessary to mitigate these.

By working with CNCC, she hopes to improve accessibility for young cavers in our region and improve coordination between the various different caving organisations in order to best support the development of youth/student caving.

In just a few months, Aila has worked with us towards establishing the exploration grants reported here, ensuring these are well-pitched at younger cavers keen to start digging projects. In due course, she hopes to organise digging workshops to provide further support.

Aila will also be a liaison between the BCA's Youth Development team and CNCC Committee and help us identify ways we can better support youth caving in partnership with our national body.

Thank you Aila for coming forward, this should be a really positive step for us and we look forward to working with you!

Caving photo exhibition in Settle

In 2022, we arranged a photo exhibition of caving at the Yorkshire Dales National Park centre in Bainbridge (see Newsletter 12).

This initiative was kindly led for us by Tim Allen. Several high-quality canvas caving prints were produced to showcase caving under the theme of Pitches, Passage, Pretties and People. These photos were an inspiration to National Park staff and visitors, and they helped to further cement the significance of caving as an activity in the National Park; an important recognition!

Our chairman subsequently managed to secure a display of these prints at The Folly in Settle. This display was live until September this year and received lots of positive feedback.

We are currently working on a plan that will see the photos further displayed in Clapham for Spring next year, but if anyone has any other suitable locations in mind please do get in touch.



CNCC exploration grants

Over summer, we examined ways to spend money!

For several years, CNCC has held reserves of around £12000, but after discussion at our June Committee meeting, we identified that we only need to hold £8000 to cover our annual expenditure prior to reimbursement from BCA for the majority of our work.

To spend money, in a non-BCA reimbursable way, we welcome applications for exploration grants across northern England and Scotland. This initiative aims to support those who seek to further our knowledge of northern caves and discover new places that future generations of cavers might enjoy.

Funding is primarily intended to help cover costs associated to procurement of materials and consumable items or equipment hire, but other costs will be considered.

To make an application, we require a summary of your project including the nature of the work you are seeking funding for (e.g. shaft sinking, stabilisation, digging, diving, conservation, surveying), project timeframes, the amount of money you need to support this, and, as accurately as possible, a costed breakdown of how this is going to be spent. We will also need evidence, where relevant, that permissions and a conservation plan or in place.

We know that many established diggers will not use this initiative, preferring to self-fund to avoid bureaucracy or preserve CNCC funds for those who most need them. However, we hope this will support anyone for who funding is a prohibitory factor, perhaps encouraging younger or student cavers to get more involved in exploration.

For more information, including an online form, please visit: cncc.org.uk/resources/exploration-grants



ACCESS

Wretched Rabbit open



Over two years ago, the entrance to Wretched Rabbit, a popular, non-SRT-requiring entrance into Ease Gill Caverns, became unstable. The cliff face above the entrance, having been subject to extensive fracturing, deposited a large boulder into the entrance, with remaining roof slabs showing dangerous signs of movement.

Based on the reports we received, we took the immediate decision to advise against all access, and discussions were initiated about what could be done to restore the entrance, which is very popular with novice groups, including university freshers.

Work to restore the entrance was partially delayed by Covid, volunteer resource and other factors, but over summer this year, the team from Red Rose Cave and Pothole Club, assisted by CNCC, have been hard at work. Permissions were arranged, and materials were brought down to the site, with many thanks to Alan Middleton at Leck Fell House for his assistance and permission.

The unstable cliff has been shored with scaffolding and a plastic pipe installed into the entrance. The area around the pipe has been backfilled and blocks stacked up the cliff face to hopefully provide a long-term solution to the fragile rock behind. In due course, the blockwork will gain moss and blend in with the surroundings.

The team have done some gardening on the handline climbs just beyond the entrance, and some remedial work on the stacked block walling around the upper section of the Spiral Staircase route.

As with any such rebuilding project, caution is advised, because the blockwork will no doubt settle over time and may shift slightly as the new entrance weathers into place.

Wretched Rabbit has been added back to the Online Booking System which covers the caves of Casterton Fell, Leck Fell and Ingleborough. We encourage cavers to use this system, out of respect to the landowner who has requested this, and also as a useful tool to help spread traffic and avoid congestion. Wretched Rabbit has never been so missed, so thank you to the RRCP volunteers for their tremendous efforts to get this safely reopened.

High Birkwith reminder

We regret to say that the situation at High Birkwith, reported in Newsletter 13, remains unchanged, and so this will be the final reminder unless there are any further developments.

Cavers are reminded that access to Calf Holes requires no permission, and the High Birkwith landowner seems to acknowledge that, having engaged with groups destined for Calf Holes without incident. However, permission to descend Birkwith Cave, Old Ing Cave, Dismal Hill Cave and Browgill Cave, all on High Birkwith Farm land, is being refused and actively enforced by the landowner.

If, while visiting Calf Holes, you should find yourself needing to exit at Browgill Cave for any reason, we recommend that you quickly

and discretely make your way along the river to the public footpath which is only a few hundred metres away.

Parking continues to be available at Low Birkwith Farm (on left before you reach High Birkwith), in front of the stone barn next to the honesty box on the wall. The fee (cash only) is £5 per car or £15 per minibus which should be placed in an envelope with your registration number and into the box. The farmer at Low Birkwith is very friendly so say hello if there is anyone around in the farmyard.

We will continue to explore all options to restore access to the High Birkwith caves. The National Park Authority have been sympathetic, however, the landowner is entrenched in their position, and as the caves are not on access land, our options are limited.

CAVE MAINTAINANCE & CONSERVATION

Securing access to Malham Cove Rising



The main cave entrance at the foot of Malham Cove is at the Flood Rising (to the east of the beck). It has been shored with scaffolding and covered with a steel mesh lid since 1989 but this was deteriorating and becoming unsafe.

Since summer 2022, a replacement structure was designed, as funding was kindly offered from CNCC and the Barry Andrew estate. Durable materials were chosen (either galvanised or stainless steel) and the fabrication was expertly done by Geoff Ward.

Natural England, the Yorkshire Dales National Park, Kirkby Malham Parish Council and the two farmers concerned were all supportive. We chose the weekend of 13-14th May for the installation, which

involved removing the old steelwork and digging a large underwater hole, before fitting the new structure. The sun shone and a strong team assembled, consisting of NPC, CPC, BPC and CDG members. Everything went well and work was complete Sunday afternoon.

Access for future generations has thus been maintained and will be in the manner of the "Derbyshire key" system. It is likely that the relevant tool to open the entrance will be kept at Ingleton and can be obtained by contacting members of the CDG Northern Section.

Report by John Cordingley (adapted for this newsletter).

This is a splendid effort and CNCC are extremely grateful to the volunteers for their work to ensure this important site remains safe for livestock and the visiting public, but accessible for cavers. We are also thankful for John for the photos and the report.



Beck Head Stream Cave

Most cavers will now be aware of the problem of ash dieback, which can cause affected trees to become weak, meaning they can collapse with little warning, particularly during winter storms.

We have reported on issues of ash dieback at several sites recently, including Gaping Gill, Alum Pot, Bull Pot of the Witches, Rumbling Hole, amongst others. Beck Head Stream Cave near Ingleborough Cave has become the latest casualty.



Report adapted from John Cordingley and John Gardner:

Back in 2021, Clapham's Ingleborough Estate was, for safety reasons, felling ash trees alongside the public footpath in the valley leading towards Trow Gill. Unfortunately, one of these felled trees ended up hanging right over Beck Head Stream Cave, also causing loose rocks and soil to pile up around the entrance.

The tree was later cut up and removed thanks to a great effort by Darren North, however, access for cavers was still unsafe due to the debris piled at the entrance.

Beck Head Stream Cave is a short but interesting trip, so John Cordingley raised this with CNCC's Conservation Officer, Kay Easton, who agreed to organise a team to sort it out.

We are grateful to Philip Farrer at the Estate, who was fully supportive when the work was being planned.

Three people went up on the 2nd August and the entrance was cleared of vegetation, twigs and rocks, and generally made more stable. Fortunately, the drop into the stream cave is offset, so it didn't appear that any significant rocks had made it into the passages within the cave itself.

The team have reported that more material may fall from the bank above the entrance, which was deemed too dangerous to clear, but hopefully nothing too significant appears poised to fall.

For now, the cave is now accessible again thanks to some fine efforts from the team.

Buttertubs litter pick

The Buttertubs Pass that crosses from Hawes in Wensleydale to Thwaite in Swaledale is one of Yorkshire's most iconic spots and one of our finest scenic roads.

This is a stunning karst landscape of hills, valley, and waterfalls, and enjoyed by thousands of walkers and cyclists each year, particularly since it featured so prominently in the 2014 Tour-de-France Grand Depart. A less-well known feature are the Buttertubs themselves, a series of 20m deep potholes in the limestone near to the road.

Experienced cavers can easily descend, but may be disappointed to find there are no passages leading off from the bottom.



During May, members of the Craven Pothole Club (CPC) were cycling in the area and were concerned to peer down The Buttertubs and see the bottom of the pots badly littered.

Not wanting other visitors to have to see such a sad sight, particularly with the busy summer tourist season approaching, they decided to arrange a clear-up session.

The team from CPC (Ian Patrick, Lin Patrick, Derek Monk and John Helm) attended on 2nd June in stunning sunshine, and they quickly rigged ropes to descend the pots. Ample amounts of smaller litter were cleared from the various crevices and undergrowth, plus some car tyres. A more challenging task was a truck tyre, which required a complex rope hauling system to be established.

This was an excellent initiative by the CPC, with mileage for the volunteers being covered from CNCC funds. Thanks also to North Yorkshire County Council who were extremely supportive and happy to collect the rubbish from the roadside.

Bull Pot sheep removal

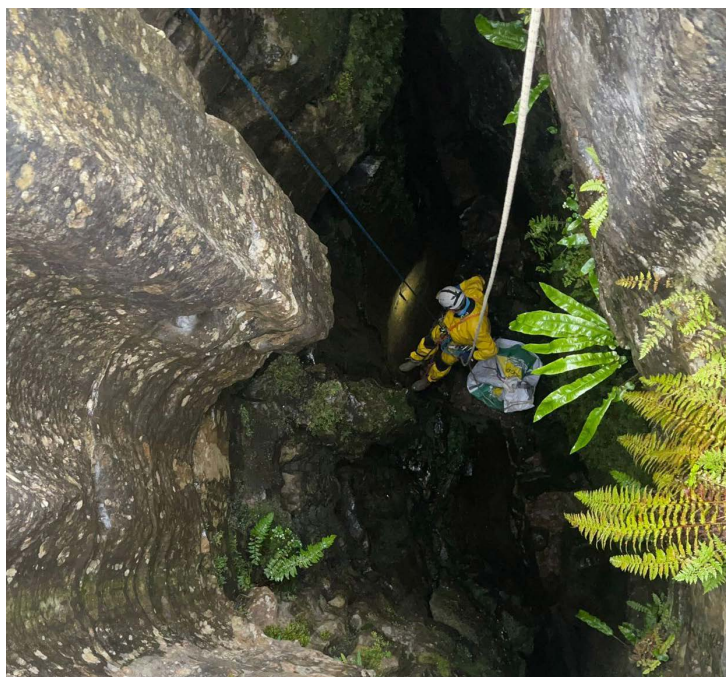
Bull Pot in Kingsdale offers a great introduction to more technical SRT including traverses, rebelay and deviations, and with a lot of action happening in quick succession.

Being on the open fell on the west side of Kingsdale, Bull Pot sometimes attracts unwanted fleecy visitors. When the outcome for our ovine potholers is not good, we rely on either biology and time, or the kind actions of volunteers to deal with the issue.

With Bull Pot being such a popular pothole throughout winter, a quick solution was preferred, so regular CNCC volunteers Anthony Brown, Pete Monk, and Simon Johnson, kindly gave up their day on 4th October to address the problem.

The team abseiled down the entrance and the unfortunate visitor was efficiently bagged up and removed. The team took some great photos, allowing them to create a short video compilation to show how the work progressed (available on our Youtube channel).

We would like to say a big thanks to the team involved. Great work and no doubt sparing several groups considerable unpleasantness over the coming months.



Anchor installers' technical forum

On 14th October, we hosted a technical forum for BCA regional anchor installers and other interested people.

An incredible amount of hard work by numerous people over the years has been put into the BCA anchor scheme. We truly stand on the shoulders of giants and are indebted to their efforts. To help continue this exceptional work the aim of this forum was to:

- Share knowledge and experience.
- Swap tips and tricks for installing anchors.
- Discuss 'frameworks' surrounding anchor installation.
- Strengthen communication between regional installers.

There was a good turnout of 15 cavers with 'representation' from, CNCC, DCA, CCC, North Wales, Cornwall and a strong contingent of six cavers from Ireland.

The day involved discussions on a wide variety of topics such as:

- Route to becoming an installer
- Styles and methods of record keeping
- Methods for reporting loose anchors
- Re-using holes from pulled anchors
- Permissions for new anchor placements
- Drawing rigging topos
- Extracting anchors and patching holes
- Rigging standards
- Testing of anchors
- Involvement of BCA in anchor installation
- Use of drilled threads
- Chain-linking anchors
- Pull through rings/anchors
- Temporary anchor options
- Fixed aids / handlines
- Ground stakes
- Insurance

We kept the sitting-down discussions to a minimum and focused on practical activity which also allowed people to have more specific informal chats which proved valuable.

Johnny Latimer, who assisted in its original development and current production of the IC anchor, kindly held a very informative chat about this unique anchor. We had installation demonstrations via the systems used by the CNCC and also the different system

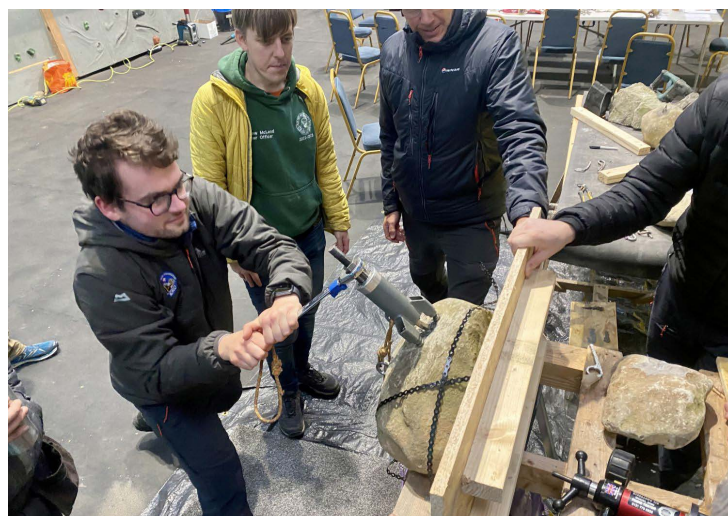


used by both the DCA and CCC, and we looked at testing anchors and the equipment and methods used.

For the rare occasions we need to remove an anchor we had a look at and practiced the options for this, including the CNCC's very own anchor-puller design.

Later in the day a frenzied session of 'experimental learning' took place with people trying out all sorts of different variations, some of them rather unconventional. This session provided a great deal of entertainment but with some interesting learning.

The forum was a great success with excellent feedback and a genuine desire to have more of these events in future, with every two or three years being the consensus. There were some really positive action points that came out of the day, and these will all be actioned in due course. Thank you to everyone who attended.



Anchoring of Five Ways Pot

The recently discovered Five Ways Pot on Dowlass Moss is currently being fitted with stainless steel resin bonded anchors.

The team started work in October, successfully completing the anchoring of the lower four pitches over the course of two days. However, the wetness of the cave that weekend limited their time underground due to getting cold, so they weren't able to finish the upper pitches. They did however manage to drill the upper pitches ready for the placements. A further weekend intended to finish the work in November was rained off, and now completion of the work is scheduled for the new year period.

A full rigging topo and route description will be published as soon as work is complete.



Simpson Pot and Swinsto Hole on West Kingsdale are two of the most well-known potholes in the Yorkshire Dales.

Despite this, anchoring of these pots in the 1990s was not performed with pull-through in mind. Consequently, many of the anchors are poorly located for efficient pull-through. We see that UKCaving posts about stuck ropes are common, and in some areas, compensatory 'tat' has proliferated, which can quickly become an eyesore, an inconvenience, or hazardous.

We are also aware that several anchors across both pots show signs of movement, or resin erosion, due to 25 years of battering from the water and the effects of resin-shrinkage.

Several months ago, the CNCC agreed to support an audit and partial re-anchoring of these pots. We are pleased to say that the first phase of the work at Swinsto Hole was completed in June.

Several new anchors have been installed to make the rigging more suited to 'pull-through' techniques. At the time of writing, these new anchors stand alongside the originals, but in due course, the team will return to check rope lengths, redraw the topo, remove defective or surplus anchors, tidy up any resin from the new anchors and remove in-situ tat that has been abandoned.



Work will then start on Simpson Pot. If you meet our team, please be patient waiting to pass, and say hello!

Thank you to the team involved for several days of great work. This project will support the enjoyment of Simpson Pot and Swinsto Hole as popular trips for decades to come, with fewer issues of stuck ropes or abandoned tat. With that in mind, we would like to remind cavers of our guidance for anyone considering leaving a rope in a cave, which was published in our last newsletter.

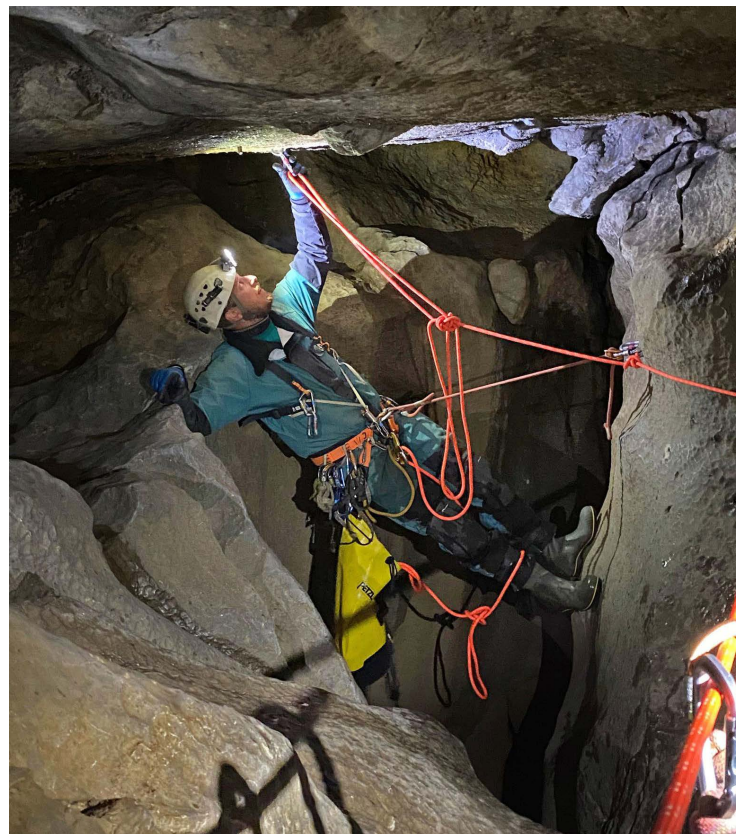
Summer rigging refresher workshops

On 11th June and 2nd July, CNCC trainer Sam Litten ran our 'rigging refresher' workshops.

These were a great opportunity for participants who were already familiar with the basics of rigging (perhaps from one of our previous indoor workshops) to put their skills into practice underground. It was also a great chance for anyone a little rusty on rigging to refresh their skills and gain confidence.

The venue was Yordas Cave, both workshops were fully booked, and all participants seemed to have a great time, with one commenting;

"This was a brilliant course. I now feel confident that I can rig caves in a way that is easy for people to use. Sam is excellent at passing on his extensive knowledge. He was somehow able to provide individual instruction to three people at once! This was my third CNCC course and all have been time well spent and great value for money."



Autumn-winter 2023-2024 calendar

Our autumn-winter 2023-2024 calendar was announced in August and included:

- **7th October:**
Skills for leaders of horizontal caving trips (1 day)
- **7-8th October:**
New to SRT indoor workshop (2 days)
- **14-15th October:**
First aid skills for cavers (2 days)
- **28th October:**
Underground geology tour with The Rock Doctor (1 day)
- **11th November:**
SRT underground refresher (1 day)
- **12th November:**
New to SRT rigging / rigging refresher (1 day)
- **18-19th November:**
New to SRT / SRT refresher (2 days)
- **19th November:**
SRT rescue foundation (1 day)
- **9th December:**
SRT rescue intermediate / rescue refresher (1 day)
- **10th December:**
SRT rescue advanced (1 day)
- **16-17th December:**
SRT refresher (2 days)
- **6th January:**
SRT rescue foundation (1 day)
- **13-14th January:**
New to SRT rigging / rigging refresher (2 days)
- **13th January:**
SRT underground refresher (1 day)
- **10th February:**
SRT intermediate / SRT refresher (1 day)
- **11th February:**
Skills for SRT cave leaders (1 day)

Takeup on these has been excellent, but at the time of publishing this newsletter, there are still a few spaces available for some of the early 2024 sessions. More information and sign up for these and future events is on our website.

Autumn first aid workshop

We ran our popular 'First Aid for Cavers' workshop on 14-15th October. This was a two-day workshop at the bargain price of £30, which covered a wide range of cave-feasible situations:

- Incident priorities and scene safety
- Primary and secondary surveys of casualty
- Vital signs
- Sending for help
- Recovery position
- CPR and drowning
- Choking
- Bleeding and shock - including treatment of catastrophic bleeding
- Broken bones and dislocations
- Head, chest and spinal injuries
- Hypothermia
- Other medical emergencies - heart attack, stroke, diabetes, epilepsy, asthma
- Improvisation of equipment
- Moving casualties
- Prioritisation and triage

This was more than just a classroom course. On the second day, actual in-cave simulations enabled participants to apply their new skills underground. We are sure to be running more sessions in 2024, so join our mailing list (cncc.org.uk/mailling-list) to be the first to hear of future sessions before they are advertised via social media.

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

Find CNCC on social media...



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

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Cover image: the newly constructed entrance to Wretched Rabbit. Photo by Sam Lieberman.

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