

NORTHERN CAVING

Newsletter of the Council for the Northern Caving Community



Swinsto Hole Split Pitch. Photo by Mark Burkey.

Editorial

by Matt Ewles (Editor)

It's looking like 2025 is going to be a good year for us. Our AGM in March achieved the highest attendance for many years and three enthusiastic new officers joined our team. Others have since come forward to take on soon-to-be created new roles. We are honoured by this, and excited to work with our growing team.

This newsletter showcases a great array of our work, spanning conservation, anchoring, access, and the continued success of our training workshops, which are now attended by cavers from all over the country.

We report on efforts to increase the recognition of caving as an important activity within the Yorkshire Dales National Park, and for the CNCC to engage more widely with our caving community, which will be somewhat of a theme for the coming years.

Our upcoming meeting on 21st June has a packed agenda, and we'd love to see a packed room too. We are also hoping to see lots of you in Llangollen for Hidden Earth in September, which after the success of last year, should be another amazing event.

CNCC and the Yorkshire Dales Management Plan

In January, the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority (YDNPA) put their proposed objectives for the 2025-2030 National Park Management Plan to public consultation.

The last time the YDNPA held a public consultation, thanks to CNCC and individual caver participation, there was strong and unprecedented recognition of caving in the final report. To maintain this momentum, we responded on behalf of northern cavers to this new consultation.

We raised several points in connection to the various proposed objectives:

- The need to recognise the role cavers play in conservation.
- The objectives fail to recognise the role unique natural environments in the National Park (e.g. caves) can play in bringing new visitors to the area.
- There is no acknowledgement of the important role local clubs and outdoor pursuit providers play in introducing people to those environments.
- Access to many locations used to introduce novices to caving still hangs on the goodwill of landowners, which can change at any time.
- The important role activities such as caving play in supporting our local economies and businesses.



As well as providing our response, we used UKCaving, Facebook and our mailing list to urge clubs and individuals to participate.

In total there were 38 organisational responses (CNCC being the only caving one) and 69 public responses, of which it appears at least a dozen were from cavers. Despite this low turnout, the proportion of responses which cited caving was high and this achieved a callout in the report.

It is unlikely that this will translate into any direct objectives related to caving. However, this does help to keep caving in the forefront of minds when future decisions are being made within the National Park. It presents our sport very positively and strengthens our position should we need assistance from the YDNPA in the future.

Thank you to those who participated.

Wild camping on Dartmoor

Why it matters for northern caving

By Tim Allen, CNCC Individual Caver Representative

In 2013, Alexander Darwall, a wealthy hedge fund manager, purchased a 4000-acre estate on Dartmoor which included land known as Stall Moor, a part of the Commons. At this time, it was accepted by the authorities that the Dartmoor Commons Act 1985 (the 1985 Act) permitted access to the common for open air recreation, which included wild camping.

The Darwalls were concerned about the public wild camping on their land and disagreed that the rights permitted this. This was opposed by Dartmoor National Park Authority (DNPA) so they ended up in the High Court, where the judge found in favour of the Darwalls.

The DNPA went to the Court of Appeal who overturned the High Court, finding that the 1985 Act did allow for wild camping as an open-air recreation. The Darwalls appealed to the Supreme Court who unanimously dismissed their appeal.

So, what does this have to do with caving?

Most involved in northern caving will remember the debates over whether the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CRoW) gave rights of access to caves on land designated as mountain, moor, heath and down. The CNCC were supportive of the case that CRoW did include caves. The prize for cavers if this was agreed to be the case would be a legal right of access to around 70% of the caves featured in the Northern Caves guidebooks.

Following a poll of their entire membership, the BCA also came out in support. Over the years this has involved a campaign, changes to their constitution, much arguing and a large sum of money spent on a derailed judicial review. However, BCA still have a clear policy that they believe CRoW does indeed include caving and CNCC are fully behind that position. This belief has helped support many of the access improvements in our region for the last decade.

Unfortunately, DEFRA and Natural England disagree, their principal reason being that caving is not an open-air recreation as described in the CRoW Act. This is a narrow interpretation of the phrase, and this is where the Supreme Court judgement is very useful as that same phrase is used in the 1985 Act, for the same reason, to allow public access to designated land types.

The five judges ruled that the phrase 'open-air recreation' should be interpreted in the wide sense of ordinary language and that wild camping is a form of open-air recreation. If camping inside a tent (and unconscious while doing so) is open-air recreation, there is every reason to assume that caving is the same.

The judges also reasoned that activities were excluded from the 1985 Act by regulation. The 1985 Act, just as the CRoW Act does, lists activities that are excluded in a schedule. Neither camping is listed in the 1985 Act, nor caving in the CRoW Act.

The judgement is positive for the caving argument. Furthermore, it aligns with the option we obtained in 2014 from Dinah Rose QC (as was), that the interpretation of 'open-air recreation' was too narrow, and which dismissed, on balance, the arguments put forward by DEFRA/NE against caves being covered under CRoW.

So, what now? There is no appetite or money within the BCA to pursue another legal route but there is interest from several forces to use the Supreme Court judgement for further lobbying. It will be interesting to see how the authorities react. What must be clear is that landowners of CRoW access land will be even more reluctant to challenge cavers going about their recreational activities. In essence, it is another positive step in the century long battle for improved public access rights to the countryside.

Tim is also a former CNCC Access Officer and BCA CRoW Liaison Officer. He is very well positioned to keep us updated on these matters. Our thanks to him for this excellent article.

Representation working group

In recent years we have tried to work on behalf of all northern cavers, and made many changes to achieve and reflect that. However, we also know that our democratic structure is still heavily limited to clubs. Our membership is exclusively clubs, and our Committee is made up of 14 clubs plus one representative for individual cavers. We lack a mechanism for direct engagement with several other sections of the caving community.

Tackling this will require some reconsideration of the way CNCC operates and how we engage. At our AGM this year, we accepted a proposal to establish a group to look at this.

Could you speak for part of the caving community with whom we currently don't engage? Do you have ideas for improvement? Ideas are welcomed, no matter how radical they are.

If you can help, please email secretary@cncc.org.uk or come along to our meetings.

Craftsman's Pot (Kingsdale) collapse

In April we heard that the approach to Dickory Pitch in Craftsman's Pot has collapsed, partially burying some in-situ ropes, leaving anchors out of reach, and blocking the way on. We advise against visiting this cave until work has been done to restore and stabilise the route which will be a very serious task. Keep an eye on our website for any changes to the current situation.

2025 AGM outcomes

Our AGM on 22nd March at Clapham Village Hall was joined by 42 attendees, including representation for 19 clubs. We achieved a decisive modernisation and simplification of our constitution, and we commenced an initiative to see how we can engage more cavers outside of clubs and from different backgrounds in the future (see article on the previous page).

We're pleased to re-welcome our previous Committee, including Tim Allen continuing as our Individual Caver Representative.

We said goodbye to three retiring officers: Andrew Hinde (Chair), Pete Bann (Treasurer) and Kai Trusson (Access). They have given a combined 18 years of service across their roles and have helped make the CNCC what it is today. Thank you!

We welcomed some new faces into those three roles...

Todd Rye
Chair



Todd has been caving since he was six, going on to cave with MUSC and helping with CHECC while at university, and now a very active member of BPC, RRCPC and CRO. If you feel you have seen him before, it may have been while prising open your wallet at Inglesport where he currently works. Todd brings a wealth of northern cave knowledge and enthusiasm.

Kath Davis
Treasurer



Kath's interest in caving started at school through outdoor education courses. This continued at university before she joined Swaledale Outdoor Club, with who she clocked up an impressive record sheet of northern potholes and international trips, as well as Munro bagging in Scotland. Her monetary skills, and experience of scrutinising CNCC's accounts, mean our finances are in good hands.

James Alderson
Access Officer



James has been a caver and diver in The Dales for 30 years, so has seen cave access change, for both better and worse. He has previously worked as a gamekeeper and shepherd so is confident speaking with landowners and already has many contacts across northern England which should prove very useful.

We should also mention that the Access Officer post was contested, and Mike Appleton put in an extremely strong application, creating a difficult decision. We are not in the habit of allowing enthusiastic volunteers leave empty-handed, so we hope to be co-opting Mike into an additional access role at our June meeting, to work with James over the coming year.

Finally, welcome back to our returning Officers: **Jill Bolton** (Secretary), **Kay Easton** (Conservation), and **Ian Patrick** (Training).

Hidden Earth 26-28th September

We'd like to encourage northern cavers to come along, enjoy and support Hidden Earth 2025 in Llangollen.

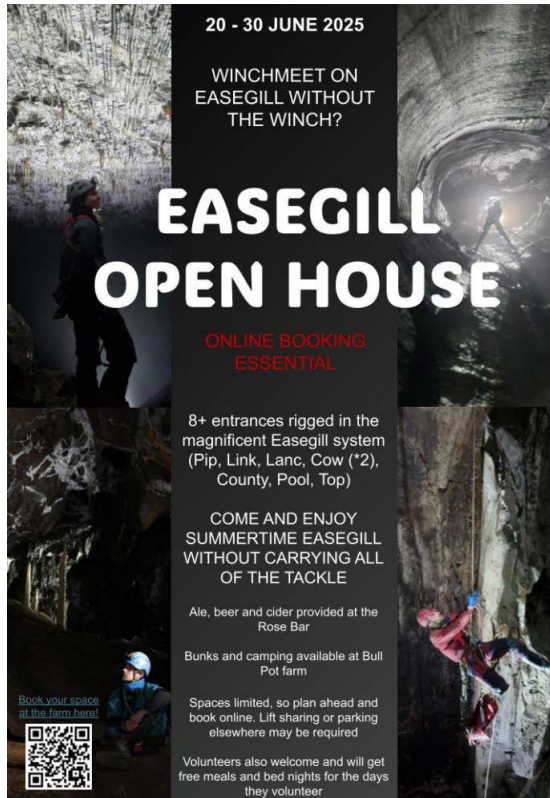
We can listen enviously to the talks on the current mega-discovery at Redhouse Lane Swallet in Forest of Dean. But be assured there'll be northern talks too, as our region seems to also be enjoying a new flurry of exploration.

The venue in Llangollen is the same as last year, with good bar, efficient catering and enough space to allow campers to spread out much more than many previous years. The trade hall last year saw several new vendors offering an array of novel kit, but fewer club stalls than usual. Why not promote your club or discoveries via a talk or a trade hall stand?

All the current information at www.hidden.earth



Ease Gill Open House



20 - 30 JUNE 2025

WINCHMEET ON EASEGILL WITHOUT THE WINCH?

EASEGILL OPEN HOUSE

ONLINE BOOKING ESSENTIAL

8+ entrances rigged in the magnificent Easegill system (Pip, Link, Lanc, Cow (*2), County, Pool, Top)

COME AND ENJOY SUMMERTIME EASEGILL WITHOUT CARRYING ALL OF THE TACKLE


Ale, beer and cider provided at the Rose Bar

Bunks and camping available at Bull Pot farm

Spaces limited, so plan ahead and book online. Lift sharing or parking elsewhere may be required

Volunteers also welcome and will get free meals and bed nights for the days they volunteer

Book your space at the farm here!



From 20-30th June, Red Rose Cave and Pothole Club (RRCPC) are running their inaugural Ease Gill Open House event. Billed as 'winchmeet without the winch', this event will see several of the most popular entrances to Ease Gill Caverns rigged, plus food and beer at Bull Pot Farm.

If you would like to join the party and stay at Bull Pot Farm, please make a booking.

If you would like to pop up for a day of caving, ideally drop an email to the team as much in advance as possible.

Last-minute trips can be accommodated but please liaise with the organisers at Bull Pot Farm on the day and be willing to be a little flexible so they can try to spread traffic across the entrances to ensure everyone has a great time. You may wish to print out our entire Ease Gill guide just in case.

Contact: easegillopenhouse@gmail.com

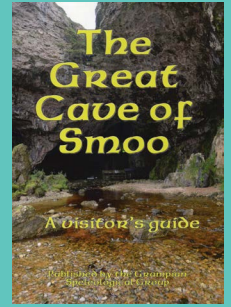
Parking at Bull Pot Farm will be busy, so please car-share if you can.

We're publishing this newsletter only days before the event, so if you are reading this too late, you may be pleased to hear that the team are hoping for this to become an annual or biennial event. Well done RRCPC, we really hope this is a success.

Smoo Cave guide

By Alan Jeffreys

A new cave guidebook appears this summer - *The Great Cave of Smoo* - compiled by members of the Grampian Speleological Group. This is a full colour, 16-page A5 size booklet to be sold to visitors of this spectacular site at Durness on the north coast of Scotland.



Insofar as Scotland is concerned, this is a rare event, albeit with an impressive pedigree. The first cave guidebook to appear was published in 1811. Entitled '*A Description of the Spar Cave, Lately Discovered in the Isle of Skye*', it served as a souvenir of visits to the well decorated sandstone sea cave situated on the shores of Loch Slapin, which was targeted by special cruise ships from Glasgow. Also, in the 19th and 20th Centuries, several booklets were produced about Fingal's Cave on the Island of Staffa and on a few sea caves in Fife and elsewhere sporting historic engravings. However, this new guide to Smoo will be the first publication dedicated to a Scottish limestone show cave. It is intended to be available for the 2025 tourist season which of course, will feature the heavily used North Coast 500 scenic route where Smoo is one of the visitor highlights.

CONSERVATION

Foxholes restoration



Foxholes is a series of low bedding caves found underneath the cliff between Ingleborough Cave and Trow Gill. Hundreds of cavers walk past every year destined for the larger potholes at Gaping Gill.

Despite being of little interest to sporting cavers, these small caves are archeologically significant, having yielded a number of important finds. They are also hydrologically interesting as Foxholes is likely to be a historic resurgence for Ingleborough Cave.

In 1993, the Northern Pennine Club dug a connection to Ingleborough Cave (the Clapdale Crawl), which led to the need to install a gate. This crawl has since completely silted up owing to occasional flooding which backs up into the lower of the Foxholes caves in the most extreme conditions.

In March 2024 we heard that the area above the cliff had collapsed into the entrance of Foxholes, completely blocking it with soil and boulders. Given the archaeological and hydrological significance of this site, we decided that CNCC would take a proactive role in trying to reopen this, which would require quite a bit of work both physically, and to arrange SSSI permissions.

With permissions in place, work was performed on Tuesday 8th April 2025, in glorious sunshine, by a team of CNCC's conservation volunteers, including Alan Wylie, Rowan Worsman, Pete Bann, Ged Benn, Terry and Chris Devaney, Martell Baines and Andrew Hinde.

This had actually been planned as a two-day exercise but in the end the work to clear the collapsed material was completed in just one day. Thank you also to Pete Monk and Jeff Keaton, who had signed up to help on the second day but ended up not being needed!

The entrance gate is now accessible again, and BCA members can arrange to collect the key from Ingleborough Cave. We don't expect there to be high demand, but we're pleased to have restored access to such a historic site. Thank you to the team for an excellent effort. More photos can be seen in the report on our website:

cncc.org.uk/conservation

The restoration of North End Pot

By Tim Allen

As reported in Northern Caving 15, in 2024 the digging group known as the Space Miners dug a route from the North End Pot shakehole and connected it into the Eastern Front of the Three Counties System. Tim Allen tells us why the team were soon drawn back.

The new 'North by North End' entrance is at the northern end of the shakehole. We were not the first to dig here however, and in the 1980s, at the southern end, another dig was engineered by the Earby Pothole Club. This headed in the opposite direction and went down two shafts into a large rift leading to the spectacular St. George's Hall. The first pitch was all dug out and shored with scaffolding and a variety of timber materials available at the time.

Before we started our dig, we took a look down The Earby side to see if there were any leads down there. The route was passable with care, but all the shoring was deteriorating badly. One particular section was being held back by a rotting 'toilet door' and it appeared that only the thick paint on the door was actually holding anything back. Below this the shoring at a narrow section had completely fallen out exposing a wall of Jenga-like boulders to squeeze past. It was obvious the route was dangerous and would soon collapse.

We started our dig in August 2023 and by December we felt the need to do a draught test to make sure we were not being fooled and just heading back into the older route. I took a final trip down the original North End Pot with smoke pellets and found the whole lot even more unstable. The test was negative, and I was pleased not to have to go down there again.

We connected our dig into Llean Bean Aven in March 2024 and had our trip to the end of the Eastern Front shortly after. At the same time, we re-enforced the conservation taping and CNCC installers anchored the route, and that was that for our exploration ambitions in North End Pot.

However, a few of us thought it was a shame to lose access to St. George's Hall via the original EPC North End Pot dig. We hoped to return to re-engineer the shoring

as a conservation project. In anticipation of this, CNCC funding up to £500 was agreed.

For the Space Miners, the rest 2024 and start of 2025 flew by with digs in Kingsdale and on Dowlass Moss. In April we called a halt at one project and the time seem right to put some effort into North End Pot. Planks and scaffold were purchased and four of us headed up for an assessment.

The shoring had deteriorated further, and the cave was firmly blocked at the narrows. The once proud 'toilet door' had disintegrated and even the thick paint was unable to hold back the tide of waste behind it. We would need to shore from the top downwards, keeping the new

shoring as close to the original as possible, which would require quite a lot of the old supports to be cut out.

This all worked remarkably efficiently with just a few nervous moments as rocks settled. The only problem was that some of the 'scaffold' poles were actually thick-walled steam pole and proved very resistant to cutting. It was easy to get through three rip saw blades for just one cut. By the sixth trip we were at the blockage. There was a fortunately located alcove just above, and by shoring this off we were able to put all the debris behind it and avoid a haul to the surface. Of course, all of this work had to be done hanging on a rope with the surface team lowering gear as required.

Up top, the walled ramparts of spoil, partly from the original dig and partly from our efforts at the other end, also demanded attention. Supporting steps needed to be built and the height of the wall reduced, so this gave the surface crew plenty to do.

Down below it was now safe to squeeze through the narrows onto the final slope which dropped down to the second pitch. A 2.5m step was put in below the narrows and then the back wall of the narrows was pulled down behind it, creating more room for new shoring. Working here required two or three people to feed materials forward and a few extra working bolts for safety.

All that was left, on our 9th trip, was to complete a final step and then for all seven of us present that day to enjoy a trip to St. George's Hall, which we did. Since then, a couple of us have walked all the old scaffold, pipe and shoring down from the shakehole, as unfortunately, no one had a vehicle capable of getting up the Turbury road anymore. The final cost came in under budget at £440 which CNCC refunded.

Those taking part in the work; Tim Allen, Nick Bairstow, Jon Beaven, Dave Gledhill, Pete Hall, Mick Nunwick, Frank Pearson, Bob Riley, Mick Sharp and Geoff Yeadon.



New shoring by Dave Gledhill



St. George's Hall by Frank Pearson

Keldheads Cave quarrying threat

In our last newsletter, we introduced you to the joys of Keldheads Cave in Wensleydale. In an unfortunate turn of events, in April we were contacted by a parish councillor for the Preston-under-Scar area expressing concern about the reopening by Tarmac of the Wensley Limestone Quarry.

Investigations by our Conservation Officer found that the cave extends underneath one of the planned quarry areas, and owing to the limited depth of the system, it is at very high risk of being disturbed or even destroyed by the quarrying operations.

We have submitted a formal objection to that part of the application via the North Yorkshire Planning Department. This is something we will be watching closely over coming months.



Loose climb by Ged Benn

Shuttleworth Pot stabilisation

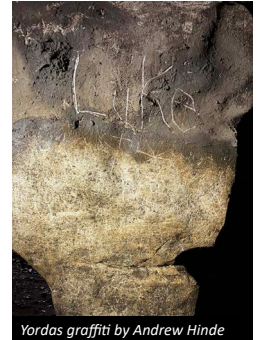
In our last newsletter we reported the collapse of the climb beneath the Shuttleworth Pot first pitch, which quickly deteriorated further. In January, a team of Russ Brooks, Rupert Skorupka, Ged Benn, Andy Haigh and Andrew Hinde headed up armed with scaffolding and stabilised the area. Nice work by the team!

Yordas graffiti

In April we received a report of graffiti having been etched into the wall at Yordas Cave and the gate being left open. Only a few weeks earlier, Tim Allen had done a cleanup of the parking layby, removing a surprising amount of litter including beer cans, wrappers and even soiled nappies!

The increasing popularity of Yordas is good in many ways, because most visitors will be responsible and may even find this triggers an interest in caves and caving. However, there are always some who are less conservation 'enlightened'.

A conservation project is being planned to try to erase the graffiti etching without visually affecting the rock patina. A further initiative to educate visitors in cave conservation may then follow.



Yordas graffiti by Andrew Hinde

Rumbling Hole fence repair

At the end of March, we received a report that a fencepost had come down by Rumbling Hole, leaving the hole open to livestock. It was actually back in 1995 that CNCC arranged the fencing of all the major open pots on Leck Fell, and since then it has been a matter of ongoing maintenance. On this occasion, Andrew Hinde was quick to replace the post. Only a small job, but a very proactive response.

DESCRIPTIONS & TOPOS

Caves of Scotland updated



Looking out from the Bone Caves onto the Allt nan Uamh valley, by Gary Douthwaite

Back in 2018, we first published our Caves of Scotland guide, covering many of the significant caves north-of-the-border. These descriptions were written by Alan Jeffreys of the Grampian Speleo Group (GSG, who have an excellent club hut in Elphin, just north of Ullapool), but they were edited and compiled into a single guide by the CNCC team to sit alongside our other route descriptions.

This consistently ranks as one of our top five descriptions, typically receiving a unique download at least twice a day.

We've been aware for some time that a major omission was the excellent caves of Applecross. In March we re-issued the guide to correct this omission, along with adding additional pictures and corrections throughout the rest of the document.

We'd like to thank Alan Jeffreys for his excellent work to provide these new descriptions. Alan, and the GSG, regularly fly the flag for Scottish caving within CNCC and we are always keen to support caving north-of-the-border when we can.

Whitewell caves

The caves of Bowland don't attract much attention. However, a visit to Whitewell Pot, Whitewell Cave and Hell Hole, all in one day, is an excellent day out particularly when the weather is nice and you can enjoyably walk between them.

To help inspire and guide your day, we have recently published a route description to these three caves on our website.

AKA Hole

In our last newsletter we reported the anchoring of the recently discovered AKA Hole on Leck Fell. We're pleased to say that this has now been supplemented by a description for the route down to Blissful Creek in Ireby 2; For anyone venturing beyond here, more research is needed, but we'd welcome a route description to be submitted to assist others with a longer trip.

Other topo updates

As well as slowly working our way through our topo catalogue to standardise the formatting, and introduce a new presentation style, we have also been busy correcting or improving a number of topos. So far this year, this includes Aygill Caverns, Bull Pot, Bull Pot of the Witches, Tatham Wife Hole, Jingling Pot, Juniper Gulf, Notts Pot and others. Many of these updates come in response to user feedback, so thank you to everyone who reports an issue.

With such regular updates being made, please always download the most current online version of topos and route descriptions when planning trips, rather than relying on old printouts or books.



Hell Hole, Whitewell, by Gary Douthwaite

ACCESS

Hagg Gill Pot



For many years, our most up-to-date information advised cavers to call at Raisgill Farm before heading up to the magnificent Hagg Gill Pot in Langstrothdale. However, we have recently been made aware that the owners at Raisgill Farm no longer wish to be called upon.

Therefore, please no longer call at Raisgill Farm for this cave.

The land that Hagg Gill Pot (and several other caves in the valley) is on actually belongs to Yockenthwaite Farm. In the coming months, our Access Officer is planning to call-in on the owners to see if they wish for cavers to make a courtesy call before visiting the caves.

We'll be keeping the information on our website up to date as we follow-up on this, so please do check for the most recent information before any upcoming trips.

Parking for Cherry Tree Hole



We have been advised that the owners of Tennant Gill Farm are asking people not to park on the roadside in the vicinity of the Pennine Way footpath (which is also the track to their farm).

The Pennine Way is one of the two suggested routes of approach to Cherry Tree Hole on our route description, and is the easiest to navigate in poor visibility.

To avoid further conflict, we advise either parking at the alternative suggested spot closer to Darnbrook Farm and approaching directly up the fell, or park 300m south of the Tennant Gill Farm track, just beyond the cattle grid to approach up the Pennine Way.

Whichever route, please make a courtesy call at Darnbrook Farm, where cavers have always received a friendly welcome.

ANCHORS

Dealing with defective anchors

For some time now, the CNCC has had an online reporting system for all sorts of issues:

- Hazards
- Conservation issues
- Errors in topos or descriptions
- Incorrect cave information
- Defective anchors

We encourage anyone to report anchors that show movement, damage, or nearby fracturing. These reports go into our online system where a member of our team can 'triage' them.

The response will depend on the seriousness of the issue and whether a resolution is within our remit and abilities. For the most serious issues, or for caves with multiple minor issues, one of our team may pay a visit to inspect the situation more closely, or to replace the defective anchors.

In March, we received a report saying that two anchors in Rumbling Hole on Leck Fell were showing slight rotational movement. This is one of our most commonly reported issues due to shrinkage of the resin used during the very early days of anchor installation.

In April a few of our volunteers took a trip to inspect the situation, armed with full anchoring kit. Both anchors were found to have only a few millimetres of rotational movement but no in-out movement.

In these situations, it can be a tough call what action to take. We know that such anchors often take extraordinary force to remove, and this can damage the rock so neither the hole nor surrounding



Inspecting the Rumbling Hole anchors, taken from the video below.

rock can be used for a replacement. However, both of these were single anchor rebelay, meaning the consequence of an anchor failure was high, so some remedial action was needed.

Our team opted to install a second anchor at each site to create a Y-hang to spread the load and remove the fall factor associated to a single anchor failure.

One of the team had also brought video-making equipment and a drone, and they managed to put together an excellent, and at times amusing video of the work (QR code below). As you will see, things don't always go to plan on first visit. The team returned in May to complete the job, and the topo has now been updated.



Scan the QR code to watch the video on YouTube

Swinsto-Simpson re-anchoring complete

Over our last three newsletters, we have reported on efforts to improve the anchoring in Swinsto Hole and Simpson Pot, to ensure the anchors are well suited for pull-through trips, remove any loose anchors, and eliminate the need for tat to be left behind.

Our last newsletter in December reported that work at both sites was complete, except for the three largest single hang pitches in the system, all of which are alternative options for the final descent in Simpson Pot:

- Slit Pot (traditional)
- Slit Pot (overhead/alternative)
- Swinsto Great Aven

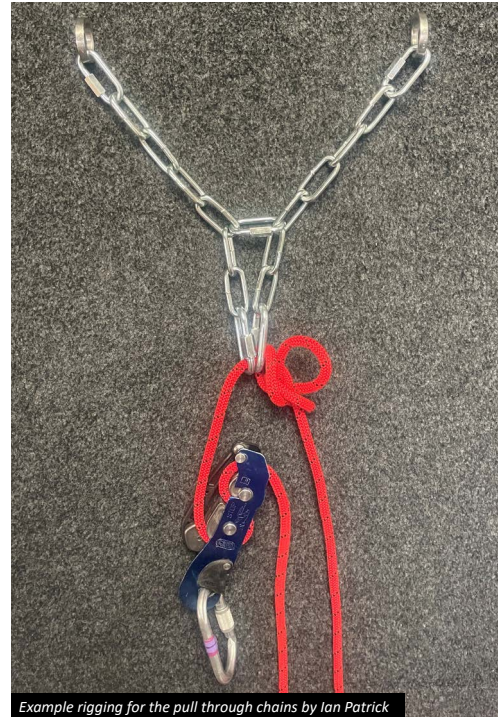
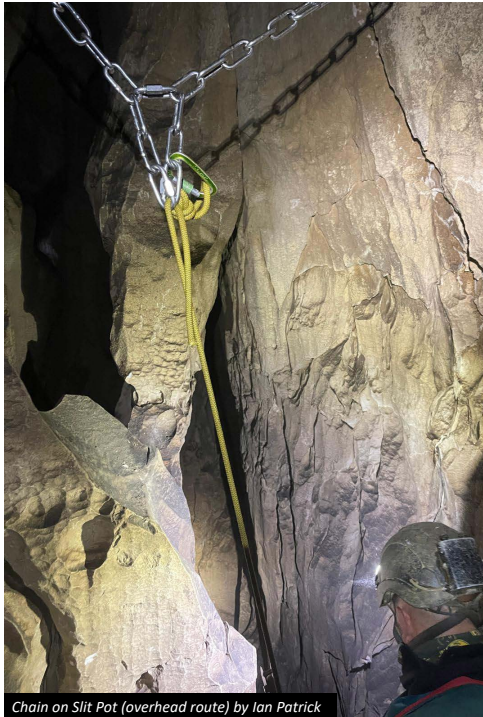
At each of these three pitches, our installer felt that pull-through using anchors was less desirable. With these being longer pitches, the risks of the rope snagging, rubbing or having too much friction was higher. It was considered that a better option would be chains spanning two anchors with a central belay ring, as used in some other regions as a pull-through solution.

Approval was given to install chains at all three sites; however, the final design needed refining after feedback from some individuals who were concerned about a single point of failure central ring. In response, a two-maillon central threading was incorporated into the design, which avoids any single point of failure in the metalwork.

The chains were installed in the w/c 14th April, thus completing all work in the two pots. We have updated our rigging topos to add information about the pull-through anchors and chains, although this information is not intended as a 'how to' document and does not replace experience and personal judgement, nor the need for users to inspect the chains for damage and deformity.

As you will see from the images below, the chains span two anchors and have two central maillons through which the rope should be passed to remove risks of any single point-of-failure.

We'd like to thank our installer, anyone who has helped carry kit, and those who contributed to the extensive discussions and who helped to refine the design. This has been a big effort, with widespread input, and we look forward to caver feedback.



Illusion Pot

In September 2024 we received a report that the old non-CNCC anchors in Brunel Rift of Illusion Pot were in a bad state. This very popular pothole was a surprising omission from our list of anchored caves, so this project was approved at our October meeting. We are pleased to say that this traverse and pitch is now CNCC-anchored and a topo is on our website.

Upcoming topos

At the time of writing, anchor installation at High Hull Pot is almost complete. We understand that this is a fantastic cave, albeit one for dry weather. Work is also ongoing at several other sites and once each of these projects are complete, you'll see news stories via our digital media, as well as a topo being available to download.

Grand Cascade, Bye George Pot

Bye George Pot is another harder cave which has gained popularity courtesy of Mike Cooper's Not For The Faint Hearted.

For those looking to do the longest possible Ease Gill Traverse, Bye George Pot represents one end of that adventure. Bye George also offers a standalone adventure as the Misty Mountain Series round trip suggested in Mike's book, amongst others.

The Grand Cascade pitch leads down to Cigalere Streamway and the connection to Mistral Hole and the rest of the Ease Gill system. This is described in Northern Caves as a 'serious and wet pitch' but at least it is now safer, courtesy of new CNCC anchors.

We currently lack route descriptions for much of the Leck Fell side of the Ease Gill system, including Pippikin Pot and Bye George Pot. If this is an area of cave you know well, and you would like to write a description for us to publish, we'd love to hear from you.

INCLUSIVITY

Accessible caving

by Josh White, CNCC Inclusivity Coordinator

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



Several people have said that my article in the last newsletter was aimed at conditions and disabilities that people are highly unlikely to encounter. This included more serious physical disabilities where significant adaptations to trips are needed. The aim of that article was partly to provide guidance for those in these situations, but also to emphasise that people with such disabilities can enjoy caving, if there is desire from the individual and those caving with them, to make that happen. However, for this, and future articles, I'm going to focus on considerations relevant to some of the most common conditions and impairments.

Before anyone even gets underground there is a huge amount involved in caving; staying at club huts, planning for the trip, gear packing, logistics and transport. These simple steps may seem routine to many of us, so the impact of many common (and often hidden) conditions and impairments may be overlooked.

This article will focus on our club huts, and considerations for those running our huts to help make them more accessible to those with a variety of common physical conditions and neurodiversity.

According to the Royal National Institute for the Blind, 1.9m people are living with sight loss in the UK; that is individuals who have a significant reduction in vision that impacts their daily life. This encompasses blind and partially sighted individuals and is a condition that many of us will experience more as we get older. If you imagine walking around your own caving hut, think of how it could be unhelpful or hazardous. Poor room design (with donated, ill-fitting furniture) may leave awkward routes between rooms.

As much stick as my own club (YSS) gets for being like a dentist's waiting room, the big bright lights in the living room are amongst the best I've seen at assisting people with sight loss. Dark dingy common areas with low ceilings and furniture to avoid must be horrendous to navigate.

Corridors and rooms can become dumping grounds for kit. Does your club have a policy on keeping corridors and walkways clear? This may also be important as part of your fire risk assessment. If such a policy exists, is it properly communicated and enforced?

Do your bunkrooms have space for people to store their gear (e.g. under beds), or does your kitchen have good storage for bags of food, to avoid things being strewn across floors?

Another quick and easy win is to paint a bright strip on the edge of steps to increase the contrast.

Hearing loss is another challenge many people face. This can make it difficult to distinguish conversations over background noise, thus seriously isolating some people in busier areas. If your hut allows, having a quieter, comfortable social area, away from the bustling common room, is useful. This area can also prove welcome for those who are neurodiverse as a less 'intense' space to relax.

An estimated 15% of the UK population have a condition that falls within the neurodivergence umbrella. The most common are autism, ADHD, dyslexia and dyspraxia (also dyscalculia and Tourette Syndrome). Due to differences in the way the brains of neurodivergent and neurotypical people function, many people with these conditions (and in fact without), can become anxious when visiting somewhere and not knowing what to expect. Being able to plan and prepare for what lies ahead, even for what may seem like relatively trivial activities, is of much higher importance for some people than others and can help to alleviate a lot of anxiety.

With that in mind, it's worthwhile reviewing what information you provide to visitors upon their booking. How is the parking? Does your website have information to allow people to understand and build a clear picture of the venue and its facilities in advance?

Is information for visitors clear and easy to find, and presented in a legible font that doesn't scramble for those with Dyslexia? The 'Century Gothic' font is a good choice available in most software, but failing that, Ariel also works. Is information for turning showers or ovens on, or turning the heating up, clear and well-written, or is it some kind of tatty hand-written sign of dubious clarity? Something that may seem obvious to you, may cause issues for others.

Ensure visitors have clear information on what is provided at the hut, and what they need to bring. Don't assume everyone has the same knowledge level as you.

The final range of conditions to consider involves dexterity loss. This can affect all of us with age, but with conditions like cerebral palsy, or arthritis, users of any age are relevant. Consider how access is managed to your hut, and how to then move through the hut. Are door handles easy to grab and are the doors of a weight that can easily be pulled open? Are there seating areas and bunks that don't require caver-grade acrobatics or manipulations to reach?

No article on disability and inclusive building design is complete without mentioning toilets. There are a multitude of different kinds of locks for toilet doors. Consider whether yours allow individuals with limited dexterity to both lock and unlock with ease.

There are thousands of factors around inclusive building design that we should all be considering when adapting our caving huts. A full, professional accessibility audit would raise all these things. These can be exceedingly expensive and frankly unreasonable to expect clubs to do, but with a switch in mindset we can all have some empathy for those with disabilities and how we can make things easier for everyone in our caving huts.

In summary, consider the following:

- How accessible is your hut for someone with reduced visibility? Could simple measures such as extra lighting in darker areas, high visibility strips on steps, brighter or clearer signage and clear-floor areas help to make things easier and safer?
- Are instructions for those visiting your hut clear and well-written? Could you include photos, a floorplan, or even a video walkaround on your website? Is there clear information on what is provided (e.g. pans, cleaning equipment, tea towels, pillows, toilet paper) and what visitors generally need to bring? Ideally this information should be on your website.
- Are locks, latches and switches able to be reached and used by someone of reduced physical strength or dexterity? How well could someone with any such impediment move around your hut and use all the facilities?

A walk around your hut with the above in mind may help identify some inexpensive and simple improvements that could make a big difference for those with common impairments or neurodiversity.

If you have any questions around this topic, please message me and I can do my best to either answer or point you in the direction of some reading materials, or organisations that can help.

Spotlight on...

Allt a'Chalda Mor Stream Cave

Assynt, SW Sutherland

By Alan Jeffreys



Allt a' Chalda Mor Stream Cave by Alan Jeffreys

It is perhaps not surprising that, given the sporting appeal of Assynt's three longest caves, investigating some of the 'outlier' systems in the district occupies a very poor second place. Yet there are potential rewards if luck and, more often, clearance and digging are employed. One such cave is the Allt a'Chalda Mor Stream Cave ('Stream Cave of the Big Hazel'), situated at NC 2540 2355 at an altitude of 130 metres on the Achmore plateau, a dolostone (limestone) outcrop flanking Loch Assynt, S.W. Sutherland.

The louring quartzite slopes of Glas Bheinn sweep steeply down onto the Cambrian dolostones to provide massive water run-off concentrated on two burns, the Allt a'Chalda Beag and Allt a'Chalda Mor. Yet surprisingly, examination of the level plateau, although with a cursory glance promising big rewards, finds it populated with shakeholes, but practically no caves at all! Only one proper system is known, first identified by ULSA in 1968 and then by the Grampian Speleological Group in 1969, the latter first reaching the bitter end. The limestone beds slope steeply northwards, for all the world as though the weight of Glas Bheinn has tilted them backwards. This has resulted in sinking water flowing into the mountain rather than, as would be expected, down the surface stream to Loch Assynt.

Having been one of the original explorers back in 1969, this cave has always held my imagination. Where does the water go? It has never been dye tested, but the current landowners of the estate have built two palatial holiday homes at Achmore and would probably not be amused at being subjected to green tap water or other agents in their drinking supply! In May 2023, three of us resolved to attack Allt a'Chalda Mor to see if progress could be made.

The entrance is a picturesque place. The stream tumbles down Glas Bheinn over a series of falls, below the last of which, a

rugged cliff about 4m in height, it strikes a jumble of massive breakdown at the cliff's base and divides. Half of its water continues across Achmore whilst the rest disappears into a horizontal slot at the foot of the cliff. Only when actually standing over it, does this peculiar entrance make itself known. To the left a dug-out slot allows an easy but uncomfortable descent underground, while on the right persons wishing to wash their gear can enter via a short dousing waterfall. Inside, a wondrously wide pink quartzite roof spans a space averaging 8m width, water roaring straight down a steep cobble floor. Frequent floods re-arrange these cobbles from time to time, creating new access routes to the ultimate tight water-filled trench.

Accompanying Simone Sambento and myself was one of Grampian's caving machines, Bruce Taylor. When he reached the bottom, his instinct was to excavate a route on the right (east) along the strike and swiftly gained 15m to where a trickle

inlet was encountered. Assuming water drains eastward, this would appear to be an obvious attack point; indeed, at several points on the descent potential digs through piles of cobbles present themselves. No further progress has been made, and I suspect infrequent visits are responsible for this. Outside on the surface, a few metres downhill there is a massive shakehole but no other evidence of where this cave is ultimately headed. We contented ourselves with photographing the place to death, resolving to return. However, a prolonged interval of hip replacements has prevented me from taking a further look so far.

Achmore is definitely an attractive place to visit, both rivers form splendid limestone gorges in their lower reaches, and potential for more caves must exist along the plateau. We shall return!

Details of how to find and navigate this cave can be found in our newly updated 'Caving in Scotland' guide available on our website.



Alan Jeffreys inside the entrance of Allt a' Chalda Mor, by Simone Sambento

Summer 2025 training workshops

In March we published our catalogue of new training workshops covering April to September. The catalogue is shown here (some dates now as a retrospective) and at the time of publishing there is still availability for some future dates.

19-20 Apr

New-to-SRT /SRT refresher (two days)

21 Apr

Pull through techniques in Swinsto Hole

26 Apr

SRT underground refresher (basic)

4 May

SRT underground refresher (intermediate)

10-11 May

New-to-SRT /SRT refresher (two days)

17 May

Underground geology tour with John Helm

24 May

SRT underground refresher (basic)

26 May

Pull through techniques in Swinsto Hole

31 May-1 Jun

New-to-SRT /SRT refresher (two days)

7 Jun

SRT rigging underground intensive (2:1)

8 Jun

SRT underground refresher (basic)

21 Jun

SRT rescue underground intensive (2:1)

5 Jul

Underground geology tour with John Helm

12-13 Jul

SRT intermediate refresher (two days)

19-20 Jul

Women's SRT rescue (two days)

9-10 Aug

Women's SRT rescue (two days)

9 Aug

SRT underground refresher at Gaping Gill

10 Aug

Ingleborough Cave geology with John Cordingley

23 and 24 Aug

New to caving novice events

30-31 Aug

New-to-SRT /SRT refresher (two days)

13 Sep

SRT underground refresher (basic)

Signup through our website: cncc.org.uk/training

Dates for autumn/winter will be announced later in summer. As always, our mailing list subscribers will get advanced notice and a head-start on booking. Our homepage contains a link to our mailing list signup.

New to SRT feedback

Following our two-day new-to-SRT workshop on 31st May and 1st June, we were pleased to receive some great feedback from two of the attendees:

“ Since being a young lad, I've always been intrigued by caving and the thought of exploring underground. As I near 40, I finally decided to do something about it. Searching on the internet I was presented with a number of caving clubs welcoming new members, but most asking for you to already have some experience; difficult when you're not part of a caving club. The CNCC's New to SRT course seemed to be the perfect answer, with a day of indoor tuition followed up the day after with a trip underground to use your new skills. Having just completed the weekend, I'd highly recommend the course to anybody else

in a similar position (or anybody just wanting a relaxed refresher). Despite having no prior experience, I didn't feel like I was holding anyone back, with both Ian and Lin providing a fantastic relaxed and supportive environment over both days. I now feel confident and prepared for getting involved with some local clubs and look forward to my next adventure.

“ Ian (assisted by his wife, Lin), did a great job of delivering the course in a fun, informative and relaxed manner and the low instructor / student ratio of 1:4 meant that attendees were able to practice safely at all times. Overall, the course was fantastic for building confidence in basic SRT skills and provides a solid foundation for attendees who may wish to attend club trips and develop their skills further.



The new-to-SRT workshop attendees, by Ian Patrick

CNCC kit for training

By Ian Patrick, CNCC Training Officer

When I took on this role in 2020, I inherited some kit from the BCA. While much of it was functional, some components were outdated and not ideal for training.

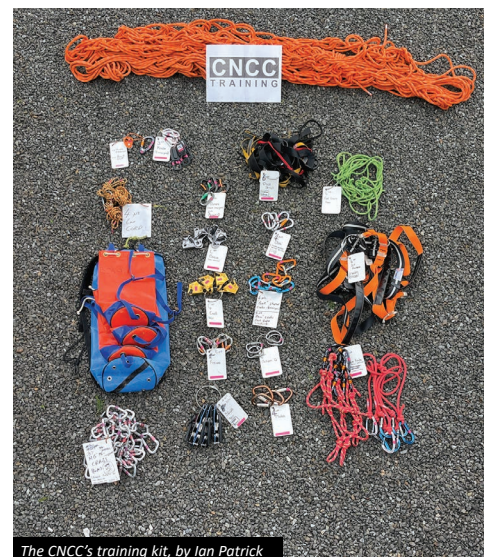
As the popularity of our workshops has increased, and their takeup now includes cavers travelling from all over the UK, we needed to update our kit inventory.

Over the last several months we have purchased four user-friendly SRT sets and several ropes, as well as a larger tackle bag, alternative chest harness for different body shapes and new cowstails carabiners.

We had an in-depth discussion about the 'best' carabiners for use in our workshops. All five CNCC trainers agreed on the Petzl Vertigo Wirelock which achieves the best balance of ease of use and secure design for training workshops. During workshops, we always demonstrate alternative equipment options and we explain the reasoning behind our selections used at training.

The investment in this kit was approved by the CNCC Committee and purchased equally from Inglesport and Starless River, to ensure we support our local businesses.

We now have an excellent selection of kit for running workshops. All equipment is logged on the CNCC asset register (found in the 'resources' section of our website) and is cared for by the training team.



The CNCC's training kit, by Ian Patrick

Pull-through workshops

Using the newly re-anchored Swinsto Hole, Easter Monday (21st April) saw CNCC host one of our pull-through workshops, covering:

- Pre trip planning (weather, call outs).
- Rope lengths and preparation.
- Choosing the right cave.
- Emergency equipment to carry.
- Rigging for safe approach and efficient pull downs.
- Problem solving.

The four participants came from Cornwall, South Wales, Keswick and Blackpool, and everyone is reported to have had a great time. Our Cornwall attendee even produced five Cadbury Cream Eggs at the bottom of Split Pitch – all impressively intact!



The pull-through workshop attendees, by Ian Patrick

New to caving workshops

Our New to Caving initiative has gained a lot of momentum over the last few years, with spaces now booked up within weeks of being advertised.

These events involve us partnering with local clubs or groups. We advertise the event and facilitate signup and costs. Near the time, there is a 'handover' where the organising club/group contacts participants to communicate last minute details.

We're thankful to the Craven Pothole Club, Yorkshire Subterranean Society and Red Rose Cave and Pothole Club (RRCPC) who have partnered with us over the last few years to run these events.

The recent RRCPC event on 26th April was a quick sell-out and sounds like it was very successful. If just a few of those who



A happy caver emerges from County Pot, by Gwen Tawy

attended decide they want to continue caving as a hobby then it will all be worthwhile. Thanks to Gwen Tawy for sending through these photos.

We have two more dates planned in August (23rd and 24th).



New-to-caving attendees in County Pot, by Gwen Tawy

Your CNCC

Chair: Todd Rye - chair@cncc.org.uk

Secretary: Jill Bolton - secretary@cncc.org.uk

Treasurer: Kath Davis - treasurer@cncc.org.uk

Conservation: Kay Easton - conservation@cncc.org.uk

Access: James Alderson - 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



Instagram



Bluesky



Threads



X



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 individual 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