

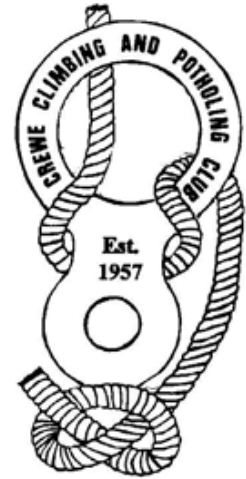


C.C.P.C. Newsletter 150. November - December 2023

Log on to www.ccpc.org.uk

Editor: Steve Knox

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Planned Club Meets, etc., from November to December 2023:

Sat. 4 th Nov.	Clearwell Caves, Forest of Dean.	CHANGED: Alderley Edge Copper Mines, Cheshire.
Mon. 6 th Nov.	CCPC Monthly Meeting. (Also available to Members via 'Zoom'.	The Red Bull, Butt Lane, nr. Kidsgrove, Staffs. 8.30 pm..
Sat. 11 th or Sun. 12 th Nov. (To be confirmed)	Waterways Swallet, nr. Ilam, Staffs. POSTPONED to 17th December. (See below)	Annual car park clear-up, followed by a descent, for anyone interested. No SRT. Multi-pitch (climbable) complex.
Sat. 18 th Nov.	DCRO Exercise: Bagshawe Cavern, Bradwell, Derbyshire.	A full day exercise for team members.
Sun 19 th Nov.	Peak Cavern, Castleton, Derbyshire. <i>Alt. Ireby Fell Cavern, Yorks.</i>	An absolute delight ! Many routes, including some with no SRT. <i>Classic multi-pitch SRT. Can be wet.</i>
Sat. 2 nd Dec.	Ogof Dydd Byraf (mine), Minera, North Wales.	
Mon. 4 th Dec.	CCPC Monthly Meeting. (Also available to Members via 'Zoom'.	Upstairs at The Red Bull, Butt Lane, nr. Kidsgrove, Staffs. 8.30 pm..
Sun 17 th Dec. 3 options !	Cussey Pot, Stoney Middleton. <i>Alt. Carlswark Cavern, Stoney Middleton.</i> Waterways Swallet, near Ilam, Staffs. POSTPONED until January 13th.	Newly discovered – serious squeezes, pitches, & copious mud. Challenging ! <i>Well known cave with single easy pitch – ideal for newcomers.</i> Annual car park clear-up, followed by a descent, for anyone interested. No SRT.

As always, my thanks to everyone who contributes to the CCPC Newsletter, and also to those who acknowledge receipt afterwards. All errors, changes, or corrections are mine – my apologies. Keep safe, keep caving, and continue to support your club. **Steve Knox, Editor.**



Derbyshire Cave Rescue Organisation: DCRO team members including a number from CCPC, continue to be ready to assist whenever required, and regular team training continues.

<https://www.facebook.com/DerbyshireCaveRescue>



Alderley Edge Copper Mines

4th November 2023

A trip from Engine Vein, and out of Wood Mine, taking in Hough Level and Brynlow Mine along the way. We managed to overload and sink a canoe in the Hough Level. Fortunately at the shallow end, where we didn't get too wet, and the boat was easily emptied. Lots of green and blue copper ore spotted along the way. **Thanks to Nigel (DCC) and Mick (DCC & CCPC)** for leading us through and rounding up stray cavers.

..... **Jenny Drake**

'Who says it was shallow ?' – it was definitely deeper than me, although I was lying flat by that time , with my nose resting on the bottom ! – **Ed.**

Twelve of us met up on the National Trust car park, next to the closed 'Wizard' pub, and after 'signing in' at the Derbyshire Caving Club building over the road, we set off for a pleasant stroll round to the Engine Mine entrance. Evidence points to the copper ore in this vein having been worked in the early Bronze Age, and during Roman times, as well as during the 18th, 19th, and early 20th centuries.

The deaths of six 'explorers' between 1909 and 1954 led to the various mine entrances, including Engine Vein, being closed for public safety. Sealing the Engine Vein workings must have been a major task, as the ore had been extracted from between the well-spaced sides of the vein, leaving a canyon open to the surface. The sandstone edges of this can still be clearly seen by passing walkers, but the space below has been bridged over and landscaped.

We entered **Engine Vein** through a steel door, led by Mick Potts, and with Nigel locking it firmly behind us. It would be impossible for me to describe our route through the maze of workings, 'though Mick kept us informed of the names of various chambers and junctions.



Amazing, clean passages like this were everywhere !

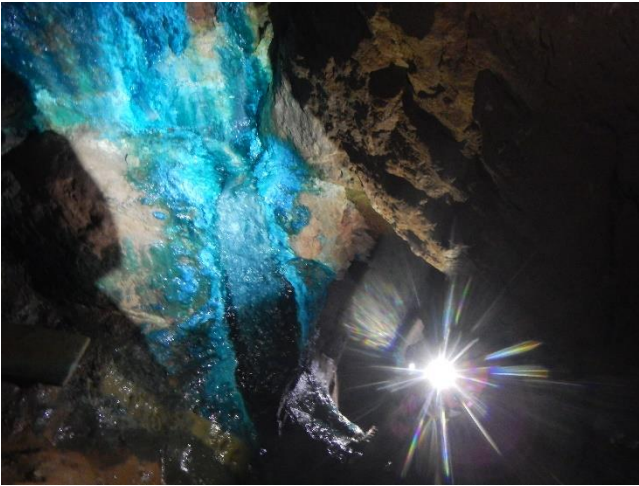
Many of the connecting passages clearly showed the sweeping pick marks of the miners as they cut through the relatively soft sandstone. Apparently many of the miners were from Cornwall where they would have been used to the hard Cornish granite.



The DCC have installed fixed ladders at various points where it is possible to move from one working level to another, either above or below the route we were following, creating a three-dimensional puzzle. At times we must have looked like a bunch of tourists (*see left*) as we were shown around the various main features (Open Days are sometimes arranged for members of the public) but it was very useful to have Mick and Nigel to keep us 'on track'.



Not surprisingly there were a number of places where seeping water has leached amazing blue and green colouring from the remaining copper ore in the roof and walls, and other trace minerals added different tones to the displays.



Eventually we dropped down through the workings to reach the **Hough Level**, where we had been promised a special treat! Apparently the Hough Level was driven almost horizontally through the whole mass of ore-bearing sandstone, to link up most of the existing workings, to act as a drainage level. Later it was used as a way to take ore from the eastern mines out to daylight.

Although much of the Hough Level was easy walking size, and relatively dry, eventually we reached the remains of an old, 'historic' wooden boat and just beyond, a canoe, and a couple of inflated truck innertubes. This was to be the promised "fun part".

Mick happily took charge, as captain of the Titanic (canoe), and assured us that it would easily carry four cavers.



I carefully climbed in at the front, while Mick attempted to get himself and two others aboard behind me – this wasn't going well as the craft leaned dangerously to one side, then to the other, before promptly filling and sinking. The others barely got wet to their knees, but I enjoyed an early bath and tested the full depth of the water – not funny at all! Mick decided it was a two-person craft after all, and we reboarded and set off up the passage, wobbling precariously from side to

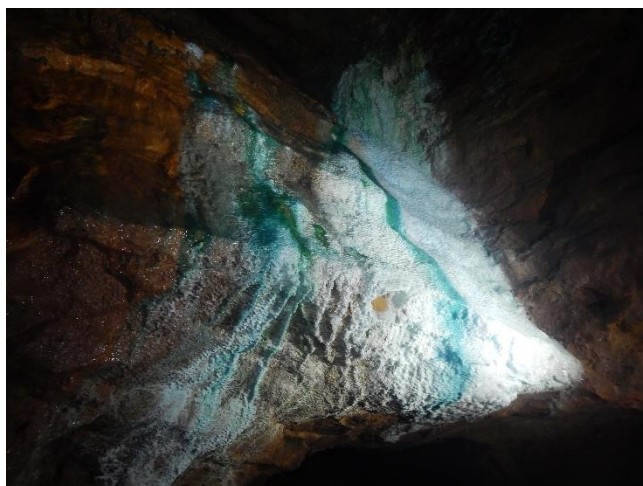
side. Suffice to say, we reached the landing point at the end of the flooded section without further mishap, only to discover the ‘proper’ four-person canoe parked on the side. Mick changed boats and set off to recover the rest of the party, only to find that most had decided that wading was a better option, especially as there were hand lines fixed along the wall, and the leading person proved that the water was barely more than waist deep anyway (there was supposedly a flooded shaft somewhere under there !).



With the Hough Level behind us, we entered the lower workings of **Brynlow Mine**, where once again there were passages heading off in all directions, and fixed ladders leading to levels above. For a while there were group members disappearing one way to reappear somewhere else as they explored the workings. Several of us ended up taking a break next to a bank of mud with a few clay-pipe fragments visible. We happily spent a few minutes recovering more fragments to add to a little display on a ledge.

A further stretch of the Hough Level , fortunately dry, led us into the complex of passages and chambers which make up **Wood Mine**. Several members of the party were more familiar with that area, having carried out D.C.R.O. training exercises there. Even looking at the survey at home, I couldn’t work out which bits we’d been in, although some location names (Blue Lake Junction, Sand Cavern, Pole Shaft) were familiar as they had been pointed out to us.

As expected, there were more beautiful, blue formations to be seen as we headed through the workings to reach the Main Adit and another steel door out to the surface – by this time, well down in the wood to the west of the B5087 road, having started the day well to the east. One final surprise, was finding that some person, unknown, had attempted to cut through the concealed, hardened padlock, accessed awkwardly through a small aperture in the door. They failed to do more than slightly damage the surface !



Steve Knox

(Photos and text :- Steve Knox)

.....
 ‘Glad everybody had a good trip on Saturday. I have spoken to Nigel about a donation from CCPC; he has suggested £5 a head, but it doesn't have to be that much. I suggest If the club wants to donate, ask Steve P-A to make a cheque out to Derbyshire Caving Club and pass it on to me or Nigel. No Panic over this. Let me know if you want any more trips and don't forget if you want to camp over we can offer the Surgery field.’

Mick Potts



DCRO Exercise at Bagshawe Cavern.

Saturday 18th November 2023

DCRO training is generally either specific subject sessions, or all-day exercises. The subject specific training is usually in the evening, either at an underground, or surface location, or at the Base in Buxton. The exercises are all day events, usually at a cave, or mine; the theme is at the whim of the organiser and is often unknown to the participants beforehand. Sometimes, even the location is secret before the day. Just like a real shout! Today's exercise was at Bagshawe Cavern and organised by leader Katie Eavis. She decided on comms training with Nicola radios, followed by stretcher hauling.

We arrived for a 10am start, with Steve PA bringing the team vehicle from Buxton fire station. The early rain had eased off and the temperature rose to a relatively balmy, for November, 15°C. Two people remained on the surface. One to operate the surface Nicola radio, the other to keep an eye on the van and issue gear when required. Both the duty controller and his deputy for this month were going to be underground, so the "follow me" number the police use to initiate a call out was temporarily transferred to another controller for the day. Four underground locations were issued for setting up underground Nicolas, each with a team of at least three. These were Mulespinner Mine, Agony Column, Pool chamber in the New Series and Moose's Revenge in the Full Moon Series. I was with the Mulespinner group, and we picked up our Nicola, a rope bag and a rig bag. The water levels were expected to be high, so it was uncertain if the Agony Column team could reach their destination via either The Dungeon, or Agony Crawl.

The route to our site in Mulespinner starts opposite the bottom of the entrance staircase, where you'd usually turn sharply to head to The Dungeon. Instead, crossing the wooden "No Entry" barrier you head along a mined tunnel, dropping through a restricted dug hole to the left part way along. This brings you to a natural pitch in to more natural passage. We set up in a small chamber with plenty of damp mud for the Nicola aerials to get good electrical contact. We had excellent comms with the surface and reasonable contact with the Agony Column people. Pool Chamber could talk to the Surface, but not to anyone else. Full Moon, the furthest away, couldn't reach anyone. In a shout we would likely have to set up a surface station closer to them, which might be in a field, or perhaps someone's garden!

We all regrouped for a stretcher carry from near the New Series junction back to The Dungeon. The team has had an influx of student members, who are now going through their probationary training. Today was the first time they had tried stretcher hauling and they rapidly got the hang of the awkward lifting, hauling, sliding, and contortions required. All the while being careful of the volunteer "casualty" in the stretcher. From The Dungeon the casualty was released, and we walked back to the base of the entrance stairs for a stretcher haul to the surface. A couple of Z hauling rigs and twin ropes were set up in the Coe. Comms was by shouting up and down, as the radios we tried using were ineffective, despite the line of site view between them. Hauling went slowly, but smoothly and all the team were soon on the surface for a debrief and loading the gear back in the van for cleaning and to be ready for the next shout.

Jenny Drake

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The NCC Shafts in Peak Cavern.

Alan Brentnall

The recent reports concerning the NCC Shafts and references to “poor bolting” have prompted me to put in a good word, and a bit of history, regarding this unique section of Peak Cavern. It really is a great trip to a beautiful and complex vertical shaft.

In fact, the Peak Speedwell system is full of such shafts (e.g. Titan, Block Hall, two different Ventilators, Victoria Aven etc) and there are surely more of these to be discovered because none was created during the current Peak hydrology / geology. It should be remembered that Peak Cavern was originally a huge phreatic outflow of Vauclusian proportions, issuing (under pressure) volumes of water vastly greater than anything which currently emanates from the cave - even when in high flood.

I will start by saying that beauty is, as ever, in the eye of the beholder, and the bolting of the shafts is no worse than in many other places in the Peak District. I have rigged and descended the NCC shafts many times and, while I admit it is a bit technical in parts, I have always enjoyed the trip – and I have never had any problems with the rigging.

The shafts themselves were discovered in 2001, when Foot & Mouth was infesting many of the caving areas of England, and at that time just about all of the Yorkshire Dales was a no-go area for walkers and cavers alike. We were lucky in the Peak District that we still had access to many of our caves, and the area became a magnet for visitors from areas where caving was effectively banned. It was during these visits that a bunch of Yorkshire cavers discovered a huge cavity within Peak Cavern which had never been entered before – the NCC Shafts.

There are 3 ways in!

If you visit Galena Chamber, in Peak Cavern, and enter it via the waterfall at Squaw Junction, you will notice several old plastic plumbing pipes spouting water from the walls. This was a P.B. Smith experiment to block up the inlets and clear the passage through which you are traversing. The main hydraulic effort of this system came from a tippler (AKA flop-jack) which you will eventually pass underneath. This device, which fortunately no longer works, would tip the contents of a large bucket of water down the passage every time the bucket became full.

At the same location as the tippler you will notice three ropes going upwards. One of these is a knotted hand line to assist you as you climb up into the crawl through to Galena Chamber itself. Another is an SRT line up into Cadbury Crawl, a dead-end passage on the same level as the Galena crawl. The third rope goes all the way up Wigwam Aven, and, at the very top of this is an awkward little passage called the M1, which leads to Disappointment Rift, from where a 7m passage (Mega Tsunami) eventually breaks out in NCC Shafts itself.

This was the original way into the NCC Shafts, but a slightly easier route was subsequently found further along the crawl to Galena Chamber. After the climb up the afore-mentioned knotted rope, follow muddy knee-grooves through this low passage until you can suddenly stand again. At this point straight ahead is the way into Galena Chamber, while the passage to your left (facing Galena Chamber) is Rocky Tube, which can be a way into NCC Shafts for very small, supple people. But your best route in is to your right and slightly behind you. A narrow standing squeeze into Galena Rift leads quickly to a muddy rope which can be climbed (SRT) to a higher passage leading to a boulder ruckle up through which can be found the foot of EMT Aven. There is a rope up this (SRT) leading to a rightwards rope-traverse into another rift which soon degenerates into a low squeeze-

crawl (Focal Recall) leading to another SRT rope which goes all the way to the balcony of the NCC Shafts.

The Re-bolting Exercise:

I first came across the NCC shafts in 2003 (I think) on a DCRO search exercise, looking for a “missing digger” in an unspecified location. Very few on the team even knew of the new discovery and I have to say that we never actually found Felix, our casualty – or, at least, not without some heavy hints from the organiser (Wayne Sheldon). I certainly didn’t get anywhere near the shaft, and it wasn’t until 2008 that I finally managed a trip to the series myself.

As was the fashion in those days, the first NCC explorers used spits for their belays, and all the spits were equipped with hangers and all the ropes were left in situ. By 2008, the Peak Key Holders decided that the spits needed to be replaced with decent glue-in bolts, and all the “UP” pitches should be rerigged with new rope. Lee Langdon had been persuaded to do the work, and he asked me and Keith Mason to lend a hand while Ralph Johnson provided rope and the glue-in bolts. These bolts were not DMM P-bolts, but Raumer glue-ins which were inserted into pre-drilled holes which contained a glass ampoule filled with ready-mixed resin. Unlike through bolts, glue-ins cannot be used immediately after placement, which meant that the total work would take almost two months to complete, and we would have to rely on the old spits until the resin in the new bolts was fully cured.

It is important to understand that the work was basically to make safe the existing rigging as installed by the discovering team. This was discussed at the time, and NCC Shafts weren’t seen as a tourist trip, but as a technical outing for experienced SRT cavers. Additionally, ensuring sound rock for placements can be difficult in such large phreatic cavities where walls, once supported by enormous hydrostatic pressure, are now dry and beginning to fall away. (In fact on a later trip in December 2012, when we were looking at an issue with the rigging, I remember seeing Dave Ottewell desperately trying to make safe a huge block which had come away from the wall, while Ade who was directly below, seemed totally unaware.)

Work started on 07 November 2008 and was completed on 31 January 2009, when I took a solo trip in to remove all the old rope and metalwork. There was a huge amount of tatt to drag out, and I didn’t have any bags, so it constantly got entangled. In fact, getting it all through Focal Recall and down to Galena Rift was quite a “Zen” exercise and I was glad when I bumped into Richard Tooley and Ann Soulsby in Galena Chamber, and they offered to help me carry the stuff out.

See for yourself !

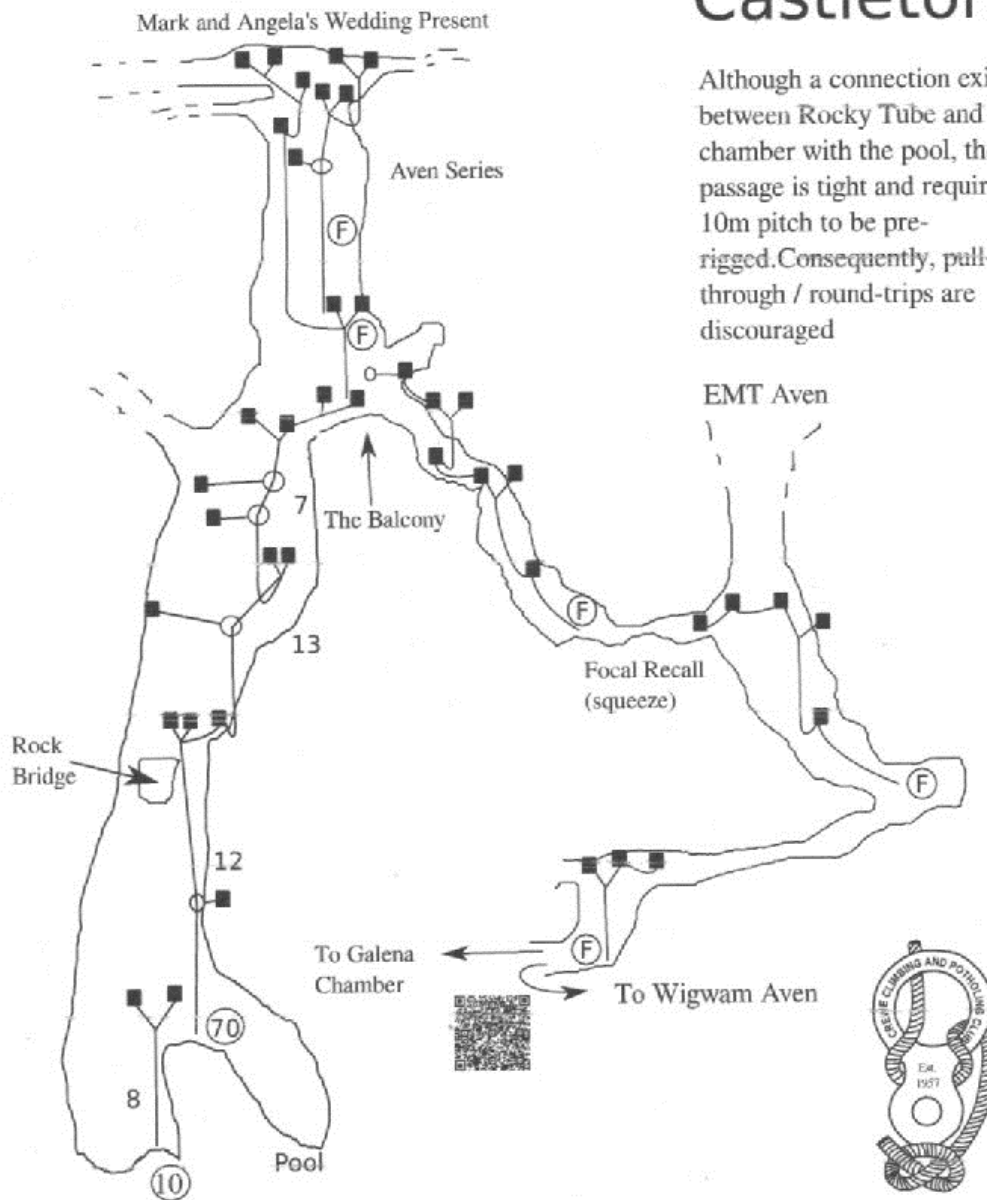
So don’t be totally put-off doing this remarkable trip, but be very aware that it isn’t an easy trip; it isn’t straightforward SRT, and you do need to be careful – but it is a great experience which will stand you in good stead when the peak District version of **NFTFH** eventually comes out!

A full description of this section of peak Cavern can be downloaded from <https://peakdistrictcaving.info/entrance-resources/download-document/1887>

And, of course, rigging details for the “DOWN” pitches can be found in Jenny’s online guide: <https://www.ccpc.org.uk/rigging-guide/ncc.html>

For those not familiar with the topo [© CCPC]:

NCC Shafts Peak Cavern Castleton



Although a connection exists between Rocky Tube and the chamber with the pool, the passage is tight and requires a 10m pitch to be pre-rigged. Consequently, pull-through / round-trips are discouraged

Based on survey by W Sheldon

©Crewe Climbing and Potholing Club 2001 to 2023

Peak Cavern NCC Shafts - Discussion Thread:- Evolution of improvement ! [Where possible, names have been intentionally removed.]

Prior to the Peak Cavern trip on 19th November there was some discussion about checking the accuracy of the current Topo diagram for the NCC Shafts. The discussion started on 15th November with a suggestion from **Jenny Drake**:

'..... some sketching for the rigging guide would be a good thing to do. The current sketch of the cave doesn't really reflect what it looks like when you are there, and people have commented that the topo is hard to use as a result - there is too much compression of the route in some places, and not enough in others. It needs someone to take a look at it with a rigging-guide eye.'

.....
The following day there was **the first response**, which explained some of the background:

'..... some time ago a group of three skilled riggers finished replacing the original spits and rope, left in there by the NCC guys during Foot & Mouth. One of them decided to add the shafts to the CCPC Rigging Guide, but only had a sketch that another person had drawn up, showing where the original ropes went, and where the spits were.

The correspondent commended Jenny for what she had done with the guide since she had taken it on. It has been a giant leap in both technology and availability and the latest version is something that all cavers have access to, and for which CCPC, as a club, should be proud.

The fact that Jenny is willing to take on board constructive comments from cavers, regarding potential issue, and quickly deal with them where necessary, is a great service. Whether individuals print the whole guide, or just the odd topo, or simply browse on-line, cavers really have an excellent source of information.

.....
Second response:

'The current topo made use of the information that was available at the time. The advantage of having the guide on-line is that it speeds making updates. Instead of gathering them all in a to-do file, we can concentrate on each one as it comes up. This saves waiting maybe a year or two and trying to redraw the topos all at once for a new edition of the paper guide.'

.....
Third response:

'Many years ago, this correspondent, and two others, went down to improve the second pitch. One of them insisted on putting in a deviation which was to prevent a nasty swing, but it's still poor bolting in the correspondent's opinion.

He states that it needs a proper re-belay there, as was suggested at the time.

Having been down there recently, the correspondent still found it to be a very awkward deviation to pass, being out of reach for a lot of people.'

.....
Fourth response: - posted' on the morning of the Peak Cavern trip:

This correspondent remembered the evening trip into the NCC shafts referred to above, when a new bolt (P32 Petzl through bolt) was installed to enable a deviation to be added to the main down pitch. This was after another caver had a worrying episode at that spot, when she got into a position where the tight rope was passing through her Croll jammer, forming a 90-degree bend at the jammer. The idea of the deviation was to position the rope so that it couldn't be accidentally taken further into the gulley of the pitch.

This correspondent agreed that a re-belay would have been a better solution for two reasons. First re-belays are always a better solution than deviations because a re-belay is a point at which the caver can definitely stop and connect with the rock, everybody knows and practices re-belays, whereas deviations aren't necessarily safe, and they tend to be positioned off-line so the interaction between caver and the sling tends to be under strain. Second this latter

factor puts extra stress on the bolt, and can even cause the hanger to eventually come off. For this reason, this correspondent had to take a trip into NCC shafts to replace both the hanger and nut on this particular deviation a few years back.

As happens on certain routes in the Peak (both Murmuring Churn in Maskhill Mine and the last bolt shared by the East and South routes in Eldon Hole spring to mind) some cavers already simply rig what is shown as a deviation in the CCPC rigging guide as a re-belay, by tying into the bolt rather than adding a sling and a snap-link, but, in the case of this deviation in NCC shafts it would probably be better if a second bolt were to be added. Also, as has already been stated, there may have been changes made to this pitch and by the time anyone reads this account, they should have the necessary up-to-date information. Whatever changes are considered to be the solution, they must first be discussed with Charley Cooley, as he represents the key holders and the management, before any action can be taken.

.....
Following the trip on 19th November, **one of the members present at the time wrote:**

'After today's trip down NCC I can confirm that alterations have been made:

- 1.) the deviation that was put in on the evening trip referred to (above);
- 2.) another deviation on the opposite side lower down;
- 3.) an additional bolt to act as a traverse line to the double bolt rebelay - it's so close it's pointless.

Conclusion:- it's a slight improvement, but it's still poor.

The new deviation would be better used as a rebelay, although it's not in the best position. I repeat my original assessment that there should be a rebelay above the main hanger. There have also been a couple of other deviations put in that are not very effective and still leave two rub points. Overall it is not bolted very well.'

.....
Final response: The previous correspondent was thanked for providing an up-to-date assessment. This original contributor is still quite interested in this area of Peak Cavern having been involved in the re-bolting, and still believes that there is more to be found in that particular area.

When the series was re-bolted back in 2008, the Peak Cavern key holders (including Ralph Johnson, who provided the new bolts and rope) wanted it done to make it safe, by replacing the 7-year-old spits and ropes. This was the priority, as at the time, they didn't see it becoming a trade route - it was always seen as a technical trip for experienced cavers.

Surplus Caving Literature ? **20th November 2023**

Darren's surplus newsletters have been donated to the [British Caving Library](#). If anyone has unwanted caving books, magazines, or other caving material, written, audio, or video, then consider this as an option. If they already have the item, they can arrange for it to go to another caving club library, or otherwise ensure it ends up in a happy home. **Jenny**

Help !!! 'Descent' appeal: Every few years I put out this same enquiry !

My collection of Descent Magazine has a few gaps which I would love to fill if anyone has any surplus copies :- .

Issues 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 9, 10 – all original small format – I loaned my first twenty issues to a dear friend, no longer with us, but unfortunately these seven issues never came home.

Issues 53, 55, 127, 136 – the standard size (A4) issues with the coloured photo covers.

- no idea who borrowed these, but it used to be 'open house' for borrowing !

Steve Knox

Suspension Trauma

The BCA have come up with a poster and some background information about suspension trauma. Most of you will be aware of this already. I'd not seen the bit about raising the legs and knees, but it makes sense.

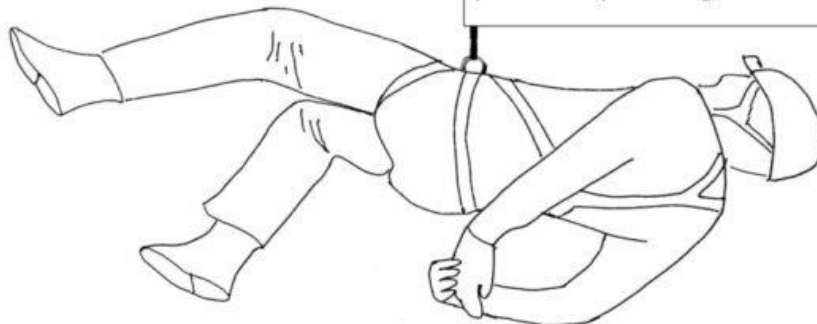
Jenny Drake

<https://british-caving.org.uk/suspension-trauma/>

Suspension Trauma

1: With stationary leg muscles, blood accumulates in the legs.

3: With less oxygenated blood arriving at the brain, prolonged unconsciousness can occur causing damage to organs and potentially leading to death.



2: With less blood in rest of the body, the heart becomes less effective at pumping oxygenated blood to the brain.

Half of 79 volunteers in an experiment to investigate suspension trauma showed the symptoms leading to unconsciousness within 30 minutes, six within five minutes.

Do you know how to respond if someone starts to succumb to suspension trauma?

- If possible, get the person to exercise their legs;
- If that is not possible, get the casualty to a safe position and if unconscious, lay them in the recovery position;
- If that is not possible, then raise the casualty's knees and legs to an elevated position with respect to the hips, before seeking help.

Suspension Trauma

- *Post author Imogen Campion Post date 2nd August 2003*
- **Suspension trauma can occur if a caver is suspended in their harness without being able to move (due to injury or loss of consciousness). They should be rescued from the rope with haste and medical attention should be sought.**

Why does it happen?

- Normally, movement keeps the blood flowing around the body. However if a person remains stationary in an upright position for too long, fainting may occur, which would normally return the body to a horizontal position. But if the person is in a harness, then they might not fall to the horizontal position.
- Suspension trauma arises from the accumulation of blood in the legs due to the lack of muscular activity which leads to insufficient blood in the trunk and brain.

Symptoms

- Symptoms include light-headedness, nausea, becoming red in the face, sensations of tingling or numbness of the arms or legs, anxiety, visual disturbance, or feeling an oncoming fainting fit.

Consequences

- If fainting occurs but the body is held with the legs below the waist and trunk by a harness, then the reduced blood flow continues, and suspension trauma can occur.
- The reduced blood flow in this situation can cause brain and organ damage and death.

How quick

- Suspension trauma, including death, can occur within as little as six minutes.

Action

- A casualty suspended in their harness who is unable to proceed but is still conscious should be encouraged to move around where possible and take their weight off their harness by standing up in a foot-loop or on a ledge if possible. They should be rescued from their position as rapidly as possible.
- A casualty suspended in their harness who is unconscious should be rescued from the rope to a safe position as soon as possible and then laid in the recovery (safe airway) position.
- If someone is able to get to them but isn't able to remove them from the situation, then the casualty's knees and legs should be raised to an elevated position with respect to the hips before help is sought.
- If a person has suffered from symptoms of suspension trauma, then they should seek medical advice immediately after exiting the cave.

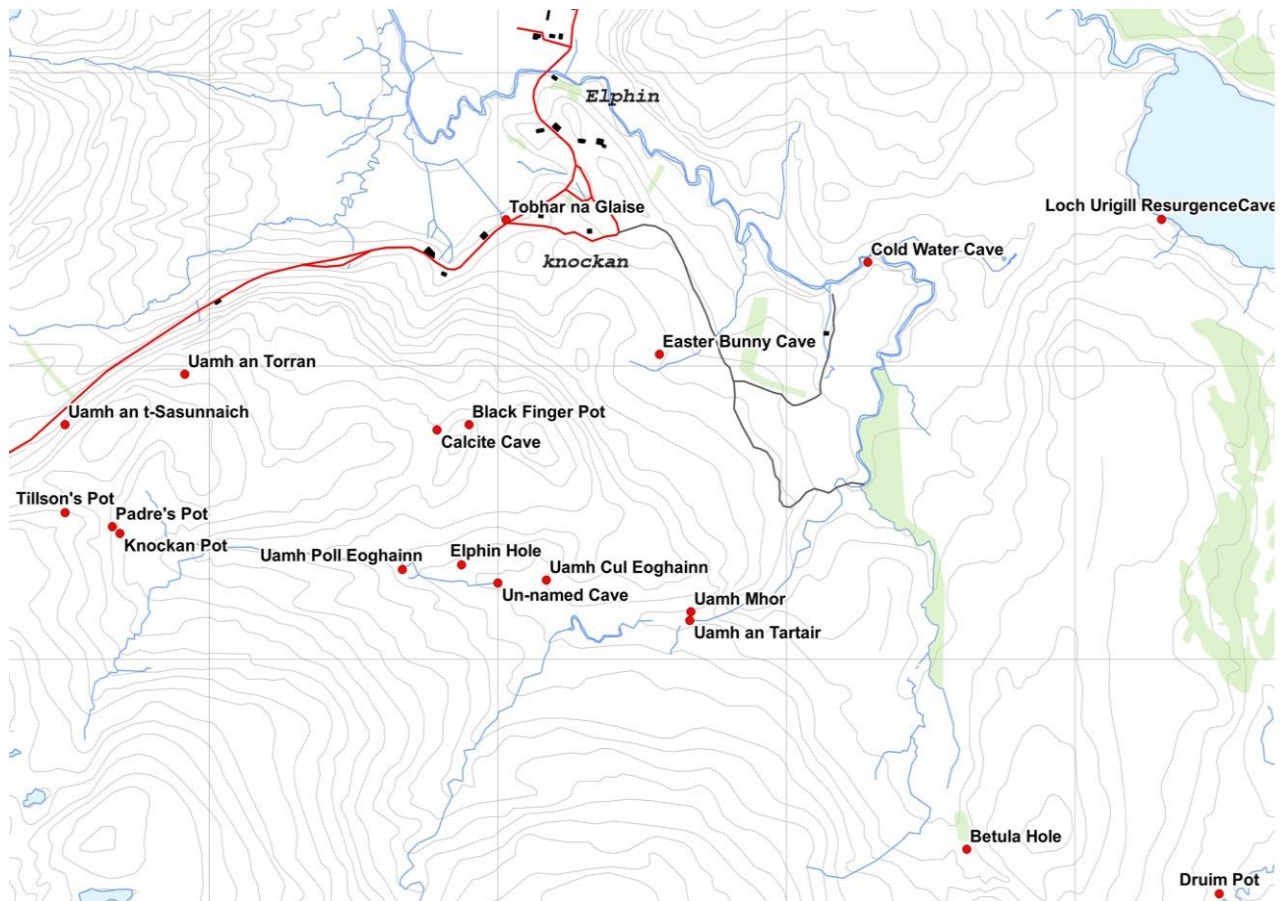
All cavers should consider their emergency procedures during caving trips including first aid, summoning assistance from cave rescue and basic SRT rescue techniques to get someone off a rope swiftly.

The BCA Training and Equipment working group would like to raise awareness amongst cavers of suspension trauma in caving and cave rescue situations.

A walk around some of the Knockan Caves.

Alan Brentnall

Map: © OpenStreetMap, with additional information.



The weekend of 08-10/12/2023 was the date for Grampian Speleological Group's annual Christmas dinner at the club's hut at Elphin [north of Ullapool, in the Western Highlands of Scotland – Ed.].

Last year's well-attended do was memorable for my introductory trip down Allt nan Uamh Stream Cave (aka ANUS) which was very impressive. This year, alas, caving, along with many of my other pursuits, is off the menu, as I am under strict instructions from my cardiologist to take it easy – at least until "Eric Blood Axe" can perform a by-pass operation on my heart.

So, not wanting to miss out on the splendid meal which Pete (GSG member and a chef by profession) would be putting on, I booked my place at the hut for the weekend – but what should I do other than eat? Well, I'm not too well acquainted with the many caves in Assynt, and I know some of them are quite spectacular, so I planned a walk around the hills south of Elphin, where our hut lies.

This general area, where the caves are, is known as Knockan, and it is named after a hamlet and a large road-side crag which, anywhere south of the border, would be festooned with climbing routes, but is used as the basis for a geological display centre, demonstrating, by its very rocks, what happens when two continents collide. As you approach this crag from the Ullapool direction, you suddenly see that the usual brown colour of the vegetation of the highlands is replaced by a bright green in the hills ahead, and this is because the land around Elphin is underpinned by limestone. This is one reason for the caves, the other is the Moine Thrust, which is the name geologists gave to the overlaying of the rocks around here when the two tectonic plates were pushed against each other. Moine is Gaelic for Peat, and the thrust created several large faults and associated cavities which, along with classic Karst development, make caves a possibility. My plan was to visit some of the caves in the area and to do this I would walk from Elphin into nearby Knockan, and then out on the track over Blàr a'Chuaill, to the Abhainn a'Chnocain which flows out from Fuaran a'Ghlinne, the resurgence of the cave known as **Uamh an Tartair** (Cave of the Roaring).



Initially, the walk was easy, following a track which was built for farming and turf-cutting, but, at a sharp bend where the track swung north-east, I needed to head over to the stream itself, and this was where I left the path for heathery grasslands.

Left: The Dry waterfall and resurgence.

Following the river in a SW direction I soon saw the rocky escarpment and the dry bed of a river leading up to an equally dry waterfall. This is the path of the river when it is in full spate, but under normal conditions, like today, the entire river is swallowed by Uamh an Tartair some 300m on the far side of the dry waterfall. I soon reached the resurgence, where the water gushed

out of the ground to the right of the riverbed. This was in itself quite an impressive sight – but I must return some time when the river is in spate. I approached the waterfall itself and wondered if there might be any chance of a cave entrance there. It looked in many ways like **Uamh Cailliche Peireag** (Cave of the Old Woman of Peireag) over in the Traligill basin, a site of many digs looking for caves, but there was no such evidence here.

The walking was quite rough, with brown bracken and mossy rock scree as I climbed and skirted the rocky crags up to my next objective, known as ‘The Crater’, a huge shakehole which gets a mention in the new guidebook. From here I made my way south-west to the obvious tree-lined hole of **Uamh Mhòr**, a pothole entrance to **Uamh an Tartair**, where the now subterranean Abhainn a’Chnocain could plainly be seen below. From there it wasn’t too far to the fairly big surface stream of the Abhainn a’Chnocain, where it turns abruptly left to descend the sloping waterslide within **Uamh an Tartair** itself.



Left: Uamh Mhor.



Above: Uamh an Tartair.

From here I headed west, across a rough, pathless section of moorland, carefully navigating (it was quite misty) to a point where a small stream sinks in a large doline, called **Toll Dubh an Uisge**. Here there is a small cave, and, from that location, navigation should have been simpler as I would be able to follow this stream to my next objective, **Poll Eòghainn**, another cave of engulfment.

Walking was easier on this section as there was an intermittent ‘trod’ alongside the small burn. However, the map shows a stream junction, shortly before **Poll Eòghainn**, which I never found.

Right: Poll Eoghainn Stream.





It was only when I realised that the stream had turned from west to south-west that I realised that I was on the wrong tributary. Correcting my direction of travel, I soon found **Poll Eòghainn** itself, but the stream entering the cave was far bigger than the stream I had been following, which implies that the stream junction on the map is wrong, and probably only occurs in very high-water conditions. The large stream entering the cave obviously resurges somewhere else – I need to check to see if any dye-tracing has been done here.

Left: Poll Eoghainn entrance.

Again, route-finding from **Poll Eòghainn** was fairly easy, as it entailed following this larger burn upstream, and there were intermittent ‘trods’ to help. I needed to watch out for (and easily found) a stream junction where the main Poll Eòghainn flow comes in from the south-west, while a smaller tributary, which I needed to follow came down from the west. At a sharp bend to north-west in this new streamlet, I headed roughly west to pick up a bend in a fence around the Knockan Crag Nature Reserve, from where I could easily contour around to meet the main path back to the Knockan Crag Information centre, and the road back to the hut in Elphin.

It was an interesting walk, through different limestone country, which has shown me some interesting caves and raised a couple of questions.

Cave Location Data:

1	Name	Length	Depth	Altitude	OSGB36East	OSGB36Nort
2	Betula Hole	12		230	222625	908352
3	Black Finger Pot	5	5	265	220900	909800
4	Calcite Cave	18	0	244	220789	909782
5	Cold Water Cave [1]	98		163	222282	910354
6	Druim Pot		7	210	223500	908200
7	Cul Eoghainn (Uamh)	81	12	240	221168	909270
8	Easter Bunny Cave	9	2	198	221560	910040
9	Elphin Hole	67	12	253	220874	909322
10	Knockan Pot		42	312	219690	909429
11	Loch Urigill Resurgence Cave	3			223300	910500
12	Mhor (Uamh) [Knockan]		20		221669	909162
13	Padres Pot	5		320	219664	909452
14	Poll Eoghainn (Uamh)	51	17	263	220669	909306
15	Sasunnaich (Uamh an t-)	12		290	219500	909800
16	Tartair (Uamh an) [Knockan]	135	45	262	221665	909132
17	Tillson's Pot	5		326	219500	909500
18	Tobhair na Glaise	3		152	221028	910499
19	Torran (Uamh an)		6		219915	909972
20	Un-named Cave	6		227	221000	909260

Alan Brentnall

Editor's Note :- Alan supplied an annotated extract from the 1:25000 Ordnance Survey map of the area, however the Ordnance Survey refused to allow me to include the map extract in our Newsletter, unless I purchased a publishing licence from them – I chose not to !

Fortunately Alan was able to supply an annotated '**OpenStreetMap**' of the area.

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The O.S map of the area is O.S. Explorer 439 ;- Coigach & Summer Isles - Inverpolly.

Alan's suggested reading (Christmas Present ?) :-

'It may be worth mentioning several books which have been recently published, and which have been reviewed in the latest copy of **Descent (Issue 295)**:-

Alan Jeffries (a legendary Scottish caver, and the founder of both GSG and SCRO): "**Hidden Inside the Highlands**". This book is written for non-cavers, and describes caves and caving areas in Scotland. Despite its intended readership, I would recommend this book to any caver as I enjoyed reading it myself, and it does describe caves in several different areas which may not be familiar to us all.

Harry Long (the main driving force behind the Upper Wharfedale Fell Rescue Organisation and one of the co-authors of the series of "Northern Caves" guide books for the Yorkshire Dales which we all used back in the 80s): "**Weekend Explorers**", is very reminiscent of one of my favourite books, Gemmel and Myers' "Underground Adventure", as it describes in great detail the discovery of many caves which have since become household names - at least for cavers in the Dales !

Martin Wright: "**Pioneers in the Peak**" also gets a review in the same issue of Descent, and that too should become a well-thumbed tome on most cavers' bookshelves.'

Editor's Final Comment:- As this will be the final Newsletter of 2023, I would like to end by thanking all those who have contributed during this past year, by sending in trip reports, photographs, and feedback. There would be no Newsletter without those contributions, and I sincerely believe that the activities of Members are really worth recording and preserving, not forgetting how much pleasure I get from reading about the trips.

As Editor, I do sometimes 'tweak' write-ups, with very minor changes, perhaps to a particular word or two – please don't be offended, as this is not a criticism, but I sometimes find it necessary for our wider readership. Please keep writing in your own style, and leave it to me to mess it up !

***** My very best wishes to you all for a brilliant, active, and safe Christmas.*****