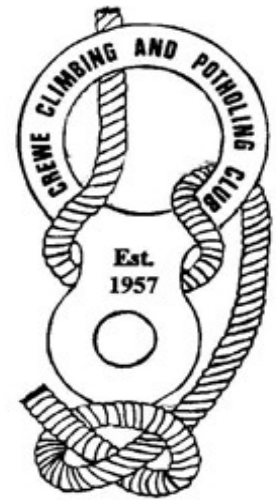


C.C.P.C. RALPH JOHNSON

Memorial Issue

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Ralph Johnson

03/12/1941 – 24/06/2013

I've been asked to say a few words about Ralph's involvement in Crewe climbing and Potholing Club. It is impossible to do justice to his contribution in a few words, other than to say that for over fifty years 'he was the Club'.

Ralph and his pals, growing up in and around Crewe, soon discovered the joy of exploration in the sandstone caves of Cheshire, before progressing to Alderley Edge Copper Mines, and further afield. By 1957 the Club was born. At least two of those very early members are here today, their special circle now diminished.

Ralph and I became friends back in 1966, and he encouraged me to join the loose knit group of individuals who met once a month in a Crewe pub, to plan their next caving adventure.

Numbers within the caving club rose and fell over the years, but, unlike many other similar groups, we kept going, and developed into something special. You have to be a Member to fully understand that. We all contributed to the Club, according to our own strengths, but Ralph was exceptional, and found subtle ways to ensure that we all played our part, particularly if it involved carrying heavy bags of caving gear uphill.

He gave more of himself, in time, and energy, than seems possible looking back. He swept us along with his enthusiasm and commitment, always looking for new challenges and trying out new techniques, but never forgetting the needs of those just starting out. He had a special talent for teaching, and took enormous pleasure from time spent with beginners in basic systems. His record was four caving trips with scouts into Devonshire Cavern - on the same day. I was there, carrying his bag. I think I know most of his stories for groups of novices off by heart, and had to have the various props needed, ready to pass to him – a bit like the magician's assistant. Watching him work with youngsters really was magical.

Since Ralph's death there have been numerous messages from past and present club Members, and friends, making it clear that he left an indelible mark on so many individuals. It is no exaggeration to say that he changed people's lives. He changed mine.

I cannot end today without speaking of Ralph's huge contribution to Derbyshire Cave Rescue Organisation. It was yet another manifestation of his drive to support and help others, especially others in difficulties. There will be many, present here today, who have worked with Ralph on cave rescue call-outs. In his younger days he was underground in the thick of things, as a team member and leader, before spending thirty years as a Controller, but even then he couldn't resist getting his hands dirty. In 2009 he received an award for 50 years service.

That really sums Ralph up. He loved his life and his activities, but he was always prepared to go the extra mile to help and support others.

Steve Knox' funeral address

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A true giant in the caving scene. He showed true grit to the end and inspired us all. You will be missed, an inspiration to so many and a friend to all. The world will be a poorer place without you.

Paul Gamble

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He has inspired so many people in his life I wouldn't have done all the caving and trekking if it wasn't for him he opened my horizons to things I never thought I would have been able to do I owe him so much, a very special man

Paul Holdcroft

.....

Ralph Johnson a true giant in the caving scene. He showed true grit to the end and inspired us all.

Neil Conde

.....

A real character and a long serving member of the Derbyshire Cave Rescue Organisation. Who am I going to argue with now?!

Iain Barker

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Ralph Johnson and DCRO

Ralph's first contact with DCRO was during the Neil Moss rescue attempt in Peak Cavern in 1959 when as a young teenage caver he turned up, volunteered his services and soon found himself at the sharp end as one of the very few cavers actually to descend into the shaft where Neil was trapped. There is a letter in DCRO's files from Ralph in 1960 offering his services to the re-organised DCRO but due to working away from the Peak District and then a long period of recovery from a serious motorbike accident his involvement didn't actually begin again until the mid 1960's.

In those days DCRO's membership comprised local caving clubs and a handful of individual cavers. Each of the main clubs provided a rescue team and Ralph's club, the Crewe Climbing and Potholing Club, provided one of the keenest and most efficient. For many years Ralph was its team leader and right up to 2006 when it was the last club team to be absorbed into the now central call out list Ralph was its mainstay and principal

organiser. He was also the team's main point of contact on the DCRO central committee and he rarely missed a meeting or significant DCRO event.

Ralph was a DCRO operational Controller from 1982 until shortly before his death – a period of nearly thirty years. He was chairman from 1993 to 1996 and then treasurer from 1997 to 2005 helping to raise the money for DCRO's current purpose built rescue vehicle. He also helped cave rescue nationally by serving as the British Cave Rescue Council's treasurer from 2003 to 2005.

All in all Ralph was a dedicated stalwart of DCRO for several decades. Not only was he involved in nearly a hundred rescues (over half as a controller) but he also helped the Organisation in so many other ways – as trainer, innovator, fund raiser, mediator and (although he would hate the word) administrator.

From cavers everywhere – thanks Ralph.

Bill Whitehouse. DCRO

'Ralph introduced me to caving back in 2007. It was in Giants Hole, I didn't think I could manage but Ralph and the other cavers gave me the confidence I needed. Ralph also introduced me to rock climbing and hill walking in this country; it opened up a complete new world to me. He was extra patient with a slower learner like me. Without his continuous encouragement I would not have been able to cave/climb/walk in the past years. He was also my advisor when I had some issues from time to time with my two teenage sons who are now adults. Whenever I had questions about rope work he was always able to provide me with solutions. I learned a lot from him. He was my teacher, my good friend, my mentor. If I don't stop the list can go on and on I miss him a lot. - Grace Chu'

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We only had the pleasure of knowing Ralph for a year. We met him whilst climbing in the Peak District. We were grateful that Ralph was generous enough with his time and such a friendly person to invite us along on a caving trip. It wasn't something we had tried before but really enjoyed it. Ralph's enthusiasm definitely rubbed off onto us and we intend to carry on caving. It is unlikely we would have discovered caving without Ralph. We feel privileged to have known such a caving legend.

Ian and Clare Wilkins

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In July 2012, Ralph sent me a text telling me about his inoperable condition. Alison and I were cycle-touring in the Hebrides at the time and felt very remote and helpless when we received the news. Last week, when we were in Corsica,

we received another text from Steve letting us know that Ralph's battle was finally over. But, in the intervening period, Ralph far exceeded his own doctor's most optimistic life expectations, and, I doubt very much that the same

doctor would have believed just how much Ralph managed to pack into those final months because, as he always did, he just carried on!

To say that I'll miss Ralph is ridiculously understated. Although I only met him around fourteen years ago, he quickly became a major influence in my life - coordinating the "Coffin Dodgers" who seem to have subterranean projects all over the Peak, keeping the Crewe club focussed on caving and all the best aspects of it, helping with training in the various clubs and of course in DCRO, helping to introduce youngsters to caving with trips for youth groups and scout groups, making films to

keep us all entertained and educated, raising much-needed cash for DCRO ... and so much more too!

I'm sure everybody who met Ralph will have been encouraged to do that little bit extra, go that little bit further, to learn new techniques and to also try to help others. This spirit of enthusiasm and encouragement is our legacy from Ralph, along with the many great memories we all have of his exploits and his "ways", and the best way to remember him might just be to try to do a little of what he did for so many - and encourage others to find for themselves what's great about caving.

Alan Brentnall

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Where do you begin? Ralph gave so much to so many and in many different ways. Knowing him and learning from him has been an honour and truly humbling. He will be greatly missed. If there is a life there after Ralph, may your peaks be snow capped and your caves full of wonder.

God bless you Captain

Steve Pearson-Adams



One of the most inspirational persons in my life. Everything that I have achieved in life I owe to Ralph Johnston, he was a teacher, a mentor and an amazing person to be with, either in the outdoors or socially but most of all I feel proud to have been his friend and to have been almost a part of his family.

We caved, we climbed, we camped, we trekked, we climbed mountains together, even enjoyed the odd beer. Ralph was a special man to everyone who ever met him. He will be remembered in the hearts of his friends and family for eternity. When my son is old enough I will pass on to him stories of Ralph so that my son will realize that his Dad is like he is because of Ralph

When I am in the mountains, this weekend and for the rest of my life, I will think of Ralph and his Family with pride. I hope that someday I can repay to society for some of the amazing time, patience, inspirations and goals that he gave to me. Thank you for being a father figure, my school teacher, my friend.

Kevin Mountford, New

Zealand

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A guide, mentor and friend. A fountain of knowledge and a calming influence in times of dispute. A living legend with stories and details going back to the golden age of caving. Everybody was happy to see him and he touched the lives of so many in a positive way. There is so much more I want to say, but can't put into words.

May your spirit flow with the waters in the dark places and soar with the eagles in the high places

Brian Edmonds

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I feel so humbled in having the pleasure of sharing Ralph's adventures with him. He was such a dear friend to me and the love I have for him will go on. He changed my life for the better, I'm forever grateful for that. Thank you.

Darren Conde

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Such a remarkable friend. Lost are the days where we use to argue and trade fond insults to each other over a bottle of whiskey, then helping him back to his tent and putting him to bed, learning from him how to fit a catheter when the need arises on our adventures, retrieving his ATC he dropped into a gully teetering over a 1000mtr drop, the list could go on. He may have been a small man, but he had the courage and the heart that makes everyone that knew him stand proud and be honoured, it's been a privilege to have shared some of his life with him

Darren & Zoe.

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Will miss you so much dear friend/dad....

Aga Malysaik

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Ralph was involved in the Neil moss rescue at Peak Cavern in 1959, and until very recently, until bad health stopped him, an active Controller for DCRO. He was caving and cheerful to the end.

Paul Lydon

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A legend lost to the great grotto in the sky. RIP.

Philip Smyth

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Ralph was small in stature but huge in character, my biggest regret about knowing Ralph is that I did not get to know him better or be part of one of the many fun filled adventures in foreign parts. I feel that I owe Ralph the greatest thing that came into my life and that is my fantastic daughter Talulah, without Ralph's constant enthusiasm for encouraging new people into caving I am sure I would have not met Jenny and Talulah would not be here, I owe you such a lot Ralph, you will not be forgotten by me or anyone who has had the pleasure of knowing you.

You will be sadly missed, but the world has become a better place for your having been here... Adrian Pedley

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I first met Ralph down Oxlow in May 1985. My last trip with him was in the same mine 28 years later. In those intervening years I soon grew to love and admire his easy, common-sense, humble expertise. He never judged anyone, just helped them to achieve their best. He was a mentor, and inspiration, but most importantly, a friend. Even now, when faced with an awkward situation (caving or otherwise), I think "what would Ralph do"? I just wish I had written down the stories he used to tell me! - Mark Lovatt

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Ralph was the heart and soul of our club and all of us owe him so much that it is difficult to express the loss of him. As a personal friend and confidante he was always there to help and inspire both me and the rest of us. There will be many heartfelt messages from his friends that will surpass mine, but in me, as in most of us, his spirit will live on.

Ralph was nominated for an honour two years ago. It was hoped that he would receive an MBE. Unfortunately the Olympics diminished his chances and he was never honoured. Such honours are empty compared with the honour that we have for him!

John Gillett

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**A real caving character..
Amanda Revell**

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Life is a journey not a destination..... and what a journey he had! - influencing and gaining the respect of so many along the way.!

Gareth Williams
Ralph was an inspiration to us all.

Sam & Daz

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Having only known Ralph for 3 years his philosophy on life of use it or lose is an inspiration to anybody. His energy and drive were second to none always the first person to help anyone apart from carrying a bag, this is one of my fondest memories which he told me on my second trip out with the club I think this was a hint that I was carrying the bags, a man who is a legend and a hero will be greatly missed by all of us.

Rob & Susanne Nevitt

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I feel privileged to have met the man.

Dave Skingsley

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In the grand scheme of things we knew Ralph for a very short period of time but long enough to know we have lost a national treasure. Ralph brightened up our lives from the day we met him. He introduced us to some wonderful people; he took us on some fantastic journeys & told us some even more fantastic stories. Ralph was the little pensioner who we thought may need some help when we first met him in P8; how wrong we were! He could always make do, the man who if you gave him a bit of rope and a couple of karabiners would quite easily concoct a full SRT kit, a

trick I'm sure most people in the caving world have seen him do that on more than one occasion. He may have left this mortal plain but I know his memory will live on in every man, woman & child's heart he ever touched & that my friends, makes him a LEGEND in his own right.

Gill, Des & Martin

I have been caving today with the school at Long Churn and on several occasions I was distracted by the thought and memories of Ralph. I feel he will be with us for a long time to come. We have lost a great friend and a mountain of a man who never sang about his own praise and put us first before himself. This put him in a true minority of men the like of which we will probably never see again.

Michael Potts

.....
Where do you begin. Ralph gave so much to so many and in many different ways. Knowing him and learning from him has been an honour and truly humbling. He will be greatly missed. If there is a life there after Ralph, may your peaks be snow capped and your caves full of wonder.

God bless you Captain
Steve P.A.

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I have many happy memories of Ralph even dating back to school days but my overriding feeling is one of gratitude that because of his friendship and encouragement I have done things I would never have dared do otherwise and had adventures to hopefully inspire my grandchildren with a desire to lead life to the full. I, like Ralph, believe that life is not a dress rehearsal and no-one could have made more of their time than Ralph both in achieving his own goals and in helping others to achieve theirs.

Ann Austin

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.A special person and true ambassador for our sport, one of caving's unique "characters" and a thoroughly nice bloke. My deepest regret is that I didn't

know Ralph for longer, he was always there at DCRO and we got on well, but if our paths had crossed earlier, I'm sure we would have caved together for many years.

One of the best decisions I ever made was to join CCPC as it has enabled me to spend time with this amazing chap and all you interesting people :) in our wonderful, underground world.

Keith Joule

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...and finally...

“I’ve been proud to have known you all, some of you for many decades. Your company has given me great pleasure, at least for most of the time. No names will be mentioned and any hints as to anyone living or dead are purely coincidental. No offence is intended and none should be taken, except of course where it’s deserved. To all those who carried my tackle sacks for all those years, many thanks and to those who carried me back to my tent in the mountains after a hard night out in the hills, many thanks. I bet you’ll never forget the time when with the help of the European arm wrestling champion, now deceased, we beat the Russians at arm wrestling. It’s troubled me for some time and I must finally clear my conscience and confess that the referee was biased. The final bout was rigged, by the referee.

These last few months could have been unbearable but with your help they've been enjoyable and I'm grateful for all your support, even if it meant calling in the air ambulance on one occasion".

Ralph's final message to CCPC