

NEWSLETTER

Issue 10 September 2019

Editorial

Welcome to the tenth CNCC newsletter. This issue brings you the news that the 55+ year old permit system on Leck Fell has finally come to an end, and has been replaced with the online booking system, offering considerable freedom of access for cavers while also meeting the wishes of the landowner.

We also have some great reports on conservation initiatives both on Ingleborough and in Swaledale.

Volunteers are essential to what we do. Roles of volunteers includes admin tasks, hands-on-conservation, officer roles, or attending meetings to ensure decisions are well thought-through and democratic. By volunteering, you are improving northern caving. If you want to get involved, and can regularly attend our meetings (four per year) and then give a little time outside of them, we would like to hear from you.

Matt Ewles (Editor)

Next AGM: 7th March 2020, 10am
Hellfield Village Institute, Hellfield.

Your CNCC

www.cncc.org.uk



/CouncilOfNorthernCavingClubs



@cncc_uk

Chair: Andrew Hinde
chair@cncc.org.uk

Secretary: Matt Ewles
secretary@cncc.org.uk
07983 559566

Treasurer: Pete Bann
treasurer@cncc.org.uk

Conservation: Kay Easton
conservation@cncc.org.uk

Access: Tim Allen
access@cncc.org.uk

Webmaster: Gary Douthwaite
webmaster@cncc.org.uk

Anchor: Alan Speight
anchors@cncc.org.uk

Changes in BCA

The BCA AGM in June was in our region; Horton-in-Ribblesdale Village Hall. With over 70 people, it was one of the most well-attended meetings the BCA has had in some time.

There was a contentious debate over the Youth and Development Officer report which discussed the age limits being applied for access to caves managed by the caver-run Charterhouse Caving Company (CCC). The CCC recently conceded to lowering the age limit from 18 to 16. However, a barrister's report and other advice suggest that there is no legal reason to prevent under 16s having access too.

The BCA isn't entitled to interfere with the CCC's affairs, hence discontent from some over their involvement. However, the BCA cite this as their response to a complaint of discrimination against younger cavers. The issue rumbles on. We are keeping a close eye on this just in case any precedents are set that could affect northern access.

The meeting saw a number of new Officers join the BCA team, and several members' proposals were passed. These included approving a 'New to Caving' leaflet to promote caving to those interested in getting involved. The BCA also adopted a new logo shown here.



Finally, the most controversial proposal was for the removal of the two-house voting system (by which motions must pass by individuals, and by groups/clubs, to be accepted) and replacement with electronic voting for individuals only.

As this involved constitutional change, a 70% majority was needed in both houses for this one to progress to a membership ballot. The individuals voted overwhelmingly (>90%) in favour, and the groups/clubs just got there with 71%, so this now goes to a full membership ballot. The CNCC voted in support, following a strong agreement from northern clubs at our AGM in March. Full details on the ballot (planned for Oct/Nov) can be found on the BCA website homepage.

The mood of the AGM was very much one of modernising and adopting change, with many younger cavers present and some new and enthusiastic people on board.

Northern Explorers' Forum



On 7th April the Northern Explorers' Forum was held at Clapham Village Hall. A packed room was treated to a variety of great talks on exploration across our region. A comprehensive overview is provided by John Cordingley in Descent 268.

The CNCC are very grateful to Sam Allshorn for putting so much work into making this happen.

New CNCC contacts

Assistant Secretary:

Welcome to Josh Young, who has just been coopted as our new Assistant Secretary.

Anchor Coordinator:

Simon Wilson, developer of the now widely recognised IC anchor, and our anchor coordinator, has stepped down from this role. We are pleased to welcome Alan Speight in his place. Alan should be the first point of contact for all matters relating to anchor installation (anchors@cncc.org.uk).

Northern/Eastern Dales permits:

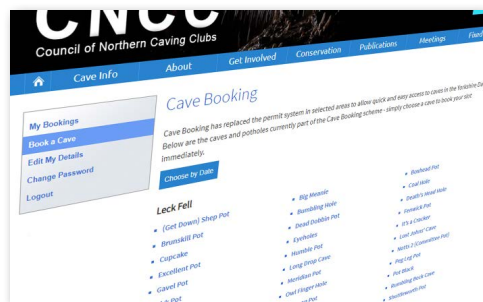
Please take note of Ric Halliwell's new email address on our website (for Birks Fell, Stump Cross, Fairy Holes and Robinsons Pot permits).

Hidden Earth 2019

Hidden Earth this year is in Wrexham, North Wales, from 27th-29th Sept. The CNCC will be there with a stall so please come and say hello to the team. Full details, including a list of all talks currently submitted and ticket sales can be found at www.hidden.earth



Online Booking for Leck Fell



The CNCC are pleased to announce that the online cave booking system now applies to Leck Fell.

The caves of Leck, many of which form part of the 90 km Three Counties System, offer some of the best sporting trips in the country. Lost Johns', Notts, Gavel, Rumbling, Deaths Head and Shuttleworth, to name but a few, are now available to users of the online system.

www.cncc.org.uk/booking

The online booking system was developed initially to cover the caves of Ingleborough Estate but always with a view that the system could be expanded to include other areas (more detail in newsletters 8 and 9).

Leck Fell is designated as access land but the landowner prefers a managed access system for the caves, hence, CNCC have developed the online booking system. This serves as a compromise and consensual solution and an alternative to the old restricted permit systems of the past.

The new system has been widely embraced by cavers on Ingleborough, both to respect the wishes of the Estate, and to allow them to see what entrances are free each day, thus allowing cavers to avoid congestion. We hope this will continue to be the case on Leck Fell.



A major point for cavers to note is that there will be **no closed season** for the foreseeable future. Under the previous permit system, the fell was closed to cavers for three months of the year (April to June inclusive).

Also of note is that there is no restriction on what background of recreational caver can use the online system. So, whether you are a club or independent caver, BCA member or not, registration and use of the online booking system is available for you all.

As per Ingleborough, the system is based on one booking per entrance per day, which allows much more flexible access than the previous permit system.

Following our negotiations with the Leck Estate we ask all cavers to acknowledge and follow these recommendations;

1. Car parking is limited on Leck Fell. Please car-share as much as possible and park responsibly so that farmers and other land users have clear access. Please leave unnecessary cars behind at your accommodation or a designated car park such as the one at Cowan Bridge.
2. For conservation reasons we advise that caving groups should not exceed eight people.
3. Please abide by the Countryside Code and Minimal Impact Caving Guidelines.
4. The booking system is for recreational caving only. Cave instructors undertaking recreational or personal training trips are welcome, but for any trips of a commercial nature separate arrangements must be made directly with the Estate Office.
5. For information on digging please refer to the CNCC SSSI digging guidelines.

We hope that cavers will embrace the online system for Leck Fell; not only to respect the landowner who has requested that this be used, but also to respect other cavers. The online system has proved popular as many cavers feel it provides a secondary benefit of distributing traffic and avoiding congestion in the deeper potholes.

The CNCC do not control or police access, but we do try hard to facilitate the best possible access for cavers in the north of England.

This outcome has been the result of several years of careful negotiation. As well as my own efforts, the CNCC webmaster, Gary Douthwaite, has played a vital role in the design and operation of the system together with Geoff Whittaker who administers it on a day to day basis. Fair credit is also due to the CNCC Secretary, fellow officers and the whole Committee for their close support.

Tim Allen, CNCC Access Officer

Thackthwaite Beck Cave

Thackthwaite Beck Cave is found in Blue Scar, a remote and picturesque fell above the small hamlet of Woodhall a few km east of Skrigg. Not only is the walk up there quite stunning on a fine day, but the cave isn't too bad either, offering some good stream passage and a very entertaining short trip which is highly recommended indeed.

Until recently our website presented a need to seek advanced permission and provided a contact which we have been informed was very out of date. The cave now lies on land owned by Bolton Estate. We have received advice that there is no need to ask advance permission to visit the cave, which also fits with the fact it is on Access Land covered by the Countryside Rights of Way Act. Ensure to use the public rights of way to reach the access land. The Estate prohibit any vehicles being taken up onto the fells.

Update on Birkwith parking

You may recall in the last newsletter we announced that parking at High Birkwith Farm now required payment.

Soon after that newsletter was published and following the death of the family dog as a result of a visiting vehicle, the owners decided not to allow parking on their land anymore whatsoever. Access to the caves is still welcomed (free of charge and no need to call for permission at the farm) but you must park elsewhere and walk to the caves.

Therefore, effective immediately do not take vehicles onto High Birkwith land.

We appreciate the challenges this presents to cavers, with the increased risk of people parking on the lane at the passing places likely to cause inconvenience, and possible congestion at the already-busy green lane at Selside (Long Churn/Alum Pot parking).

Therefore, we have been exploring other possible options, and following discussions, Mr David White has agreed to allow cavers to park, for a fee, in his farmyard at Low Birkwith Farm (left turn before High Birkwith).

Please park in front of the barn wall with a black letterbox shown in the photo. The fee of £5/car or £15/minibus, should be put into an envelope stating your vehicle registration and posted into the letterbox. There is a public right of way from the back of the house, 500m up to High Birkwith.



This parking is exclusively for cavers, and so should hopefully avoid the high volumes of traffic (parking by other outdoor pursuits) that caused issues at High Birkwith Farm.

Camping is available at Low Birkwith Farm by prior arrangement (01729 860260).

We must stress that inconsiderate parking on the single lane public highway between Horton-in-Ribblesdale and High Birkwith (for example, in passing places or gateways), or irresponsible use of the new facilities at Low Birkwith Farm is likely to result in the withdrawal of all parking options.

Excalibur Pot access

The 2007 discovery of Excalibur Pot near Kirkbymoorside in the North York Moors (see Descent issue 202) is probably one of the more unexpected new cave discoveries of the last few decades. The system, now also comprising Jenga Pot, is 2.8 km long and is formed in the Hambleton Oolite, a Jurassic limestone that spans the southern slopes of the North York Moors National Park.

The survey can be found on our website.

Excalibur Pot lies on a private shooting estate, however, the diggers established good relations with the landowner which allowed a CNCC access agreement to be reached in 2008 enabling other cavers to visit the system. Due to the commercial nature of the land, the landowner understandably wished for some restrictions to protect his financial interests and privacy. The agreement allowed one permit per week to be issued to BCA member clubs. Limiting access only to BCA member clubs was partly due to this being our standard practice at the time.

Of course, things have moved on a lot in ten years and we now aspire to achieve the best possible access for all cavers.



The Excalibur Pot main streamway. Photo by Gary Douthwaite

During a recent meeting with the landowner, we gifted him a copy of Caves and Karst of the Yorkshire Dales Volume Two, which includes a chapter on the North York Moors. Access was discussed and a revised agreement was agreed which allows permits to be issued to all cavers. There are still a few restrictions, most notably that access during the shooting season (1st Oct - 1st Feb) can be on Sundays only, to avoid disturbing the shoots.

Although a seldom-visited area, this still represents another cave where access is now available for all, which is certainly something to be celebrated.

Weathercote Cave

Historically, access to Weathercote Cave in Chapel-le-Dale has been problematic. However, following a change of ownership in 2019, our Access Officer has visited the new owner (Andrew Braithwaite) and he is happy to allow cavers access providing they contact him in advance to arrange permission. Please avoid turning up at the house unannounced.

Andrew can be contacted by email: Andrew@dalecontractors.co.uk

Barbondale reminder

With the shooting season approaching, we would like to remind any cavers (or any other relevant outdoor groups) visiting Barbondale, particularly midweek through September and October to take note of the details on our website and in our last newsletter, aimed at avoiding access conflicts during shooting.



A wintery day in Barbondale. Photo by Jane Phillips

Conservation

Christmas Cracker

Christmas Cracker, located very close to Christmas Pot and P5 on Ingleborough, is a mothballed dig. The shakehole started to collapse recently, taking with it the surrounding fence. Therefore, Ged Benn, Tim Sullivan, Fred Rattray and other Bradford Pothole Club helpers installed a twin-wall plastic pipe to help stabilise it and make the site safe. This was funded by Stories in Stone, a CNCC-partnered initiative to clean up and make safe abandoned digs and shakeholes across the whole of Ingleborough.



Christmas Cracker (before). Photo by Andrew Hinde



Christmas Cracker (after). Photo by Andrew Hinde

Shakehole cleanup near P5

Andy Hall reports on this substantial Stories in Stone project on Ingleborough:

On 21st March a 10-strong team including Fred Rattray, Terry Devaney, Ged Benn, Tim Sullivan, Rowan Worsman, Andy Farrow, Andrew Hinde, John Nightingale, Stuart Whitmey and myself gathered at this deep shakehole above Clapham Bottoms. This was part of the CNCC-partnered 'Stories in Stone' conservation project in the Dales.

The object was to clear out vast amounts of metal rubbish from the shakehole, some of which had been there for at least 30 years. Andrew and Ged had brought up two vehicles from Newby with assorted equipment, while the rest of us walked up from Clapham on a pleasant dry day.

The operation gave us a chance to make use of the new CNCC petrol capstan winch. This was anchored to the ground above the depression and proved very useful. With Fred at the bottom of the shakehole connecting stuff on, it was possible to haul up larger amounts of fence wire and other metal rubbish than we could have managed by manpower alone. Care was needed, with lots of sharp metal and barbed wire. Three of us worked at the bottom of the hole and various methods were tried to haul out the smaller bits of material using buckets, rope, plastic bags and pure manpower. We noted that for next time, a drag tray would be useful.

After a break for lunch we had all the large material out of the depression and continued to tidy up all the loose small bits of rusty metal from the surface.

A very large pile now lay on the surface of the fell, to soon be taken away by contractors.



The shakehole near P5, full of rubbish. Photo by Andy Hall

By the middle of the afternoon we had opened up an interesting hole through rocks at the base of the shakehole, a future digging site perhaps?

Once we had fenced-off the rubbish, we went for a look round the surrounding cave entrances and retrieved some more rubbish from them. A useful and fun day out with an enthusiastic team.



Rubbish ready to be taken away. Photo by Andy Hall

Crackpot Cave, Swaledale



The team at work in Crackpot Cave. Photo by Gary Douthwaite

We noted in our last newsletter some plans for conservation work to be done in Crackpot Cave following reports of significant damage to much of the stal. Rowan Worsman, Craven Pothole Club Conservation Officer, has since put in a huge amount of work to plan the conservation project and arrange the necessary permissions and resources.

The following report is by Rowan:

Crackpot cave is situated in Swaledale and is part of the Gunnerside Estate. The cave is used by many clubs and outdoor centres. It has easy access and is a good all-round cave with crawling, streamway, walking passage and thousands of formations.

A plan was presented to the CNCC, after permission had been given from the Estate, asking for approval and assistance to clean up the cave, the aim being to allow everyone to appreciate the beauty of this cave and keep it that way. The go-ahead was given and a team of seven cave conservation volunteers gathered on 30th March 2019.

The equipment we used was provided by the CNCC, mainly water spray knapsacks, hand sprays and brushes.

As we made our way through the cave to the end chamber (The Turnip Field), we could all see the damage. The mud on the formations was evident, with big splodges and splatterings. The effects of our work soon became clear. The team spent five hours cleaning formations. The chamber began to take on a new look, restoring some of it to its former glory. Underneath the mud the formations were white.

We were also joined by Matt Ewles and Gary Douthwaite who wished to see the problem for themselves, and to make a short video documentary on the conservation work.

The second visit was held on the 28th April, with a team of 12 volunteers meeting at the cave to assist the taking in of the equipment through the awkward entrance crawls. This

included the usual water spray bottles, PPE, brushes, and this time a 30m water hose, 12v battery and diaphragm water pump. Fred Rattray had been busy since the last trip in devising a system to pump the water from the streamway up to the chamber. We can all say it worked extremely well and made finishing the cleaning so much easier and quicker.

The majority of the group concentrated on the Turnip Field chamber, while a few worked away in the stream passage. Parts of the floor were cleaned and then conservation pins and tape put in place to protect the area. Tumbled loose rocks were used to form a path leading up to the usual 'seat' where cavers for decades have sat to admire the formations. A good four and a half hours were spent before we made our retreat.

The difference these two conservation sessions have made is spectacular. The plan now is to monitor the cave and user responses before any further work is carried out.

It is hoped that information about this cleanup will reach all cavers. Caving groups can hopefully sit in the beautifully restored chamber and leaders of novice groups can explain the Cave Conservation Code, the need for conservation tape and respect for our caves. The video of the work on Youtube (search for 'Crackpot Cave Cleanup') might even be a useful educational aid to demonstrate conservation in action.

Many thanks to all who helped. Let's hope this could be a turning point.



Using a water sprayer to clean stal. Photo by Gary Douthwaite

Got an idea for a conservation project?

Of course, we encourage all clubs and individuals to organise your own conservation initiatives. If however the conservation job is a bit more than you can safely handle, please report it through the conservation section of our website or email us:

conservation@cncc.org.uk

This might include cleanup works inside caves, at entrances, or surface works such as shakehole cleanup, stock-proofing, fence, footpath and walling repairs. We can either undertake the work through our conservation volunteers or provide materials and funds for your own group to tackle the project. Write a report with a few pictures and we will publish it in an upcoming issue of this newsletter.

Want to get involved?

Being involved in the CNCC can take many forms.

Full membership:

Full member clubs of the CNCC can vote at our AGM, and receive email notifications of any matters that the CNCC becomes aware of that may affect northern caving (and log into the CNCC website). If your club is not already a full member (you can find a list on our website), you can contact our Secretary for information on how to apply.

Officer:

Our officers work hard to perform the day to day functions of the CNCC, advise, and carry out the wishes of the Committee. This is a real chance to make a big difference to northern caving, and anyone interested should contact our Secretary for more information.

Committee:

Each year up to fourteen of our full member clubs and a representative for non-club cavers are elected to the Committee, who then meet at least three times a year to work in the best interests of our member clubs and northern cavers. If you are interested in standing for the Committee, please contact our Secretary for more information.

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

CNCC Newsletter Issue 10 - Sep 2019. Published by the Council of Northern Caving Clubs.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0>

