

COUNCIL OF NORTHERN CAVING CLUBS

British Caving Association

Reports for 14th January 2023 Committee Meeting

Chair's Report

Horner Photo Collection

This historic collection of photographic prints is scheduled for digitisation by The Folly in Settle. They asked CNCC for a financial contribution to help with costs on 19 century caving images. Since reporting this at the last meeting the Folly has secured a large grant for the project and so far as I am aware, they no longer need our support.

YDNP Management Plan Forum 2022

I attended this forum representing CNCC. There was very little discussion of the MP other than to say that most of the key targets had been met except in affordable housing. Most of the meeting involved project presentations by partner groups such as Rivers Trust etc. However, it did provide an opportunity for me to alert the Park's CEO about the cave access loss at High Birkwith. This proved to be a useful tea break encounter which has produced some forward momentum at the right levels in recent weeks.

YDNP Cave and Crag Advisory Group

This specialist wing of the Local Access Forum of YDNP has convened a special meeting on 9th Feb 2023 to discuss the cave access situation at High Birkwith. The case was raised at the December meeting of the full Local Access Form and was discussed briefly before agreeing to forward the case to C&C Advisory Group. Thanks to Tim Allen for his swift intervention to get this on the LAF agenda.

All correspondence from YDNP on this matter has made it clear that "As there is currently no statutory access to caving, access needs to be through voluntary agreement and we are happy to work with the Council of Northern Caving Clubs in trying to achieve this".

YDNP Nature Recovery Plan

It was encouraging to see that Caving was highlighted in this plan on page 37 under the heading of "Our Vision for 2040". It stated that:

"The extensive cave systems beneath the Dales will continue to provide important hibernation sites for moths and bats with responsible cavers ensuring that the accessible systems are carefully conserved."

This is a testament to how far CNCC has come in its ability to influence statutory bodies on the positive contribution of caving to protected sites, well being and local economies.

Andrew Hinde - CNCC Chairman

Secretary's Report

Things have been fairly quiet since the last meeting. Other than the usual steady stream of anchor installations, it has been great to witness the tremendous work our volunteers have been putting regarding the access situation at High Birkwith.

I would like to remind the committee that the deadline for the AGM's draft agenda is actually the same day as this meeting, so any potential discussion items which come up during the meeting should be highlighted so they can be added before publication.

Josh Young - CNCC Secretary

Treasurer's Report

Financial Status as of 4th January 2023:

Business Community Account: £812.83

Business Saver Account: £13690.84

Since the October meeting, the following payments/receipts made:

Sam Litten Training Inv 1122 £290.00

Helen Hooper Training Inv 56 £145.00

Settle Coal Co. Inv 644997 & 644299. £862.04 (re: Wretched Rabbit & Lancaster Hole Mtls.)

BCA claim 2021 paid paid to CNCC in full. £4565.86

Transfer to Business Premium Acc. £5000.00

Mileage payment for Alum Stiles work. £123.75

Newsletter Printing & Postage £124.70

Mark Richards Training Inv 15 & 19 £860.00

Barbon Pot & BPOW Tree removal mileage £129.15

PayPal Credit from course bookings £2323.22

Paypal Refunds (Course cancelled due to trainer sickness) £ 50.00

Pete Bann - CNCC Treasurer

Conservation Officer's Report

An increasing problem is the effect of Ash Dieback on trees surrounding potholes, and trees have been removed at Bull Pot of the Witches and Barbon Pot, among others. Our thanks to Martin Holroyd for this work. CNCC has continued to give support to individual groups carrying out conservation work, for example RRCPC at Wretched Rabbit.

A list of equipment available for CNCC members to borrow for conservation projects is on the CNCC website <https://cncc.org.uk/about/> (It's under the "about" heading rather than "conservation" because the list also includes publicity and anchor placement items.) Those who are planning conservation works are reminded that Sam Allshorn has money donated by Mike Cooper from sales of "Not for the Faint Hearted" which is available for conservation work on caves featured in the book.

Kay Easton - CNCC Conservation Officer

Access Officer's Report

No report provided, a verbal report may be given at the meeting.

Adele Ward - CNCC Access Officer

Training Officer's Report

Happy New Year to all cavers

CNCC training workshops continue to be well attended, there are only a few spaces left on the current batch.

New to caving / Try caving

Gary has once again done a great job in setting up a section on website aimed at "New to caving". This gives a nice "portal" to help anyone "New to caving" find information and any suitable events or training workshops.

Linking to the BCA "New to caving" website is given good prominence as a resource. However having something specifically for the CNCC helps people access suitable CNCC training and events.

Currently we only have one "New to caving" day hosted by the CPC, having a couple more events hosted by other Northern clubs would be helpful.

If any club would like to host a day but feel unable to for any reason, then please contact me. Along with help available from the CNCC, I have been informed that funds and assistance are available directly from the BCA to help with resources, kit, insurance questions etc etc.

“Pop up” Kit shop, fitting, advice, try before you buy day

I am hoping to organise a “pop up shop” where anyone can come along to buy kit, try out different kit, get advice from experienced cavers and have input in to setting it all up.

The initial date is hopefully 5th March to run along side a CNCC New to SRT workshop at YDG barn. I have asked Tony at Starless River and Inglesport to attend.

Training Officer “Moderation”

I recently shadowed Phil Baker on a 4 day CIC training course. As well as having an enjoyable time it was a good confirmation that we are very much aligned with techniques been taught within QMC.

BCA “Training and Equipment” working group

I was unable to attend the last meeting, I sent in a report and Mark Richards attended so the CNCC were well represented.

Training Videos

I have had an idea developing for a while to produce some training videos to accompany the CNCC training workshops.

This idea has been discussed within the BCA T&E working group as something that could be beneficial for all “sectors” within the BCA. This would be a resource useful to both the instructed and recreational side of the BCA.

I am looking into how best to move this forward.

Shadowing opportunities

We continue to offer “shadowing” opportunities on the technical workshops. Primarily aimed at club training officers who want to develop their own training knowledge (and pass on their own knowledge) but also to trainee instructors working towards a qualification.

Re-election

I am happy to continue in this role if the committee are willing to support my candidacy.

Ian Patrick - CNCC Training Officer

BCA Training & Equipment Rep's Report - Mark Richards

Main points from BCA Training & Equipment Working Group Meeting (Nov 22)

1. The BCA have made funds available for the test rig that Bob Mayhew and his team had in place some years ago, to be made operational again. Bob will offer assistance where required. It is hoped Fabian Ehlers (DCA) will take over the future operation and direction of the test rig. The location of the test rig could be near Matlock.
2. It was confirmed, after the question was raised by Ian Patrick and myself, that the BCA have no issues with any aspect of the workshops the CNCC are running. In fact they are very complimentary of the workshop programme and take the view that the CNCC have been very transparent regards the running and financial side of the workshop programme.
3. The terms of reference for the group are being reviewed with a final outcome due in the Spring of 2023.
4. Rob Watson has stood down as the training officer for CHECC and Amelia Oliver has taken his place. Both Rob and now Amelia Oliver attended meetings.
5. QMC have been undertaking strength testing on caving belts. The findings are being prepared through QMC for publication on the BCA website.
6. The decision by the CNCC Committee which recommend destruction of the stock of sub-specification anchors currently held by Steve Gray was discussed. The meeting agreed unanimously to have the sub-standard stock of anchors destroyed.

PR and Communications Officer's Report - Matt Ewles

Hello all and happy new year!

Since the October Committee meeting, I have continued to keep northern cavers informed of CNCC's work and other important northern caving news.

Our efforts to make it easy for people to report issues to CNCC are being successful. The overhaul of the website last year includes a central page where issues with topos, descriptions, conservation, anchors, or other hazards can all be reported, with emails automatically sent to Officers.

As PR/Comms Officer I am in copy for them all in case any warnings need to be published. Over the last several months I have noted a considerable upturn in issues being reported. Sometimes it is hard to decide what action to take without spamming people about everything. My response is dictated by the apparent risk, with the worst offenders (e.g., the issues of very loose rocks over the top of an extremely popular pitch at Lancaster Hole) broadcast by all social media channels, our website and mailing list, and the more minor matters by a more measured approach.

This represents a significant increase in the workload of this role, but nonetheless, I am delighted to see cavers embracing this system.

Regarding the action item about the warnings on the CNCC website; I agree that this situation is not ideal. For example, the ongoing warning about the issues with the Mud Hall Traverse are applicable to all Gaping Gill entrances, and therefore appeared multiple times in the list of warnings. It would take some considerable work to create a new system.

To spare Gary several more hours of work, I have downgraded this particular warning from 'Immediate Danger' to a 'General Warning' meaning it does not appear on the summary list of warnings on our website, but it does appear (in yellow, rather than red) on the individual page for each Gaping Gill entrance. These are also shown when individuals are making a booking.

I have also audited the remaining list of 'Immediate Danger' warnings on our website and have downgraded several to 'General Warnings' based on the amount of time that has passed without any further reported deterioration of the situation.

It would help me a lot if our Committee could encourage your members to report to CNCC on the status of any existing warnings on the CNCC website. People are extremely proactive in reporting dangers (which is great) but reports that these dangers have been investigated are rare, which means warnings accumulate, and I am left to best-guess when they can be taken down.

For example, there are still 'Immediate Danger' warnings on Meridian Pot and Voldemort Hole from 4-5 years ago, which were given this status at the time due to the sound of an imminent collapse. Should these remain or can they be downgraded?

In addition to the report of the work to deal with fallen trees at Barbon Pot and Bull Pot of the Witches, the main news story of the last few months has been the CNCC response to the situation at High Birkwith, which was published on 22nd November and circulated by all social media outlets and via our mailing list. The response to this has been extremely positive, with many cavers choosing to follow our request to contact the National Park with their concerns, which has led to the followup actions that Adele/Andrew will hopefully update us on. I would like to thank Tim and Andrew for their proactivity in helping to bring together the information and guidance for this update and confirming the parking situation at Low Birkwith Farm. I think this has been one of the most significant matters CNCC has encountered over recent years, and the recent work is a shining example of a pro-active regional council trying to address such issues.

I have updated the CNCC website details for all High Birkwith area caves, and rewritten the cave route descriptions for Birkwith, Calf Holes, Old Ing and Browgill based on the 'new norm' for access. I have added a description for Dismal Hill Cave (with an emphasis on the exchange to Old Ing). I felt we needed to show a clear support for cavers who do choose to visit these sites.

The Pillar Holes description and topo has been significantly updated following my own visit there a few months ago (there were numerous errors in the topo, and the description was too brief).

The Bull Pot of the Witches topo has been updated to remove the Direct Route which relied on rigging from the tree. I believe there is a plan within the installers to look to potentially reinstate this via anchors, however, the poor quality of the rock may prohibit this, meaning additional

anchors on the alternative route to improve its accessibility might be needed. I would be interested to hear any thoughts and feedback on this, and if so, a possible vote on whether action here is justified.

Regarding the framed photos produced back in 2020, I am out of stock of these, but Tim Allen who held a Dales-based stock has given these a home at Bentham Medical Centre, Clapham Village Hall (via Jon Beavan) and three to the Yorkshire Dales NP headquarters for distribution around their offices. This is in addition to the ones I had previously distributed to the YSS, NPC, Settle Tourist Information and High Borrans Outdoor Centre. Thank you to Tim for your help with this.

I understand that the photographic display at the National Park HQ in Bainbridge is still in place, and we have yet to receive notice that they want it removed, so this has had an excellent showing. With this, and the letters they have received on the High Birkwith matter, the National Park can surely be in no doubt about the importance and strength of feeling about caving in the area.

Our mailing list now has 460 subscribers, up from 424 in my October report, a steady rise of one subscriber every 2-3 days. Gary will no doubt give us all other social media stats in his report, but needless to say that our reach via platforms such as Facebook are now one of the highest of any caving organisation in the UK, and we are very active on UKCaving too. I have recently had some communications with Frank Pearson, the new Northern Correspondent for Descent Magazine, to help ensure CNCC news continues to make a regular appearance in Descent.

I will be putting together a newsletter around March (ish) so any contributions are welcome.

By the time of this meeting I expect to have worked with Gary to add warnings about Ash Dieback onto topos which depict the use of trees for rigging. This includes Alum Pot, Meregill Hole, Rumbling Hole, Death's Head Hole, and Jingling Pot, thus completing this action item from the last meeting.

With respect to my action item to investigate a statement about leaving ropes in caves. I suggest the statement below for consideration by the Committee.

I would like to wish you all a great start to 2023.

Statement about leaving ropes in popular caves – Draft for Committee consideration

We are aware that many cavers choose, for various reasons, to leave ropes (or other aids) in caves for longer than the duration of a single visit. Reasons may include to expedite an ongoing project, or for their own convenience or the perceived convenience of others. Many of the caves in which these ropes are left are sites which are popular with multiple visitors.

We are aware of numerous sites across our region where ropes have been in place for months or years and it is often unclear whether they have been abandoned. In some situations, these ropes can be problematic as they make it more difficult for other visitors to use the anchors, making it more complex for them to rig, and can ultimately detract from their enjoyment of the cave.

Importantly, ropes left in caves can become damaged very quickly and present a serious hazard.

As there are so many potential reasons and situations for ropes being left in caves, the CNCC cannot, and would not wish to police this or declare this practice right or wrong. Furthermore, we know that there are in-situ ropes in several caves, the presence of which has become anticipated by many.

Nonetheless, we would like to appeal to everyone to consider the following before leaving a rope behind in a cave:

- (1) Do you really need to leave the rope in the cave?
- (2) Does leaving of ropes for your own convenience really justifies the inconvenience and reduced enjoyment it could cause others who might visit the cave?
- (3) Is the site appropriate for leaving a rope? Sites on the surface, near waterfalls, rub-points or in muddy/gritty locations can result in very rapid deterioration of ropes.
- (4) If you really must leave a rope, ensure you remove it promptly when finished, or consider an inspection/replacement schedule for longer durations.
- (5) If you really must leave a rope somewhere that other visitors are likely to encounter it, please consider labelling it (for example, a small, laminated sign robustly attached to the rope) with installation and expected removal dates, so others can see whether it is in active use or abandoned. A note explaining the reasoning for leaving the rope might be courteous on popular, anchored routes where your rope could cause inconvenience.
- (6) The CNCC supports any cavers who choose to remove ropes from caves where they are confirmed to be dangerous or abandoned and they are definitely not in current use.
- (7) Anyone leaving a rope in a cave for extended periods should do so expecting that others may use that rope or that it could be removed by well-meaning individuals.

Finally, CNCC would like to remind all cavers that we strongly recommend against the use of ropes which have been left in caves (in-situ ropes). This is because the condition of these ropes cannot be ensured and is outside of your own control. Any decision to go against this advice and use an in-situ rope is entirely at your own risk and that risk should be mitigated as best as possible.

Thank you for your cooperation and courtesy in this matter.

Web Coordinator's Report - Gary Douthwaite

New to Caving section created on the website following a suggestion by Ian. This is to highlight the training workshops aimed at novice cavers and explain what steps they need to take to get into caving. It can be found in the training section or directly at: <https://cncc.org.uk/training/new-to-caving>

Cave searching has been improved to now include the text used in top titles and route descriptions. For example, a search for 'Toyland' would not have found a cave previously, however a topo exists for it. The new search will now include Valley Entrance for that search.

Other than that, just the usual maintenance with a few tweaks here and there.

Analytics

Google

As previously reported, Google analytics will no longer be shown in my reports.

Social Media

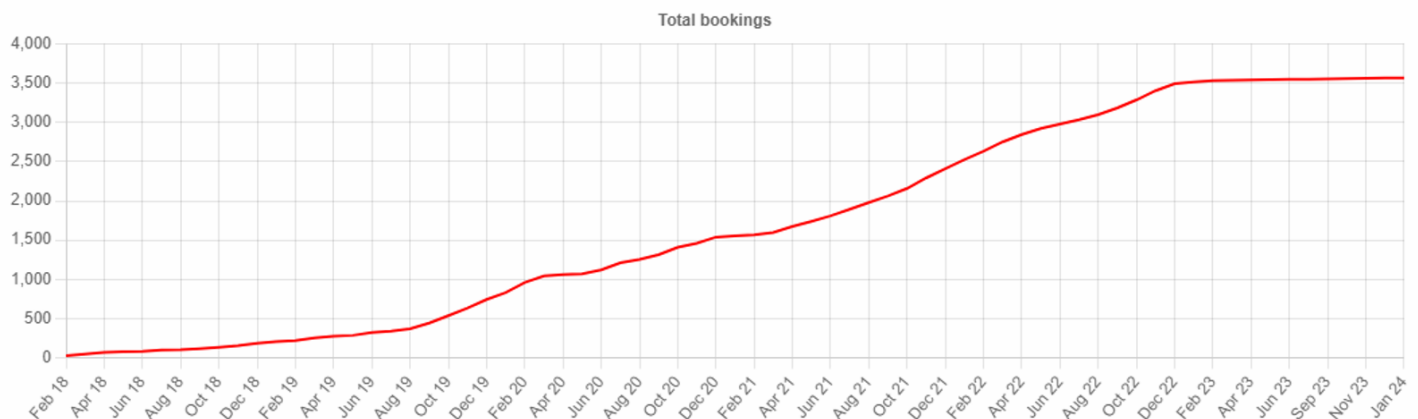
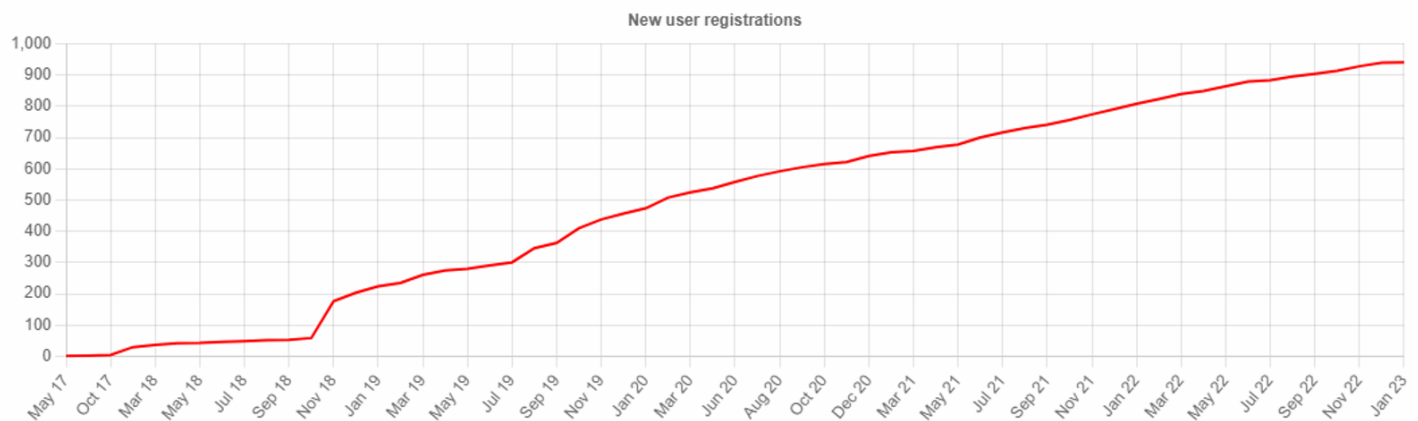
- Facebook: 1570 page likes (+31 since last report) and 1749 followers (+39 since last report).
- Twitter: 528 followers (+7 since last report). 329 tweets have been made by CNCC.
- Instagram: 433 followers (+15 since last report). 34 posts have been made by CNCC.

Mailing List

- The mailing list contains **461** people (+37 since last report). **1** have requested to be unsubscribed.

Online Booking System

- 940 registered users
- 4114 individual bookings have been made. This number includes 3565 approved bookings and 548 cancelled bookings.
- 186 (20%) made a positive statement that they are NOT BCA members.
- 652 (69%) said they are members of a club.
- Of the users who specified gender there are 151 female (16.5%), 676 male (74%) and 1 other (0.1%).
- The average age is 49.5 with the youngest 19 and oldest 82.

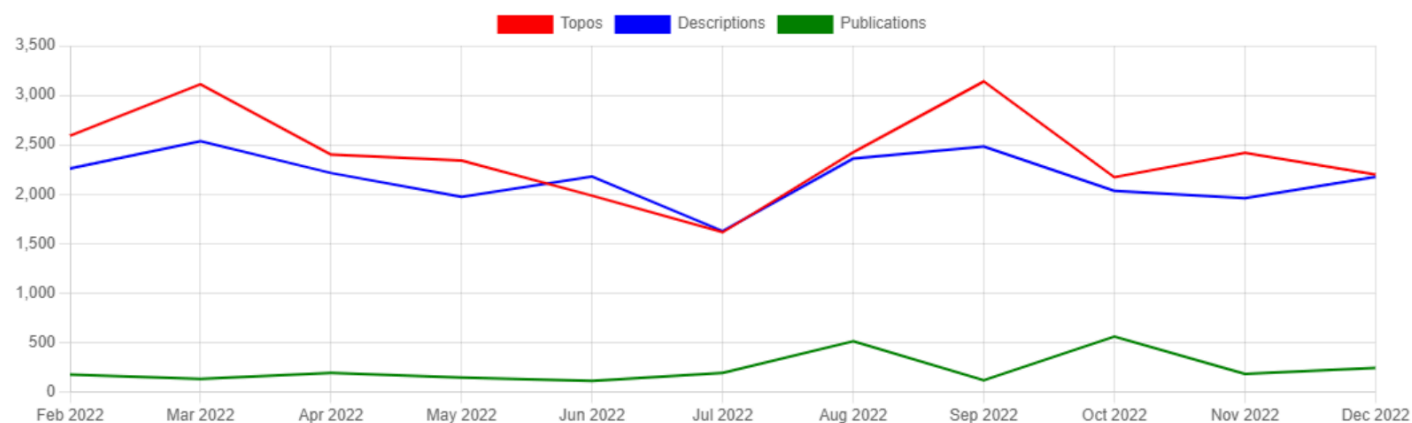


Bookings by month



Media Downloads

| | Topos | Descriptions | Publications |
|------------------|-------|--------------|--------------|
| Dec 2022 | 2200 | 2176 | 243 |
| Nov 2022 | 2418 | 1961 | 183 |
| Oct 2022 | 2172 | 2035 | 559 |
| 12 Month Average | 2200 | 1983 | 215 |



Top 5 media downloads (last 3 month period)

| Topos | Descriptions | Publications |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| 285 - Alum Pot | 411 - The Leck Fell Master Cave System | 462 - CNCC Newsletter Issue 12 - Oct 2022 |
| 243 - F'ing Hopeless Pot rigging topo | 328 - Ease Gill Caverns | 68 - CNCC Newsletter Issue 10 - Sep 2019 |
| 216 - Lost Johns' Cave | 306 - Alum Pot and Long Churn Caves | 50 - Great Douk Cave - A Guide to Hidden Gems |
| 204 - Sell Gill Holes | 244 - F'ing Hopeless Pot route description | 48 - CNCC Newsletter Issue 11 - May 2021 |
| 198 - Bull Pot of the Witches | 220 - Caves of Scotland | 47 - Witches Cave Conservation Plan |

Report data snapshots taken 5 Jan 2023.