

CHECC COVID NEWSLETTER



CHECC

Council of Higher Education Caving Clubs



PHOTO: Stuart Gardener

Hello, how are you?

It may have been over a year ago since the last time students filled up their SU's minibus with ropes, ladders and freshers to a barely road legal level for a weekend of underground adventures. Back then we'd just had a cracking Northern CHECC and corona was still just a beer. Despite the lack of mud on our oversuits, the student caving community has remained very active over the previous months and has demonstrated time after time that it's full of enthusiastic and caring people. We've held several virtual delegates meetings, slipped in a useful and popular training event in Sheffield in-between lockdowns, had possibly the best ever attended AGM - 22 clubs were virtually present!

If one thing that has been obvious throughout all of the messy 12 months is that camaraderie is very much alive and integral to how CHECC and the wider caving community function. This shines as bright as Scurion 1500 through the articles of this newsletter and epitomises the wonderful characters and adventures one can have encounter while caving! With a massive 20 pages of content, grab yourself your beverage of choice and have a read! There'll be something to interest you I'm sure!

From all of the CHECC committee cheers!

Jacob Puhalo-Smith

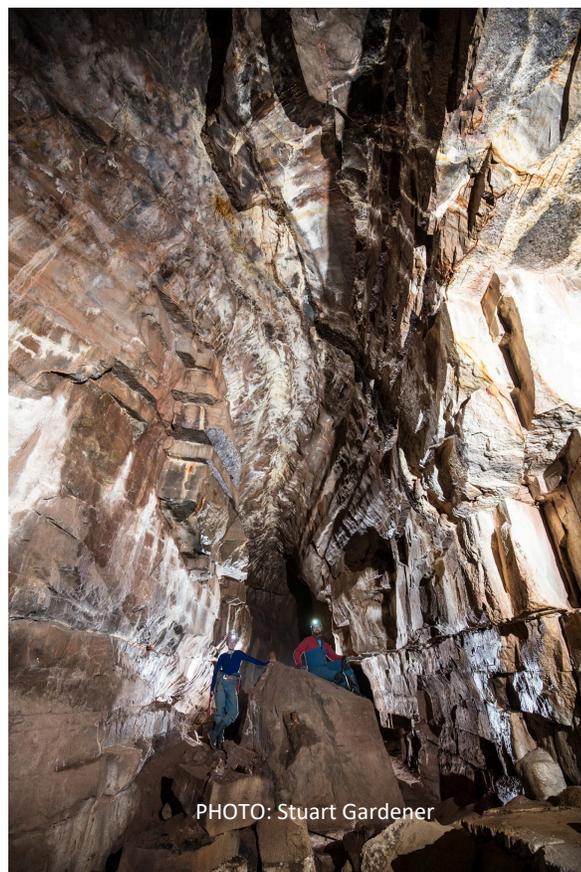


PHOTO: Stuart Gardener



PHOTO: Stuart Gardener



CHECC
Council of Higher Education Caving Clubs

What the CHECC?!

The Council of Higher Education Caving Clubs is a constituent body of British Caving Association. This basically means that BCA trust us enough to be the coordinators of student caving – they also to give us a vote at their meetings too which is nice as we can lobby the interests of students! More generally we aim to encourage the continued growth of student caving by aiding clubs in need of assistance, encouraging collaboration between caving groups and organising the legendary annual forum!

CHECC consists of an elected committee made up of 3 executive officers, each of whom serve a 3 year term, 4 non-executive officers, each serve a minimum of 1 year and the 26 university caving clubs, each has a delegate who represents their club at attends CHECC Delegates meetings. The one question that remains though, who are these trampy, beardy smelly cavers? What are they like? What do they like? Lets find out!

Chair: Jennifer Ryder

What is your most memorable caving moment?

Picking a memorable trip is a difficult task, particularly as many are memorable for all the wrong reasons! Whilst I can drone on about expedition caving, I wanted to pick one closer to home. For me, no place is closer to home than the Mendips, despite my more northern caving habits. I've been to Manor Farm Swallet twice, which likely surprises anyone that knows the cave contains a literal river of shit. My second visit is particularly memorable, as it happened at a point last year when I was genuinely questioning if I wanted to go underground again. Imperial being the club

it is, we disdained ladders (...we definitely know how to use them) and used SRT instead. This time, the nearby ponies were shut away and unable to chew on our rope - bonus! We abandoned our harnesses at the bottom of the second pitch and took the bypass for the third. It's a little damp crawl, perfect for the fun cave it is. There's some brilliant small wet climbs and before a certain grim inlet, it's all good caving. This trip, we didn't even have to crawl in the river of shit, instead finding what I presume is the right way on. It wasn't much better than the other way and next time I go I plan to stop well before the contaminated inlet! All in all, it was a very good trip and reminded me that I do, in fact, actually like caving.

What are your future caving ambitions?

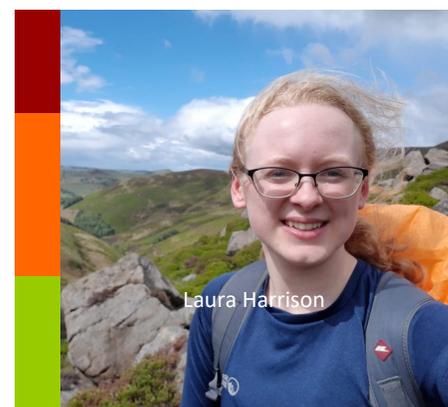
Cave more! A friend of mine has some simple advice no matter what life problem is brought up: cave more. I would love to sort out my fear of deep water - I'm eyeballing many trips, but put off by how wet they are. The obvious step to doing that would be to actually learn how to swim, an endeavour I have successfully put off for many years now.

Beyond that, drink lots of post-caving tea and I would also like to improve at surveying: I currently hold the unenviable title of creating the worst loop closure error in the Migovec system, Slovenia.

Secretary: Jacob Puhalo-Smith

What is your favorite cave and why?

There's *sooooo* many to choose from but if I had to pick on based purely on how ridiculous and mind bending a trip in there is it I would pick Otter Hole. Situated just about in Wales (which as a proud Welshman, makes it even more *ardderchog*) on the banks of the River Wye, the unassuming muddy and crawly entrance series opens out to the 'beach' where we



Laura Harrison



Rob Watson

Jennifer Ryder

Jacob Puhalo-Smith

Lisa Crow

(Continued)

find the world's only tidal sump. This is just the beginning of the bizarreness. At low tide this barely a duck but once you're through, the tide only comes in to literally lock you in the cave. You don't care though, there's a lot to explore for the next 8 hours before the water levels lower and you can exit again. Beyond here, the cave starts off as fairly standard meander upstream with the occasional black arsenic stall. This suddenly changes at a washing point where you leave the stream and head towards some of the finest passage on the planet. The Hall of 30 and what's beyond is whatever caver dreams of finding. The way out is equally fascinating, watching and listening to the water lower on the tidal sump as it makes it way to the Severn Railway Tunnel. Good trip, just try to loose a kneepad on the way back to the car.

What caving trip do you want to do next?

The very next trip I am going to do is probably this afternoon. That will be a quick outing down Grotte de Vaux-Saint-Sulpice. Ain, France. Hopefully over the coming months I'm hoping to be able to get more caving done on the Bauges Massif which will have lots of pre-rigged

caves for the upcoming UIS2021. Hopefully before then I will be able to have proper in person catch with lots of my friends who surprisingly are cavers who I've not seen for a while either in the UK or France, and have proper caving weekend. Maybe we'll even be able to organise a CHECC event soon! In the mean!

Treasurer: Laura Harrison***What caving trip stands out more than others?***

Looking through old trip reports, I find it difficult to pinpoint one particularly memorable trip. Do I mention my second ever rigging trip, where I got 2 committee members strung up and did almost the whole trip twice due to a stuck rope? How about in the Vercors where we went caving down one croll, two wellies, and no rope on the first pitch? Regardless, it seems the most memorable caving trips have been the ones where everything did not quite go to plan. But that is the fun of caving, as long as we learn from it!

One trip in particular left a lasting impression, namely an excessive caution with regards to flooding. This was on the

aforementioned Vercors holiday, in a cave hidden away on the hill as you leave St Martin. The weather had been beautiful with next to no chance of rain, and we were looking forward to a trip not too far from camp.

The cave itself was great - a scramble up a dried river bed to the entrance, followed by a low crawl which quickly opened up to some beautiful calcite formations above clear blue pools. A bracing crawl through one such puddle led onwards to some interesting passage with sandy chambers, and a via-ferrata style stapled climb, before dropping back down to meet a sumped passage. Except, according to our survey, we should not reach a sump for quite some time. Had we misread the survey, and in fact made much better time than previously thought? Had we made a wrong turn, and instead found a different part of the cave? First one caver, then another tried to fit through a muddy squeezy climb on the left just in case we had indeed made better time than expected.

'I'm a bit stuck!' Said one.

'What's that noise?' Said another. We paused, and listened. There was, indeed, a faint rumbling noise.

'I heard a similar sound on exped' Alex reported, a strange look in his eyes. 'Do you reckon this water is a bit higher?'... Then it struck us that, perhaps, we were exactly where we had anticipated.

'Natalie, could you come down please? Now?' After some brief discussion I made the executive decision that, however low the chances that a storm had hit while we were underground, I was not waiting to find out the hard way and began a swift exit back the way we came. A brief pause, and even the keenest of explorers followed suit, determined not to find out alone. A rapid reversal of our trip soon saw us emerging, blinking, into the blazing sunshine of the French summer- not a cloud in sight! After a bit of ribbing and grumbling about over-caution we returned down the hill, if nothing else happy to be enjoying the sunshine.

(Continued)

A few days later some fellow campers returned to the scene of the crime, and found the water levels to be slightly lower, now with a (marginal) air connection onwards. After some discussion and double checking of weather in the catchment area we have put this phenomenon down to snow-melt, and resolved to visit again once all the snow is well and truly gone- but not a moment sooner.

Although there was realistically very little danger this time, it has left my attitude to water in the marginally paranoid category.

Which cave will you head to as soon as restrictions allow?

I have been missing caving hugely in recent lockdowns, as I'm sure we all are. I plan to make a break for Yorkshire as soon as restrictions allow, with anyone too slow to make an excuse. Last NCHECC I attempted Large Pot, but abandoned it before Colossus so as not to have the committee driving home into Monday, and hope to try the exchange before too long. Maybe I'll save it as a celebration for when CHECC next makes it to the Dales. Beyond that, the first lockdown prevented what would have been my first expedition, with uni commitments getting in the way previous years, so hopefully I'll be able to make good on those plans in the coming year or two. Whatever the caving year brings, I am most looking forward to once again seeing my caving family in person, be that above or below ground. Preferably below.

Training Officer: Rob Watson***What was your most memorable caving experience?***

It's tough to boil down so many amazing and formative experiences into one paragraph, but most of my really memorable caving adventures have occurred in two places: the Yorkshire Dales and the Austrian Alps. For condensed variety you can't beat the Dales: from the calcite theme park of Easegill, where pure fun is guaranteed, to the loose,

waterlogged, uncertain journeys to be had beneath Pen-y-Ghent and Wharfedale, there is truly something for everyone here, which is reflected in the amazing and diverse community of cavers who you might bump into at the Farm on a given weekend. On the other hand, the sheer scale of the caves in the Alps forces you to learn quickly and gain the trust of your peers. The multi-day adventures I've had in Austria, finding kilometres of new passage (or not) with some of my best friends, being the first and last person to walk across a sandy floor, and getting back to camp at 5am after coming close to running on empty, have really made me who I am today. And the one thing that unifies both of these adventurous settings? The certainty of an excellent party and continual pistaking once the caving is done.

What do you want to do with caving in the future?

I love learning and caves and caving have shaped my education since I was small, so hopefully that will continue. If it doesn't I might not finish this PhD, which would mean I would lose my income but also have more time to go caving ('funemployment' as a friend once called it). I like sharing what I've learnt about caves with others; often it means you learn a lot more in the process. Caving is a truly cooperative endeavour: most of the time it doesn't work on your own, or if it does then it's quite boring. So keeping in touch with my old friends (apart from Botch; what a dick, good riddance), making new ones, and going on great adventures with both, will hopefully lead to more great memories and possibly

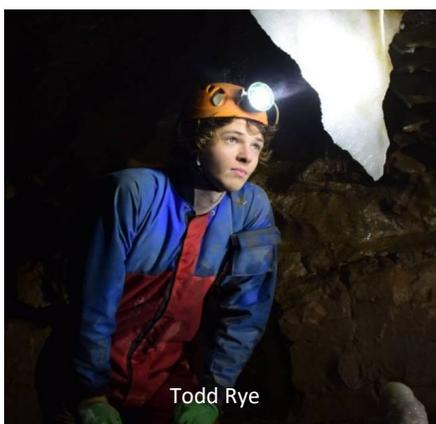
finding some new cave along the way!

Which cave will you head to as soon as restrictions allow?

I have been missing caving hugely in recent lockdowns, as I'm sure we all are. I plan to make a break for Yorkshire as soon as restrictions allow, with anyone too slow to make an excuse. Last NCHECC I attempted Large Pot, but abandoned it before Colossus so as not to have the committee driving home into Monday, and hope to try the exchange before too long. Maybe I'll save it as a celebration for when CHECC next makes it to the Dales. Beyond that, the first lockdown prevented what would have been my first expedition, with uni commitments getting in the way previous years, so hopefully I'll be able to make good on those plans in the coming year or two. Whatever the caving year brings, I am most looking forward to once again seeing my caving family in person, be that above or below ground. Preferably below.

Welfare Officer: Lisa Crow***What caving experience stands out above the rest?***

With so many great experiences it's hard to pick just one that stands out. My favourite caving trips are often the ones where I get wet. Nothing beats a decent streamway. And I think we can all agree that the best caving stories are the ones where things go awry. With that in mind one trip in particular comes to mind. It was one of my first trips in OFD and a generous individual, who will not be identified for the purposes of this story, had offered to show us a bit more of the



Todd Rye



Wassil Janssen

(Continued)

large maze of passages that is OFD. We set off intending to go from the bottom to the top. All was going well when we got to The Step at the start of the streamway. We stopped to debate whether it was the streamway that was too high if the water came above your ankles when standing on The Step or was it your knees? It was a fairly crucial distinction to make as the water lapped at the top of our wellies. It was concluded that it was the knees, it had to be the knees, right? We were to later discover that the correct answer was that if you couldn't see The Step then the water is too high to enter. So we were about a foot and half off, nonetheless, in our blissful ignorance we pushed on. As we made our way along the streamway our mistake was becoming ever more apparent. I recall thinking well these are some convenient ridges along these deep pools of water when I couldn't ever see the scaffolding bars that we were tentatively shuffling along. It was around here when our guide for the day slipped and got dragged back by the river luckily grabbing onto some more stable legs as they passed the rest of the party. A look was exchanged. There was a glimmer of mutiny in our eyes. Shortly afterwards we came across the start of the waterfall series. As we looked up at the torrent of water coming down the climb we started to wonder if there was a small chance that we were wrong about the water levels. It was at this point we conceded to the water gods and quickly bailed out Cwm Dwr. Things may have not gone to plan, but at least my kit was cleaner than when I went in.

Publicity: Todd Rye
Introduce yourself?

Hello! I'm Todd, the sponsorship and competitions officer for CHECC. I've been caving from a majority of my life, and as such have a lot of fond memories, choosing just one would be hard. One that springs to mind is the leadership training

weekend where our volunteer fresher turned to us after we'd gotten through the ducks in Peak Cavern. The conversation went something like this. "I've left my phone in my pocket!" "Your oversuit pocket?" "No my jeans!" None of us had checked properly before we got underground, and he was still wearing his jeans under his under suit. So there we were, making a fresher strip underground. The phone was fine. So was the fresher, though we never saw him again. Another that sticks out was on expedition, after another team said the cave I had been exploring with another caver had gone dead, no way on. We went for one last check, and managed to find a traverse leading to a way on. There were a lot of whoops and cheers from two of us, anyone who heard us would have thought we'd gone mad! In terms of what I want to do with caving, the easy answer is more of it. I've built up a list of trips I want to do, having talked to some older and more experienced cavers. So I'm hoping to put a dent in that list as soon as possible. Hopefully we can start getting ourselves into tight wet holes again soon!

Web Officer: Wassil Janssen

What moment brought you the most joy while caving?

Having a warm shower after a camping trip in Daren Cilau where I thought I would die due to rising water levels

When not caving, what do you enjoy doing the most?

Socialising and playing caving games with cavers. When that's not possible, cycling really long distances.

CHECC Delegate NUCC: Benedict Hal Claxton Stevens

How did you become a caver?

When I arrived at the dawn of my PhD having done a single trip underground to a non-show cave age 13 I was looking down the list of societies and spotted caving, "well it wouldn't hurt to try it I guess" I intended on it being a pastime, every now and then I would go on a bit of an adventure. But the bug caught me. Both

for the deep underground and of meeting the most warm-hearted and welcoming group of misfits reprobates and all round excellent people I had ever come across. A whole new world opened ahead of me with an instant group of friends, a sense of purpose and call to adventure. For me caving is exciting and scary, and interesting and silly. It helps that I'm a glutton for type 2 fun masochism. The whole world of cavers, caves and cave research is pretty damn cool and the more speleology I learn the more I appreciate the rock walls above and below me. There's always a bigger drop, a shittier crawl, a prettier formation and another cool type of rock (or mud) I hadn't dreamed of.

What is the best part about being a CHECC Delegate?

Having grown incredibly attached to Nottingham and NUCC slowly meeting



Benedict Hal Claxton Stevens

other clubs and getting involved in the wider caving community has been a real joy. CHECC is a great resource for helping clubs get together, share problems, solutions, and commiseration as well as kit loaning and getting our voices heard with the big bods at the BCA with the purse strings. Especially over the last year we've started to do even more talking between the clubs and it's been a really rewarding experience as delegate. Sounds serious, but it's not and I've been struck by how well-run things have been.

So that's a very brief introduction to those integral CHECC.

Bye bye Botch...

By Rob Watson

At November's AGM saw David 'Botch' Botcherby's term as CHECC Chair come to end. Here's what Rob Watson had to say about him...



This is a twisted eulogy for our dear Botch Botchington, who has moved on from the UK and his CHECC-related responsibilities, to pastures new. Now undertaking some kind of druidic scholarship, he spends his days whistling to birds, drawing pictures of moss and cooking mushroom omelettes. He's also begun to cave with the French, who have tried to convince him to transcend his chaotic approach to preparing for caving and even charge his batteries the night before.

However, this impression is deceiving, for Botch will never really leave his student caving ways behind. He is intrinsically drawn to the disorganisation and setbacks that will always befall student caving, embracing them rather than allowing them to frustrate him unduly. Organising student caving events necessitates a degree of 'que será, será', which Botch managed to master by allowing others (such as Brendan) to put all the logistics in place for him. And yet he has never once tried to wriggle out of his obligations on the day. I remember a certain Saturday morning in a Sheffield caver house, following an all-night techno rave, going upstairs to see him removing someone else's poo from the landing carpet (the culprit is still unknown). Faced with such an atrocity, many of us would have been seen off completely. But Botch finished the job, made a strong coffee and then drove us both to the Farm to make sure we got a decent trip in Easegill with SUSS, ULSA and Red Rose cavers, followed by a bracing naked swim in Cow Dubs (the swim has now become an obligatory finale to any trip exiting from County Pot or Wretched Rabbit). Such a combined dedication to caving, comrades and the sesh is rare.

Botch tried to get to know everyone in student caving: his commitment to other people was what made him so effective during his time in CHECC. He has an immense talent for listening to what others have to say, and taking it seriously, without losing sight of his responsibilities or seriously compromising his own vision. He's written a lovely article somewhere in this newsletter about the UK caving community which I think sums up why he felt inclined to dedicate so much of his time to it and why he ended up being quite central to it without necessarily seeking to be.

I haven't been able to cave with Botch as much as I would have liked lately, what with COVID and druidic studies. But I know that one day we'll cave together again and it will be great fun. It's also reassuring to know that, if a poo appears in an offensive place, he has the necessary experience to deal with it. Though if he'd been a truly skilful chairperson he would've delegated away this responsibility...

Vive le Botch. To many future caving trips and hopefully no future poos on the carpet.

End





Opinion Piece, By Elise Freshwater- Blizzard

As my time as a student slowly shuts its doors, I should like to share about what I have learned from the community of student cavers and caving in the past five years.

For many years I had grappled with the idea that I was not progressing in my confidence underground as I had previously anticipated. Caving is a skill to be defined and learned, and those who were naturally good at doing hard kinetic skills surpassed those with seemingly integral soft skills. The main consensus for those like me, who were struggling, was to be the same: ‘just go caving *more*.’ This was a fantastic point to consider as a young caver, and indeed, I ended up cramming some weeks off with a cluster of trips. The darkness became secondary and sleeping became wishful thinking. I had honed down on my SRT skills and became so used to numb hands that I became pleasantly pleased when they were not chapped! It was a life on the road, and I was proud of it. These trips consisted of an array of small caves with a reasonable amount of SRT for my level, which pushed me to a point of feeling exhausted, sometimes packing in two trips a day.

Even after this push for learning, I still found myself frozen like stone when faced with big drops and began to shake when handling more complex SRT challenges. I am in awe that I did not admit to feeling my large twang of shame at the time, but instead pushed through when I failed on any of these challenges. It became a life goal to somehow prove I wasn’t afraid of what I was blatantly terrified of: heights. Of course, I miserably failed. The more I asked the community on and offline on how to combat this, the more of the same reception would parrot: ‘just cave *more*’. I would shortly give up on the idea of doing any big caving trips at all, and began restricting myself on doing larger, more demanding trips. I became aware that I was not progressing as a caver should.

But months later, something would change my caving experience forever. I had met Alum Pot.

First gazing upon *-that-* view, gave me that feeling of ‘underground rush.’ This only ever achieved when the rock sinks into your eyes and washes through your body as you stand, feeling like the small human that you are in the vastness of the underground universe. It made me feel proud to be a caver. On that day, I had been persuaded by peers at Manchester to make the fine trip from underneath the slab, all the way down to the sump. This followed

roughly a 60m length descent with a deviation.

The day before agreeing to go on this trip, I thought countless on everything that could go wrong. I pondered on whether I was skilled enough, and how many more years I should have to train until I felt confident enough to take the plunge with bigger trips like this. The anxiety racked my brain through the night, and surely, I woke a few times to recurring nightmares of falling. If you’ve never had crippling anxiety, it can be hard to explain how you are aware of the falseness of your imagination, whilst completely succumbing to its darkest suggestions. The very next day, I was halfway down the rope in Alum, twirling around as one might fall sick on a teacup ride out of control, and I felt the relentless need to forcefully engage the emotion of joy. The peers on this trip were the most wonderful, comforting people, their support and friendliness had eased me into a real sense of calm. After 3 years of caving at that point, it was more confidence I lacked, than skill.

Prussiking back felt like a chore: but I had no idea what was coming. As the blood rushed away from my head and into my muscles, my anxiety had a free-for-all when I reached the top.

And that’s when the most pivotal moment of my caving career began to happen.

After hanging under the greasy slab tentatively, I noticed sharp cracks arounds the bolts in the limestone as I inspected the wall. My breathing became heavy, unregulated and my mind, chaotic. My legs dangling freely below a 60m drop, I ventured into fight or flight mode.

What led to this moment was a 3-year ordeal: I first decided to cave because it subsided my depression and anxiety. Back then, it was hard to walk on the street and do menial tasks, but caving helped me understand what true fear could potentially be. There was a sharp divide between the underground and overground, which seemed to complement each other. The underground let me experience true fear, which led me being fearless overground. The overground made me feel tense, which pushed me back, deep under the earth.

What happened at Alum changed my life. Under that slab, I was so fearful, that I became starkly un-fearful. I felt my thoughts lighten: my brain became a blank slate and all I could feel was the breath pouring in and out of my mouth, becoming slow and controlled. I was no longer ‘Elise’. It was perhaps the most important five minutes of my life, where my whole body was concentrating on one objective: to move out of the situation in a calm and controlled manner, using my beautiful backlog of training. Sheffield University Speleological Society had run SRT into my brain like a hammer. My thoughts became void, and every move I made became pre-calculated, as if an orchestra was playing in my mind. Yet I was conducting the tempo and tune they had been steadily rehearsing in those cold halls of ropes and shining metal gear. A peer was just around the corner talking me through my calculations, and excellently calming me down. Within minutes, I pulled my weight back on top of the greasy slab.

When I had finally left the entrance of the cave, I had dissipated

(Continued)

into total exhaustion and I seemed to 'flood back' into myself. I had truly won this battle.

After years of pondering what had happened at Alum, I became cognizant of the fact that dealing with fear by going caving *more* might not entail the building of bravery, rather, it is the notion of feeling present with the fear, experiencing fear and making friends with such emotion. Before, I pretended that I was not fearful. I blocked out a strong emotion and frequently became angry underground because I was not understanding of why I should be scared, when I knew I was perfectly safe. I used to swear and shout abuse at myself, much to the surprise of my peers. But now, I had begun to accept fear and tried to experience it to the full when I was in the scariest moments, allowing me to focus on my breath, be at one with the rush, and glide through the motions of SRT. It was easy to become angry at a situation where I felt I had lost all control, but it was far wiser to let myself be at one with the situation presented to me. After all this time, I believed the volume of caving trips would be equal to how 'good' a caver I was, as if there was a certain level to reach that would obtain me respect from my peers. What I ended up finding on this 5-year journey is that my progress was

never connected to caves, it was connected to my own personal mentality towards life. It was never about 'levelling up' at all.

A few months back, I went caving with my housemates to practice some technical SRT.¹ It felt like a beautiful closure of what I had learned. Of course, I was still scared, but the friends I love were there with me, and fear became a fun exercise to experience, instead of fighting it. I felt comfortable admitting that I didn't want to do traverses with no SRT, since I still have my limits, but I felt comfortable in telling them I *was* experiencing fear. When visiting a mine last year, I squeezed through a small and narrow entrance, the walls lined with large spiders. I am terrified of spiders, but as I reached the end of the trip, whilst wriggling on the ground to get them off my suit, it hit me: Fear doesn't define me as a caver, the way I deal with fear, does.

It is as if I have gone full circle: I have realised once again that caving is an act of walking straight into your own private hell, with challenges designed to make you uncomfortable. You are walking into the belly of the beast, and walking out again feels like not only an exorcism of your inner demons, but that of a journey of friendship and love, communicated in the team work and respect you have for your peers along the way.

END

Welcome to the committee Jennifer..!

By Jacob Puhalo-Smith

It is massive pleasure to welcome Jennifer Ryder to the committee! Jennifer has several years of caving and committee experience with Imperial College Caving Club and has already seemingly effortlessly transferred these expertises to CHECC!



I've been fortunate to know Jennifer for a number of years and arguably had my best caving experience in her presence. One beautiful spring day it was decided we were to attempt to Agen Allwedd's Grand Circle. Despite doing the trip the *wrong* way round and having some near leg breaking falls on that notoriously slippery stream way, we somehow managed to complete the circle with limited faff.

Very quickly after meeting Jennifer, her passion for caving and adventure shines brightly. I can recall one of our conversation where she enthusiastically describe the Migovec System in Slovenia which subsequently lead me joining the expedition myself in 2019. Her compassionate and considerate approach is what caving needs during this bizarre time and I'm sure CHECC will come out of this COVID time strongly under her tenure!

WORST EVENTS OF THE LAST YEAR:

THE PUBS ARE SHUT!!!!

By Anna Taylor

The UK student caving community is in crisis. The pubs are shut, our oversuits are looking scarily clean, and we are under the dictatorship of elderly white men who rule the underground realm from their armchairs.

After the absolute shitshow of 2020, it's time for us student cavers to take a stand and expose some of the horrific things that we have witnessed within the UK caving community in the last year.

1. Aygill Caverns Blocked.

Aygill Caverns has been BLOCKED by members of Red Rose, who, due to the average age within the club, are very scared of contracting the coronakarstvirus. Members of the club have employed CSCC-style techniques to block the cave entrance so that only they can enter and failed to take accountability by attributing the blockage to 'natural' causes.

2. BCA Threatened to Remove Membership Cards.

The BCA AGM concerned the abolition of membership cards. This is a direct attack on the student caving community, who rely on the cards to divide our cocaine up equally.

3. AditNow Closed Down.

AditNow has returned to its rightful place in the noughties, after a group of Gen-Z teens hacked the site to find places to host underground raves in lockdown.

4. Mendips Caver Ate a Bat.

A Mendips caver who lost his sight just after his 80th birthday in 1952 accidentally ate a bat instead of his cereal bar, and caused the transmission of a deadly virus. The UK government then pretended the virus had come from China, and now everyone is dying, and we're about to enter a nuclear war.

5. SUSS' Spray Paint Removed from Giants.

The arrows that SUSS (Sheffield) kindly spray painted in Giants so that the rest of us had directions to their stash of acid were removed by a TSG member. For some reason, the culprit felt irritated by all the student cavers sitting in the crabwalk to watch the fluorescent crabs. Did anyone see the purple one with pink spots, by the way?!

6. Red Rose Membership shrinking.

Red Rose are suffering from a dramatic decrease in membership, after switching their monthly orgies for socially-distanced wanking sessions. If the membership continues to fall, the annual Bonfire Weekend may not be able to happen in 2021, which means UNCC (Newcastle) and MUSC (Manchester) won't be able to partake in their traditional fight over who booked the hut first.

7. CHECC Committee Under Threat.

The CHECC Committee are under prolonged threat from the 'Bondage-Cum-Alliance', which was created in lockdown during a CHECC pub quiz on Discord and has since carried out several attempted mutinies of the organisation.

8. SUSS Coup.

In order to protect his ego after being forced by the Bondage-Cum-Alliance to step down from his position as CHECC Chair, Botch has assumed control of SUSS, who, under his new regime, will be forced to speak French, wear beret's instead of helmets, and eat any unsuspecting frogs found in East Canal. It is feared that coups in other university clubs may follow.

9. Speleorrhoea Epidemic.

A Speleorrhoea epidemic is raging through the student caving community after a member of one of the clubs announced his diagnosis of the rare disease on UKCaving (<https://ukcaving.com/board/index.php?topic=27396.msg334950>). The disease, which only affects the penis, means that the student caving community is being usurped by female cavers who believe in all sorts of whimsical ideas such as feminism and equality. It is recommended that all clubs invest in a specialist STI kit sold by Starless River that target the detection of cave-related STI's.



BEC Weekend, February 2020

By
Emily Punzalan

Almost exactly one year ago, a group of intrepid Irish cavers – despite whispers of a burgeoning global pandemic – boarded an airplane bound for the mythic land of the Mendips. Little did they know it would be their last real caving weekend before ‘social distancing,’ Zoom calls and repeated lockdowns became the norm.

I'm not gonna lie, I was a bit wary about another visit to the UK for caving. My experience with UK trips so far has consisted mostly of little sleep, hordes of people (in various stages of undress), and very little actual caving. What possessed me to book flights to Bristol for an infamous BEC weekend, I don't even know myself. We made a rather inauspicious start in Dublin airport, spending 10 minutes arguing with an uncompromising security lady over a caving knife in a carry-on bag. Despite Veronika's impassioned pleas to save it, it was tossed unceremoniously in the bin. We sought out some overpriced airport food, while waiting for our friend, Matt, who managed to fly through security just barely in time for our boarding call. It certainly promised to be an interesting trip.

We arrived to a very foggy Bristol morning, and our next challenge was to find the hired car. Matt, trying to be as tight as possible, booked from the car rental equivalent of Ryanair, and had no idea where we were due to pick it up. Naturally I suggested the car hire centre, and we took a little shuttle bus there... only to find no desk for our rental place. He rang their customer service number and got some vague directions. We then had to board the shuttle again, all our caving gear in tow, and go back to the airport terminal. We eventually figured the car hire company was not even located on the airport premises and got a courtesy van there. Their main 'office' was naught but a converted shipping container on an empty lot, and we spent another half hour waiting outside in near-freezing temperatures before we finally had a car. A bit of boot-Tetris and we were finally on our way to Cheddar in search of second breakfast. We found a café and filled up on full English-es with tea, but had to make a quick getaway after Dáire unintentionally smashed open a bottle of probably the thickest, stickiest cough syrup I have ever seen. We did a quick food (and cheese!) shop before driving to Priddy via Cheddar Gorge. The morning mists had long cleared by the time we rolled up to the Belfry, where we found preparation for the weekend festivities well underway. If the lasers, UV lights, fog machine, cotton candy maker, and 3D-printed stalactite-cups were anything to go by, I was definitely not mentally prepared for the party it was shaping up to be.

And now, we finally get to the caving! After ditching our less

necessary gear, we drove over to the Wessex to change for Swildon's Hole. A pleasant walk across several fields led us to a small stream that sunk below a stone entrance-tower. It was definitely strange for us Irish cavers to see a cave entrance so obviously marked! None of us, save Matt, had been before, so we unfortunately had to rely on him to lead the trip. Fortunately, there really wasn't much route finding involved on the way to Sump 1. We fuffed for ages at the ladder pitch, trying to figure the best way to set up the ladder and lifeline. In the end, Matt just wound up descending the ladder without the lifeline, leaving me to belay the others down the waterfall. We're not as accustomed to ladders over in Ireland, so naturally, Veronika wound up completely in the waterfall, got drenched head to toe, and arrived at the bottom, fuming at Matt who had claimed Swildon's was a 'dry cave.' I don't know what constitutes dry in Matt's world, but that certainly was not it. Thoroughly pissed off after specifically asking for a dry-ish trip, Veronika angry-caved her way to the sump and had a teary, rage-filled meltdown. This went on for a few minutes before she calmed down enough to accept a few nibbles of peanut butter KitKat, and a few more minutes before being convinced it was time to leave. It was a pretty quick trip, but at least I thoroughly enjoyed myself! Definitely worth another proper visit, but maybe after a few more hours of sleep!

That was not the end of the day's misadventures unfortunately. Matt had one last surprise for us. The Wessex had emptied out at that point, but Matt had the key to the changing room. While the rest of us had left our clothes in the car, Matt had changed inside the hut. Somehow, he wound up locked out – the changing room keys, car keys, and all his dry clothes inside. Thankfully, he had opened the car door for us before this happened. He briefly debated trying to break in before tucking tail and walking back to the Belfry to find another key. We changed into dry gear and mercifully some elder Wessex members showed up to let us into the drying room to retrieve the gear and keys. Veronika drove us back to base, and we hung around chatting to a few new arrivals while waiting for the Hunters to open for food. A hearty portion of cheesy pasta and doorstep bread mended most of the day's ills. I didn't last more than two pints of Potholer before heading back to the Belfry to catch up on sleep. This was short-lived, however, as the crowd from Hunters poured back into the hut and blasted the sound system for a few more hours. Poor Dáire didn't sleep at all and probably would have slaughtered the entirety of the BEC if we had allowed him out of bed. In fairness, we *had* tried to warn him!

The following morning, we tried our best to stave off two nights of sleep deprivation with several pots of tea. It worked somewhat, and we re-packed our (now dry) kit for a special trip into Reservoir Hole. Access to the cave is fairly limited, but Matt had arranged for Pete Glanvill to lead us on a 'working' trip. We met Pete and changed at the side of the reservoir in Cheddar Gorge, all the while getting a history of the discovery of the cave. The spiders in the entrance had Veronika in tears for the second time in 24 hours, and we tried not to disturb

(Continued)

the few hibernating Lesser Horseshoe bats we encountered as we moved through the cave. Pete has been heavily involved in its exploration and digging over the years (even writing a book on the subject), so it was quite an honour to have him lead. It felt like a show cave trip in some ways, stopping at various points along the route for him to tell a story about digs and breakthroughs over the years. It must have been quite a feat of engineering – great walls of large boulders, bits of shoring and concrete, stacks of railway sleepers, stone stairways, various drains and hoses in abundance. On the latter of these, our excuse for the trip was to try to unblock one of these lengths of hose, which had become clogged up with mud. This basically involved blowing or sucking on an end until the muddy water could trickle through again. All-in-all we spent about 15 minutes on this before giving up and continuing on. The *real* objective was to see 'The Frozen Deep', the (purported) largest cave chamber in the UK. Whether it actually is or not doesn't really matter, I suppose. It's just impressive – massive pure white pillars, an abundance of curtains and stals, 30m high walls of flowstone, and rare cryogenic calcite formations. We spent an entire hour winding our way carefully around the conservation-taped path, which even had the odd tiny bat clinging delicately to it! An absolute treat of a trip and not one I will soon forget!

We were quickly back into Cheddar to stock up on 'supplies,' stopped into the Queen Vic for some pub grub, and headed back to the BEC hoping for a little R&R before the big night. Purely exhausted, I managed to sneak in a little nap before the party kicked off. The theme, which had caused a full weekend of frantic costume prep a week beforehand, was 90s rave. Think crop tops, baggy jeans, chains, flannel, bucket hats, with the addition of glowsticks and UV paint to top it all off. The night started with them burning an effigy of Mike in front of the hut. You can imagine it only descended into further chaos from there. The highlight of the evening was probably Matt stumbling excitedly into the bathroom after presenting Mike with his birthday card. Matt, in his inebriated state, forgot we hadn't signed it yet and gave it to his friend with the declaration, "I'm not sure what it says, but I'm sure Veronika wrote loads." Matt deservedly got a lot of shite for it the next morning. My otherwise fun night was promptly ended around 2am when someone thought it would be a good idea to test out the fire extinguisher. One minute, I was stood in the hallway chatting, the next moment a cloud appeared, covering everyone in a fine white powder that made it difficult to breathe. I took that as a sign to go bed,

washing as much of the stuff off as I could before crawling into my sleeping bag and miraculously drifting off despite the bass from next-door threatening to bring the building down.

There were a brave few awake early, and we busied ourselves by attempting to clean up last night's carnage. I had downed enough tea for several people by the time Matt and our other leaders drifted wraith-like into the sitting room. For our last day, we planned on a trip into St. Cuthbert's Swallet. The cave was a minute walk from the hut, which was certainly appreciated as a storm was brewing outside. The entrance was a bit unusual. To enter, you have to remove a wheel from the entrance ladder and use it to close up a dam, blocking the flow of water and allowing you to climb in without being water-boarded. Not far inside, there was a narrow rift to negotiate, a 10m or so climb which was easy enough to slip down but we dropped a ladder down to assist on the way back out. It was a sporty enough trip through a maze of very well decorated passages, and it felt a bit sacrilegious having to climb over the many formations. Near the end of the trip, we finally reached Veronika's cave pearl grotto, where we all sat back, shivering, while she insisted on listening to 'A Whole New World' from Aladdin not once, but twice. It was a really lovely cave, but I was all-prettyed out by the end, happy to head out cold and tired as I was.

We had stayed in a bit longer than anticipated, emerging around 5pm and had to rush a bit for our 8:20 flight. We managed to cut the fuff (it helped that the Belfry had basically cleared out by then), and we were on the road shortly after 6. Our flight got a bit delayed due to stormy weather, so we at least didn't have to rush to eat before hopping on the plane. I slept from take off to touch down, thoroughly worn out by a weekend unexpectedly well spent.

END



PHOTO: Pete Glanvill

MUSC's Lockdown Art

Ying Clarke (b. 2000)
Spaghetti Limbs after Cave, 2020
Compost on kitchen table
A depiction of the physical effects caving has on the body.



A Philosophy on Extreme Sports:

Dangerous sports and their values

By
Elif Okutan



PHOTO: Luxatic

Despite the negative outcomes that occur because of extreme sports, there is still a population that cannot be deferred from partaking. What is it that causes a person to participate in such a high-risk sport?

To answer this question, we must have a better understanding of the human mind. In such scenarios the human mind may go through mental states of extreme fear and extreme elation; perhaps it is the extremity of the highs that one can get, that makes extreme sport so appealing – with high risk comes high reward. However, it is obvious that courage is needed to overcome fear of any extremity and many philosophers like Aristotle, et al. have argued the necessity of such a virtue in living the best life.

Russell describes 'dangerous' sport as such:

"By 'dangerous sport' I mean a sport that involves activity that itself creates a significant risk of loss of, or serious impairment to, some basic capacity for human functioning. Dangerous sports, then, range along a continuum of significant risks." (Russell 2005: 3)

We can thus refer to a dangerous sport as one where death is a risk. It is the danger of the sport that gives it its extremity.

The philosophy of risk aims to understand the risks taken in certain experiments and medical procedures and considers at what point is too high of a risk considered unethical. For example, when scientists carry out measurements there is always an error margin involved. Of course, one would prefer a

smaller margin of error, but we cannot always take risk statistics to fully equate to how dangerous the sport is, because probability can only be an estimate. Improvement in equipment and techniques means our statistics of fatal accidents in these extreme sports are not entirely accurate as these numbers are calculated based on previous fatalities. One is far less likely to die caving today than 70 years ago due to our experience, knowledge, and equipment advancements. As Pliny the Elder put best "the only certainty is that nothing is certain" (Pliny 1983). We furthermore cannot accurately measure a risk of an extreme sport as the risks change from person to person based on experience level.

Overtime the list of extreme sports has grown with advances in equipment and popularity, thus many more sports have fallen under this classification. What sport fell under 'extreme' did so because there was a possibility of fatal accidents. Despite negative consequences that occur due to these extreme sports there appears to be some positive in it.

Russell explains that the overall value gained is self-affirmation (Russell 2005: 12). Exploring the idea that pushing boundaries and surpassing personal limits builds ourselves as people and bolsters personal confidence.

"In reaching and attempting to surpass our limits we inevitably confront what we are. In doing so we affirm or declare to ourselves who we are and what we are striving to make of ourselves" (Russell 2005:15). However, there are obviously many

(Continued)

things we can surpass our limits in, such as academically or in non-dangerous sport but there is a different and distinct value found in these extreme sports that cannot be found in anything else. As Martinkova discussed, her belief was the distinction between the values of an ordinary sport to an extreme sport was the 'degree of intensity' (Martinkova 2009: 95). Thus, high risk means high reward.

Although we can push our limits in everyday life, dangerous sport offers a degree of intensity with extreme highs, lows, thrills and moments of intense fear.



PHOTO: National Geographic

All of which contribute to people feeling they have really pushed their boundaries as far as they can possibly go.

I conducted a short interview with the famous cave diver and adventurer, Josh Bratchley to try and get to the bottom of the question, 'why do people do extreme sport?'. He is notably known for having been one of the divers involved in the Thai Cave Rescue of 2019. Cave diving is an extreme sport with high risks. Primarily these high-risk sports require the virtue of courage, thus when we look upon these adrenaline junkies, they appear fearless to us, maybe even reckless. Here is what Bratchley said when discussing how he

dealt with fear:

"To a non-cave diver lots of situations that cave divers put themselves in may seem horrendous, frightening and panic-ridden. It is hard to accurately imagine things that you have no experience of. Training, progressive improvement and gaining experience puts things into perspective and allows you to think rationally in situations you may not have kept calm in before. I have been concerned, scared, and felt fear and nerves when cave diving - if I had not that would be a bad thing in my opinion. Sometimes it is because I am pushing my boundaries, others it is the result of a mistake I've made but training and experience (and learning from past mistakes) allows me to deal with the situation." (Bratchley 2021)

Much of Bratchley's answer is supported by Russell's ideas of extreme sports and its relationship to self-affirmation. In these extreme situations you are forced to be brave, you are tested both mentally and physically. I do not believe any other activity or 'ordinary' sport tests a person to the same capacity.

Aristotle's philosophy on courage teaches us that those courageous adventurers who partake in such sport are not reckless but rather this 'recklessness' we see is due to those who do not understand the risks involved as Bratchley said.

"A courageous person not only fears rightly, but also is confident about the right things, in the right way, and at the right time" (Aristotle 1115m5-19). Thus, a courageous person is not one who is reckless, but the virtue of courage lies at the mean of two vices of deficiency and excess. This is Aristotle's idea of the 'Golden Mean'. Where the vice of deficiency here is cowardice, the vice of excess is recklessness (Aristotle 1106a26-b28).

We must not paint this mental picture that those brave individuals who partake in extreme sport are reckless. Even according to Aristotle, recklessness is not courage but finding a balance between the two vices is.

In conclusion, there are a variety of reasons why one may participate in sports deemed to be dangerous or extreme. For

many these are subjective and relate to their experiences as a person, and how those sports offer escapism and an ability to build oneself outside the monotony of daily life. I believe the common denominator in the value one attaches to these sports is the development of self: gaining confidence, experience, and personal accomplishments – needed to live a good life. Independent of exactly where one attaches their value, we are all attracted to the extremity of the situations faced – which multiplies the subjective value we each find.

Sources:

Aristotle., Bartlett, R. C., & Collins, S. D. (2011). Aristotle's Nicomachean ethics. University of Chicago Press.

Bratchley, Josh (2021). Interviewed by Elif Okutan on 4th February 2021.

Hemingway, (1950). Good Reads. URL = <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/42427-there-are-only-three-sports-bullfighting-motor-racing-and-mountaineering> accessed 05th Feb 2021.

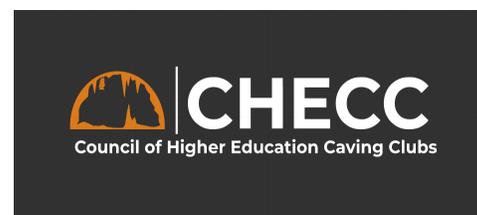
Martínková Irena (2013). *Instrumentality and Values in Sport*. Karolinum.

O.M Plinio & H.Rackam (1983) "Book XXXIII." *Pliny: Natural History*. Harvard University Press, 1983.

Russell, J.S.. (2005). The Value of Dangerous Sport. *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*. 32. 1-19. 10.1080/00948705.2005.9714667.

The North Face Trilogy (2013). *Explorers: Adventures of the Century*. 2 (4). Directed & Written by Niko Jager. Red Bull TV.

END



2020/2021



ARMCHAIR CAVING

ART: Jennifer Ryder

Test your knowledge!

Now you know what type of chair you should go looking for in your local charity shop, lets see what you've learnt!

1. In what year was Swildon's Sump 1 first passed?
2. What is the minimum rope length the Petzl Stop is authorized to be used for?
3. Which famous actor known for his unexpected journey narrated the Sid Perou film 'What a way to spend a Sunday?'
4. On the 6th of November 2011, which two caves were linked to finally form the Three Counties System?
5. What is a speleotherm?
6. According to the CHECC and BCA's Guidelines for University and College Caving Clubs, what is a must for any caver operating in the UK?

ANSWERS: 1. 1936 2. New West 8.5mm, Previous 9mm. 3. Ian Holmes 4. Lost John's (Lancs.) and Notts II (Yorks.) 5. Scientific term for a 'Cave formation' 6. BCA Minimal Impact Guide available here

Armchair Cavers: A guide on how to be one...

By Jacob Puhalo-Smith

Armchair cavers. Everyone knows one. If you can't beat them, why not join them. With this simple guide I hope you and your fellow cavers find the chair that is most suited to you, and thus releasing even the most comfortable of armchair cavers of their excuses not to cave.

The Historian^{SEP}

Chair of Choice: Armchair next to the fire

Probably grew up watching Time Team. Rarely seen without the original volumes of Northern Caves. A fairly easy armchair to sit one's arse on as there's a lot of good free (or relatively cheap) resources out there. Recommend reading:

- 1) Old club journals and newsletters. A lot of clubs have these available for free on their website. For example SWCC (<https://www.swcc.org.uk/joomla-a-swcc/club/newsletter>)
- 2) Descent Magazine. You're going to place to keep up to date with latest caving news from around the UK and abroad. (<https://www.wildplaces.co.uk/descent-magazine/>)
- 3) General interest books about caving. My personal favourites being The Darkness Beckons by Martyn Farr, Gouffre Berger: L'esprit d'équipe by Mark Wright, Robbie Shone and others and finally, for fiction lovers Journey to Centre of the Earth by Jules Verne. (<https://www.moorebooks.co.uk>)

Gogglebox

Chair of choice: a large sofa and a blanket

Probably once had a passionate conversation with Sid Perou at Hidden Earth about how influential his films had been – definitely not the me... This troglodyte prefers a large comfy sofa and some posh hipster crisps compared to its more sophisticated historian cousin. Knowing where to find a good caving film can make a good social and can jazz up a fresher's fair stall.

- 1) Sid Perou. A pioneer of cave

videography. Filmed some pretty difficult caves back in the days before SRT, LEDs and SD Cards. Fascinating insight to how caving and cavers haven't really changed loads.

2) YouTube Cavers. The ones that come to mind are Caver Keith (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pv4ITHvfeig>), Catchpool1 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vGn5KiDzgzU&t=10s>) and Derek Bristol (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N5NYTijqZho>). The former two are particularly good for finding inspiration for what cave to do next while the latter has a number of videos on particular topics.

3) CHECC video completion entries. There have been a number of these over the years but one that remains in the memory of many Southampton's classic 2016 video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XS0mGhaw04>) while 2018 saw a large number of entries (<https://ukcaving.com/board/index.php?topic=24162.0>).

Rope Bunny

Chair of choice: None. Prefers to rig up a simple rope from the nearest light fitting and dangle in harness

This type probably works as a rope access technician during the week. Lives in a van and probably know how to correctly use a Petzl Shunt. Despite taken the piss out of them for having way too much shiny gear it is extremely important to possess some of their knowledge as your safe kit literally saves your life every time you use it.

- 1) For me the definitive caving guide is 'Alpine Caving Techniques' by Georges Marbach and Bernard Toutre. Covers everything from knot tying, rescue techniques to how to carry a tackle sack. Entertainingly written and available as a PDF for free

(<http://speleo.lt/speleo/Knygos/Speleo/EN/Alpine%20Cave%20Techniques%20%5BEN%5D.pdf>)

2) Knowing where the manufacture documentation of your kit is always worth knowing. Will tell you the expected lifetime of the piece of equipment in question as well as general dos and don'ts.

3) CHECC. If you have any doubt on the providence, quality or safety of your equipment don't hesitate to get in touch with CHECC. We have a large network of extremely qualified individuals who'll be happy to help you if you're in doubt.

I'm a speleologist actually...

Chair of Choice: Lab Bench

Ahh, the cave science fanatic who makes the rest feel guilty about only just about to be able to remember the difference between a stalactite and stalagmite. Learning a little about cave science goes a long way and can help ignite enthusiasms young members of you clubs to fully commit to the caving lifestyle.

1) British Cave Research Association. An active group passionate about cave science and very keen to get students involved. See their website for more info (<https://bcra.org.uk/index.html>)

2) Cave and Karst of the Yorkshire Dales Volumes 1 and 2. Very comprehensive technical books. Available from all good caving suppliers.

Bureaucrat

Chair of choice: Doesn't matter, from the toilet to the swirly desk chair, the bus or the Queen's very own.

This type is always too busy filling in a form that will enable more people to go caving than actually go caving themselves. Usually an edgy type who brings a laptop to a caving hut.

1) CHECC and BCA how to run a student caving club guide. This the definitive guide for your club if you're having trouble and unless you're particularly keen on caving politics, probably the only guide you need. (<https://checc.org/about/>)

END

Shining a light in the dark: The importance of community for caving in a post-COVID world...

By David Botcherby

It's a question often asked of cavers: Why do we do it? Whether it's someone you've just met at the pub, your friend as you wake them up at the hut early on a Saturday, or even yourself as you force yourself through a rift after a long trip. It's a complicated question, and I'm sure you could ask a hundred cavers and get a hundred answers back. We're all in it for our own reasons. That being said, I believe there are some common threads to the draw of caving. A key reason is exploration: this is obvious, one of the first things that comes to mind when we think of caving. However, there is another reason, perhaps more subtle, but probably just as vital to the scene: community.

We live in a world where community is a much harder thing to find, now more than ever with coronavirus. Humanity (probably) lived in small bands comprised of a few families for most of our existence. Now, many leave home at 18 (notably students) and never return. Instead of being supported by a family, we are cut off in unfamiliar places, often hundreds of miles apart from our relatives. This may change as we grow and start our own families, but especially for younger people it can be quite isolating. It's no wonder then that we crave

community, whether subconsciously or not.

This desire for community drives a lot of problems in the world. It leads to everything from flat earthers to QAnon truthers to terrorists (studies show that many radicalised terrorists think more about their cell members than any higher ideology). How lucky we are then to have found it in something as harmless as caving!

This strong community is a key feature of the caving scene: just go to Hidden Earth, the CHECC Forum, or any hut on a club weekend and you'll see a bunch of cavers getting along. It doesn't matter whether they're old friends or have just met, the common ground of caving unites them into one community. This common ground brings together cavers with very different backgrounds. It's been said before that the counterculture nature of caving attracts misfits; I'd rather say that caving provides a welcoming space for everyone, which enables those marginalised elsewhere to thrive.

You can see evidence of the caving community everywhere: from the hours of volunteer conservation

work, to the cavers who haven't been underground in years chatting on UKC, to the guys at CHECC getting up at 5am to cook a massive breakfast for hungover students. All of these speak to a deep love of caving and cavers within the UK scene.

That's not to say that it's all roses. A tight-knit scene often covers for poor behaviour from some members. I'm sure we've all heard of highly questionable actions by cavers who've been around a while that go unchallenged. However, we do have the ability to change our own community for the better, and I've seen this in CHECC in recent years. The CHECC Welfare Officer and the chill out room at the 2019 Forum are both great examples.

So, why am I telling you what you already know? My answer would be that we all need a reminder of why we do this. Because it's not just about going out and finding the unknown (as amazing as that is). It's about getting in from a long trip to find your mates have already put dinner on. About that late night at a caving hut where we turned the car park into an ice rink. About driving for two days across Europe with 5 people crammed in a tiny car to go find some big limestone. If you're reading this article, I can bet that when you think of lifelong friends, many will be cavers.



PHOTO: Jacob Puhalo-Smith

Keep this in mind next time you see your club. After covid, we're going to have to work hard to bring our clubs back to life, get new members excited to go underground, and begin to rebuild our community. Remember what your club means to you. Remember that when we're allowed to take new people again you're not just showing them the wonders of the underground, but introducing them to people they could know for the rest of their life. Take that energy and save it for when we can get clubs started again. Because there's a whole new generation that don't even know what they're missing.

END

Dates for the diary...

Under the entry for *optimist* in the Oxford English Dictionary, we are told that, '*only an eternal optimist could expect success*'.

Thus, with this in mind, here is some upcoming important dates of cavers that may or may not change...

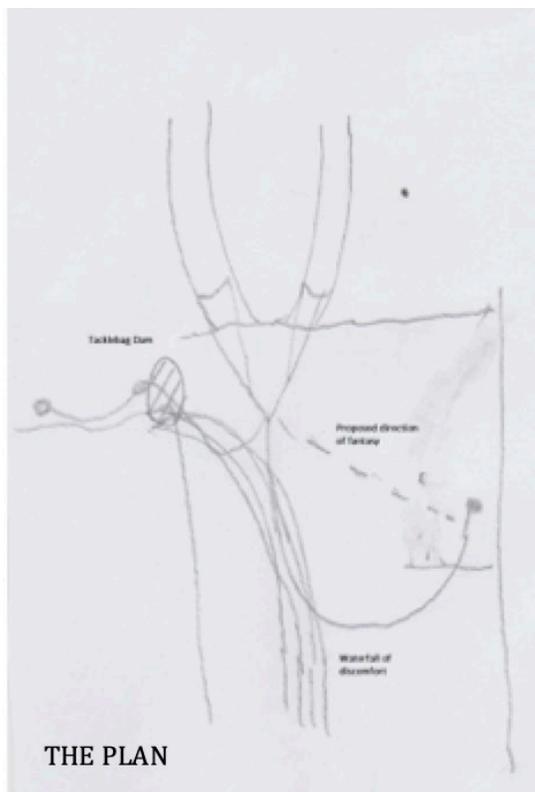


PHOTO: Jonothan Lancaster

- **15th March:** 4 people from 2 households can meet outdoors in Scotland.
- **29th March:** Rule of 6 for *outdoor sport*
- **27th March:** Stay at home rules ends in Wales. *Note: you still cant enter from England.*
- **September:** Hidden Earth
- **26th – 28th November 2021:** CHECC Forum, Yorkshire Dales
- **24th July – 31st July 2022:** 18th International Congress of Speleology, Savoie, France

My First CHECC Trip or Mental Bacon Sarnies in Jingling Pot - CHECC 2011

By Kristian Brook



THE PLAN

I did not volunteer to write this. I was asked. This will mostly be in jokes between the editor and me and I don't care if you don't get them. I cannot remember names of most people in the groups so apologies in advance that you weren't interesting enough for me to remember.

It was leg day. It's always leg day. I started with the mind based 15 squats to clear the hangover. The preceding night was filled with the usual drunken revelry that follows a Friday meetup between students which I could go on about for ages, but we're here to talk about caving and more importantly, me.

No one should have gone caving that day. It was shit. There was heavy rain forecast all day and few caves in the area are suitable in such conditions for the strongest of cavers let alone student cavers with diminished mental faculties. But all these clubs had



gathered to cave and they were going to cave goddam it, and with that the bad decisions started to be made.

The area in question was the Yorkshire Dales. A paradise of active stream caves, phreatic bliss and vadose heaven; 90% of which would have been occupied primarily by water on the day in question due to constant heavy rainfall. As such it was decided that Jingling Pot would be a suitable venue as there is no stream going down it and the closest stream harmlessly passes by to go down Jingling cave..... unless the stream broke it's shallow 'bank' and ran down the pot. More on that later.

For those who are unfamiliar with Jingling I will attempt to describe the part of the cave we are concerned with. This guide is shamelessly ripped from the new Northern Caves Guidebook. The Pot is a 45m open

shaft with further extensions to reach a total depth of 67m. The first pitch is rigged of on a set of bolts in a usually dry streambed and rebelayed of a tree at the top of the pot. From here you can either descend directly into the pot or swing across to a window to follow a series of lateral shafts. On the day we were following the lateral shaft route. Other routes are available.

We got dressed on the Kingsdale road in horizontal rain and headed up the hill to find a group from York University already descending the pot and passing the first pitch. Our team was of around seven strong but only three would end up in the cave. The three included myself, and Ian Peachy who was the closest thing we had to a leader (and then reluctant CHECC Chairperson who was voted in while distracted with alcohol). After waiting in a group shelter for an hour or so Ian and one other had made it down the first pitch into the cave behind the York group. I was the last descending seeing the stream start to break the bank and flow into the cave proper. Having only caved for a year I ignored this sign and set off down as I had



already come this far and wasn't going to call it off after sitting in a bothy bag for the past hour. The others fucked off back down the hill as they were getting to cold. Another leader from York had stayed at the pitch head and did not follow us underground but stayed at the pitch head for the whole of what is to follow.

I arrived at the window to find three people from York on their way out. They had not made it far into the cave when their leaders looked at the situation and decided that it would be wise to turn back. They asked me what the pitch was like and I turned around to see a torrent going down where I had just been and only encountered a trickle. Naturally I said it looked fine and they sent their fresher into it first and mocked him for screaming so much as the cold water hammered onto his head. He made it through and the two more experienced York leaders sailed past carrying the tackle intended to rig the rest of the cave using their fancy Pantins to ascend in good time and acknowledging that maybe this was getting dicey. By this time Peachy had joined me and the torrent had turned from a mild danger to a major hazard as the flow had increased by quite a margin and a plan was needed in order to make our way out.

I volunteered to be a guinea pig. What was decided was that the York boys on top would use their tackle sacks to dam the flow going into the cave whilst Peachy would hold the line tight in order to keep me out of the water. A sound plan.

It went to shit right away. I attached my kroll and ascender and jumped straight off the window and into the shaft. Peachy could not hold the rope and it slipped straight out of his hands and I swung straight into the waterfall. It was a flow that was so thick that one could not breathe, I have since been told a good tactic for this is to tuck your chin into your chest in order to make an air gap to breath but at the time I was ignorant of this. Luckily I already had both feet in my foot loop and I just instinctively started prusiking and made it to the rebelay at the tree. Peachy tells me now that I was screaming quite a lot during this ordeal and it was the first time he'd thought he'd killed someone (for those who know Peachy and the dodgy stuff he's done this is quite the accolade), luckily I didn't.

Whilst at the rebelay everything below my waist was still in the water and my hands were quickly loosing feeling so clipping into the loop of the bunny ears was difficult for my inexperienced mind to comprehend. Whilst performing this changover the dam engineers above were at breaking point with the amount of water they were holding back. So they got my attention and simply said "hold your breath". What followed was a good moment of force upon my dazed and confused mind where my angle to the earth was made more horizontal than I would have liked.

This was my only flash flood as the engineers were able to keep the dam intact until I made it off the rope where I discovered my legs no long

worked. Unfortunately the others were too concerned with improving the dam so I had to simply crawl over to the York novice who had come out of the cave first and sat in a bothy bag with him hitting my legs until they got feeling back. After I had surfaced all I could think of was bacon sarnies and my then girlfriend Lucie and was thankful that I could gain access to both in good time.

The engineer's efforts had not been in vain as one of them had found a random roll of astroturf in a nearby shake hole and had used that to great effect to divert the water in order to get other party members out of the pot. With enough people out one leader joined me and the other novice and escorted us down the hill in order to warm up. On the way we passed Rowten Pot where an epic of equal drama was unfolding and one trip member had to jettison their wellies in order to stop the weight of them dragging them down with the waterflow.

I returned to our transport and found the party member who bailed were very happy ate all our biscuits. Bastards. The rest of CHECC 2011 was a blur of gale force winds, continuing rain fall, collapsed tents and half of my club leaving early due to wetness. When I got home I ate a bacon sandwich and Lucie dumped me. Good CHECC.

END

T shirts!!!!!!

There are still several t-shirts from CHECC 2019 available (S/M/L). If you're interested (why wouldn't you be?) in purchasing this classic garment designed by Jennifer Ryder, please don't hesitate to contact the CHECC Committee.





PHOTO: Stuart Gardener

Thanks for reading!

So there you have it, the CHECC COVID newsletter! Hope you enjoyed having a good read. Fingers crossed in the coming months things will begin to ease and we can all discuss the spelling mistakes, misplaced commas and of course the brilliant content that was submitted by cavers for this

newsletter in your caving hut of choice. Ideally, after a good caving trip! A massive thanks to those who submitted articles and photos, the rest of the CHECC committee and you, the reader! Until the next time, stay safe!

Jacob Puhalo-Smith

Massive thanks to all that contribute articles, photos, ideas, moral support. Predominantly edited by Jacob Puhalo-Smith. Views and opinions are of the authors .

CHECC Committee

Chair: Jennifer Ryder
 Secretary: Jacob Puhalo-Smith
 Treasurer: Laura Harrison
 Training Officer: Rob Watson
 Welfare Officer: Lisa Crow
 Publicity: Todd Rye
 Web Officer: Wassil Jensen

Newsletter Contributors

Jennifer Ryder	David Botcherby
Jacob Puhalo-Smith	Elif Okutan
Laura Harrison	Elise Freshwater-Blizard
Rob Watson	Anna Taylor
Lisa Crow	Benedict Hal Claxon Stevens
Todd Rye	Emily Punzalan
Wassil Janssen	
Kristan Brook	

CHECC Clubs 2021

Durham University Speleological Association
 Glasgow University Potholing Association
 Liverpool University Potholing Club
 Lancaster University Speleological Society
 Manchester University Speleology Club
 Nottingham University Caving Club
 Sheffield University Speleological Society
 University of Leeds Speleological Association
 University of Newcastle Caving Club
 York University Cave and Pothole Club
 Oxford University Caving Club
 Reading University Caving Club
 Southampton University Caving Club
 University of Bristol Speleological Society
 Kent University Caving Club
 Imperial College Caving Club
 Exeter University Speleological Society
 Plymouth Adventure & Expo
 Aberystwyth Caving Club
 Cambridge University Caving Club
 Cardiff University Caving and Canyoning Club
 Swansea Speleo Society
 Bangor Student Caving Club
 Irish Clubs:
 Dublin City University Caving Club
 Dublin Institute of Technology Caving Club (TUD)
 Queen's University Belfast Caving Club
 University College Dublin Caving and Potholing Club
 University of Limerick Outdoor Pursuits Club