

## **A brief history of the guides to caves and potholes of Yorkshire**

*Written March 2006 S E Warren as introduction to project for revision of Northern Caves*

In October, 1934, the late Reg Hainsworth of Ingleton received a message from the local police asking for assistance. A young potholer from the Moor and Fell Club had met with an accident, a broken leg, in the then Final Chamber of Gingling Hole and the police required the help of people who knew something about the pothole, and about potholing. Local potholers, principally members of the North Cavern and Fell Club who were in the locality, were called together to form a team which brought the youth to the surface after twenty six hours.

Following this episode, a meeting was called in February 1935 at which the police and ambulance authorities met with representatives of local caving clubs and the Central Rescue Organisation was formed. The name was changed to the Cave Rescue Organisation in 1938. Present were Edgar Smith, John Mitchell, Albert Mitchell and Godfrey Wilson, Reg Hainsworth of Ingleton and Norman Thornber of Settle. Cliff Downham, an early secretary of the NCF, was nominated as the first Secretary of this early CRO which was based at Settle Police Station. Norman Thornber took over the post in the following year.

One of the questions raised was that of the location of any particular pothole as there was no comprehensive guide to, or list of, holes in the area. The police had no idea where to start if a call for help came and it was probably a matter of chance whether any particular local potholer would know the locality of any specific hole. A handful of local guide books mentioned some of caves and potholes, and publications from the Yorkshire Ramblers Club and the Gritstone Club gave information on their explorations in some of the major systems.

The original Wardens of the CRO were Reg Hainsworth, Tot Lord and Godfrey Wilson. However, Arnold Waterfall of Airedale was soon enrolled as a Warden of the new organisation along with by A D Brown, L Brown, F Royston, K Horrocks, T Guy, J Lovett, J Leach, J Swindlehurst, H Burgess and R D Leakey. Arnold Waterfall was a very systematic person, and had already assembled a card index recording a large number of the holes in the area. Arnold was also one of the most accommodating and helpful of people and thus he handed over to Norman Thornber the complete box of cards. Subsequently, it became the basis for the first edition of *Pennine Underground* published in 1949.

However, sometime in the later 1930s, Albert Mitchell, as a journalist, had been asked to produce a guide to the caves by, or in cooperation with, Eli Simpson, for or on behalf of the British Speleological Association. Perhaps Albert just wanted to just 'do his own thing', or, from this writer's understanding from conversations with Edgar Smith, Albert could not see this arrangement working to his satisfaction, or standards, so this did not transpire. Albert obviously had given the matter some thought and, in 1937, he wrote and published "Yorkshire Caves and Potholes: 1: North Ribblesdale". This volume was dedicated to John A Pilling, FRGS, of Tunbridge Wells ...*"but for whose suggestions, help and advice this book would not have been written."* The volume owes perhaps something of its style and phraseology, no doubt, to an earlier guide "A Tour to the Caves in the Environs of Ingleborough and Settle in the West Riding of Yorkshire" by the Rev. J Hutton, published in 1781 at London and Kendal. As in that earlier style, Albert Mitchell's rather formal approach only echoes the times. That is not to say it not eminently readable and highly recommended even today, nearly seventy years later. It not only describes the approach and the location of the vast majority of Ingleborough's caves and potholes, it also includes excellent photographs taken by the author, by his brother John, by the Settle photographer E H Horner and by James Thompson and Bill Fairbank. E H 'Lew' Llewellyn contributed some admirable pen and ink sketches. North Ribblesdale was reprinted in 1938 and in 1948.

Albert had plans to publish guides right across the region but it was not until 1948 that the second book was published, having been shelved for duration of the 1939-1945 war. This was "Yorkshire Caves and Potholes: No. 2 Under Ingleborough". No further volumes were published.

It was a year earlier, in 1947, that Norman Thornber had produced his first compilation of caves and potholes: "Pennine Underground". This contained descriptions and location maps of all the known holes of the Pennines right up into the Northern Dales, across to the west into Furness, and to the Helmsley Windypits in the east. With various modifications it was reprinted in 1959 and then finally in 1965.

In 1953 Pennine Underground was enlarged and extended to cover the whole of Britain as "Britain Underground". Norman Thornber was assisted by Jack Myers and A & R Stride in this compilation which had separate sections for Northern Pennines, Southern Pennines, Mendips, North Wales, South Wales, Devon and Scotland.

Whilst new finds were being made constantly through the years, it was the 1960's that brought an explosion on cave exploration and it became apparent that a new approach was required if all our caves were to be properly catalogued. Thus in 1972 appeared the first of a set of guides "Northern Caves" which emerged into five volumes:

**Northern Caves Volume 1: 1972: Wharfedale and Nidderdale** compiled by Dave Brook, Randal Coe, Martin Davies and Harry Long.

**Northern Caves Volume 2: 1976: Penyghent and Malham** compiled by Dave Brook, Alan Brook, Martin Davies and Harry Long.

**Northern Caves Volume 3: 1975: Ingleborough** compiled by Dave Brook, Alan Brook, Martin Davies and Harry Long.

**Northern Caves Volume 4: 1975: Whernside and Gragareth** compiled by Dave Brook, Martin Davies, Harry Long and Roger Sutcliffe

**Northern Caves Volume 5: 1974: Northern Dales** compiled by Dave Brook, Martin Davies, Harry Long and Peter Ryder

A little later on, Volume 4 was split into two parts Volume 4A and Volume 4B covering the areas of Scales Moor and Kingsdale, and, Leck and Casterton Fells respectively.

For the first time these volumes contained sketch surveys of many of the systems described but, whilst being comprehensive and highly informative, it transpired that they were somewhat prone to self-destruction. If well used, they ended up as loose-leaf booklets or had their pages sewn together with strong cotton or string. Apart from that, with new caving techniques and renewed enthusiasm, cave exploration was proceeding unabated and these volumes were rapidly becoming dated.

The whole lot was revised and reprinted in a much more durable format as three volumes:

Volume 1: 1988: Wharfedale and the North-east

Volume 2: 1991: The Three Peaks

Volume 3: 1994: The Three Counties System and the North-west

They were all variously compiled by Alan Brook, Dave Brook, Julian Griffiths, Harry Long, Peter Ryder and Martin Davies.

In 1987 Dave Elliot produced an SRT Rigging Guide showing SRT routes for some twenty-five potholes and meanwhile the Technical Group of the Council of Northern Caving Clubs produced a series of SRT Rigging Guides.

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In the last few years there have been a great number of new explorations. In Wharfedale alone, major new explorations have been recorded at Fossil Pot, Chapel Lodge Cave, White Keld, Hagg Gill Pot and Scars Hole as well as numerous lesser sites. Further north there is the popular Notts 2 and quite recently an significant extension to that too. The Lancaster

Hole - Easegill System has seen many extensions as has Gaping Gill system and the Newby Moss area.

More to the point, the old system of describing potholes with ladder descents is now quite untenable and there are many issues to resolve over how to accommodate modern techniques in any proposals.

Further to that are these questions:

- i) how to deal with those sites only accessible to the cave diver, and
- ii) a possible new approach to the management of access, where it is necessary or desirable to have formal agreements. Some of the present restrictions were set up more than forty years ago. In fact the very existence of the Council of Northern Caving Clubs owes its origins in the deadlock of access at Leck Fell and difficulties on Casterton Fell and elsewhere.

Thus, any proposals for a new series of guides to our Yorkshire Caves and Potholes will need a wholly different approach to the gentlemanly and leisurely ways of Albert Mitchell and his contemporaries.

Steve Warren  
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