

# Caving Without Tears

1999/2000 edition

An introduction to the fabled art of speleology  
by the University of Leeds Speleological Association



# CAVING WITHOUT TEARS

## INTRODUCTION

The title of this booklet should explain why it was written. Caving is great fun, but must be tackled correctly. Caving Without Tears will not instantly turn you into a great caver, but if you read carefully you will save yourself a considerable amount of discomfort on your first trips. There may seem to be an awful lot of do's and don'ts to follow but these are for your own safety and comfort and most of them are simply common sense. You will soon find that caving is not a highly disciplined sport and with a bit of initiative you will rapidly find yourself being able to do your own thing rather than blindly following a leader.

We hope you will enjoy your caving. We will do all we can to help (hence this booklet) but the main responsibility is all down to you. It applies to most things, not just caving: you get out of something what you put into it.

## A DAY IN (OR UNDER) THE DALES

The following is an attempt to describe a typical ULSA busmeet. This is not an easy thing to do. There is no such thing as a 'typical' busmeet as you can probably imagine (it often depends which 'nutters' are in attendance). Take this as a general guide.

On the first caving trip we hire a 50 seater coach to take us to the Yorkshire Dales, and subsequent trips we will usually use minibuses. In both cases these leave the Parkinson Steps at 9:00am (ish!) and, after pausing briefly at the "tackle store" to collect gear, will proceed along the Otley Road picking up people at Hyde Park Corner (at the bus-stop across the road from 'Belushi's'), the Skyrack Pub, the Three Horseshoes (another pub), and opposite the entrance to Boddington Hall. On the busmeet list you sign up for, write down the stop you would like to be picked up from. Although buses are supposed to leave at 9:00 delays have been known to occur due to problems with gear, weather, grumpy old bus drivers, Leeds' traffic system and Friday night's hangover. This means that the bus could be anything up to 45 minutes late. Nevertheless ruthless efficiency has been known to happen, so turn up at your pickup point on time or we may have BUGGERED OFF to the Dales without you.

Assuming we do manage to escape from Leeds, the bus will go via Otley and up the A65 to the Dales (yay!). We normally end up in Ingleton, which is about 50 miles from Leeds, and is the centre for most of Dales caving, though Settle, Kettlewell and Pateley Bridge are the centres for the caves of Ribblesdale, Wharfedale and Nidderdale respectively. A café will be visited, where you can eat your body weight in breakfast for about £3.50. A good breakfast is an essential part of the days activities; as caving is a strenuous sport the more lard you can ingest the better.

The breakfast stop lasts for about an hour (please keep an eye on what everyone else is doing on all stops [breakfast, beer, chips], minibuses have an annoying habit of driving off into the proverbial sunset). Then follows a short drive to the caving area and everyone will be dropped off with their gear as close to the cave entrances as possible. After changing, everyone plods to their chosen cave, wondering why they ever got up that morning. But this is only to emerge triumphant and 'spiritually cleansed' from a rendez-vous with the untamed beauty of another of nature's deepest orifices (or something like that). A caving trip will normally last about four hours, it may be more, may be less, depending on the nature of the cave itself, or the competence of your trip leaders! In any case we normally are underground by 1:00pm and out in time for the pub. Once back to the bus, everyone changes into their DRY CLOTHES (this is very important), and when we have all returned we will depart for a suitable hostelry. It is possible that there will be a bit of a wait here as different caving parties return (or not, as the case may be), and you may get a bit hungry. Sandwiches are quite useful at this point though you will have to fight off

the ravenous scavengers who failed to bring any of their own. (As a point of interest, lime pickle sandwiches are the only type on record to be immune from the hungry hordes of a busmeet). En route to the local pub we all pile down the local chippy, or failing that, food can be bought in the pub.

The bus leaves the Dales at closing time and arrives back in Leeds soon after midnight (although certain Dales pubs keep rather irregular opening hours so on occasion we can arrive back a little later!). Drop offs can be made along the Otley Road and down to City Square. Female cavers will always be escorted home if they so require. On minibus meets the drop offs are purely at the driver's convenience, but seeing he/she is one of us there should be no problems getting home.

## **A BIT OF HISTORY**

Organised caving began in Britain in 1895 when E.A. Martel, a pioneering French speleologist, succeeded in descending the 110m deep entrance shaft of Gaping Gill thus pre-empting the Yorkshire Ramblers Club who had been planning an assault on this famous open hole for some time. The Yorkshire Ramblers, based incidentally in Headingley, retaliated by beginning the systematic exploration of all open caves and potholes in Yorkshire. In the five years between Martel's first descent and the start of the twentieth century, the YRC had an impressive list of first descents and developed the basic techniques we use today. Considering that they used heavy rope ladders and candles for lighting their achievements were remarkable. This early era of cave exploration came to an end in the 1930's when the supply of open entrances began to run out and "digging" (the removal of loose rock and debris from cave entrances) was becoming necessary to gain new ground.

Gradual improvements in techniques and equipment made caving more pleasant and more popular and other clubs were set up. Some of the biggest and most active clubs today were formed up in the 20's and 30's. Leeds University Union Speleological Society (LUUSS), was formed in 1957 and was one of the first University clubs. In its early years LUUSS concentrated its efforts on exploring and surveying the notorious Mossdale Caverns.

The early sixties saw the club changing character with the formation of the University of Leeds Speleological Association (ULSA). This allowed the club to benefit from the experience of older non-student members and LUUSS became part of ULSA. The ULSA library, housed in our club room in the Outdoor Sports Centre, also dates from this time. Over the intervening years it has grown into an important body of caving literature. Another, more important development of the early sixties was the introduction of the wetsuit to Yorkshire caving. The increased comfort in water meant that more caves could be explored and passages previously dismissed as too unpleasant could be entered. ULSA began a period of frantic activity which was to last until the mid seventies and included much original exploration and a huge amount of cave surveying. The first notable find was Marble Sink, two ULSA cavers squeezed down a very tight rift which others had previously thought to be too tight and wet. The pothole continued awkwardly with many squeezes to a depth of 107m and is even today regarded as a classic "tight" pothole. This new found willingness to "push" horrible passages resulted in a series of important ULSA discoveries including Far Country in Gaping Gill, Langcliffe Pot, Black Shiver Pot and most famous of all - the Kingsdale Master Cave.

The early eighties saw the widespread adoption of Single Rope Techniques (SRT), in place of the traditional ladder and lifeline, making the descent of deep vertical caves much easier. It also saw a rapid increase in the popularity of the sport. During this period the club went through a quiet phase and did not have the same success at cave discovery, due partially to the departure of older members. Since the mid-eighties however, the number of cavers remaining with the club after leaving University has risen and we now have a substantial number of very active experienced cavers in the club and consequentially the number of new club discoveries has increased greatly. Over the last few years ULSA cavers have been involved in the discovery and exploration of a large quantity of new passage including major extensions to Penyghent Pot and

more recently two new caves in Dentdale. Over the last year much work has gone on opening up a totally new caving area in Upper 'Upper' Langstrothdale with the discovery of two new caves so far. ULSA members have been involved in exploration in Wales and Ireland, some have been caving as far away as America, New Zealand and Borneo. This summer (1999) ULSA went caving in Slovenia. With a lot of keen young cavers, as well as the slightly older members, the future of the club looks promising.

## PERSONAL EQUIPMENT

As one progresses through caving there is ample opportunity to spend a great deal of money on equipment. On the other hand, caving is not afflicted in quite the same way as other outdoor pursuits I could mention, and colour co-ordinated, high-fashion, designer labels are not necessary.

Seeing as us subterranean types are not in the public eye as it were, the emphasis is on practicality rather than posing (although individual needs I'm sure can be catered for).

### Clothing

The first point worthy of emphasis is if your clothing is inadequate (i.e. unsafe) we can't take you caving. Secondly it is very important that you bring A COMPLETE CHANGE OF CLOTHING - none of the clothes you have been caving in will be fit to wear on the surface (including underwear and footwear). Turn up for the busmeet with your caving gear in a strong bag and be wearing warm clothes. When you change to go underground you should be wearing a completely different set of clothes including boots and socks. A towel too, is an absolute necessity, unless you favour as I do the spiritually stimulating practice of drying off Stark Bollock Naked in the cold Yorkshire wind (however I will endeavour to keep my personal fetishes to myself and strongly advise the towel option!).

For the majority of regular cavers, "properly dressed" means either a "furrysuit and oversuit", or a wetsuit. The former is a one piece thermal 'romper' suit worn under waterproof overalls and has largely replaced the diver's wetsuit as the most popular "cave wear" for British caves.

DON'T WORRY about this for the time being. For a start there are loads of "drier" potholes to explore. If you are intending on taking caving as a hobby you will eventually seek to purchase one or other of these garments, at as cheap a price as possible. To this end, the club arranges bulk purchase orders from caving shops at a discount.

For the time being you will need lots of clothes to keep you warm and protect you from the rock. Generally speaking **wool next to the skin is warmest** when wet, so try and wear two or three old pullovers. Charity Shops are a handy source for these (there are loads in town and up the Otley Road near to Safeway). Jeans are not recommended as they become very uncomfortable when wet, cords are better. Don't forget your feet. A couple of pairs of woolly socks will save much discomfort. Lots of beginners have found the most convenient thing to wear on top to be a waterproof cagoule as it protects your clothes and keeps most of the water out. While this is certainly true it does not mean your best cagoule will be fit for use on the surface again.

An overall or boiler suit is a useful item to wear on top of everything else. It holds the rest of your clothing together and prevents them rucking up, but more importantly it protects the clothing. Overalls can be bought cheaply at workwear suppliers, army surplus, and second hand shops. In addition the club has a large stash of donated and second-hand caving gear so that if you are lacking the odd item we can help out.

## **Footwear**

The most popular footwear amongst cavers is the Wellington boot. They are inexpensive and, unlike leather boots, don't rot. Some favour industrial safety boots with steel toecaps, in particular the NCB pit boot, again available from workwear suppliers. Whatever type of boots you decide to wear they should be sturdy and have good tread; avoid boots with plain leather soles, they are treacherously slippery. Many also wear hiking boots, these are generally OK unless they have lace hooks on them that can snag on the wire sides of caving ladders rendering the climber upside down, halfway up a 'pitch'. These are therefore highly dangerous. Boots take the biggest hammering of all your caving gear, so don't take your £100 hiking boots caving - within a couple of trips they will be useless for anything else but caving.

## **Headgear and Lighting**

Every caver wears a helmet with a light mounted on it (handheld torches are not used). You may wish to buy a helmet and light later on, but for the time being, by far the best thing to do is to hire a helmet and light from a caving shop for the day for around £2.00. All you have to do is when signing up for a particular busmeet to put a 'tick' in the column that says 'Lamp Hire?'

Whether you rent or buy a helmet you must check that it is a good fit and that the chinstrap fits snugly under your chin. Any problems just ask.

## **Keeping the Wolf at bay**

TIP: Take a couple of Mars bars down with you in your helmet, pocket or pants.

## **Other Optional Items**

A pair of rubber kitchen gloves/ gardening gloves protect your hands.

Knee pads (bought from caving shops or make your own from some 'tubagrip' bandage and some foam rubber/ carry-mat).

## **CHECKLIST**

Below is a list of suggested underground clothing. DON'T WORRY if you can't manage everything. Let's face it, no one brings an entire wardrobe of old clothes to University with them. Feel free to *improvise*. If you have no alternative than to wear your best woolly jumper then put something old and tatty on top to protect it.

- Wellies or Boots - (not walking boots with lace hooks)
- Thick woolly socks - (two pairs if possible)
- Tracksuit bottoms/Longjohns - worn under.....
- Trousers - (NOT jeans)
- Vest or T-shirt - worn under.....
- Woolly Jumpers - (Two or three if possible)
- Cagoule/waterproof jacket or a plastic bin liner
- Waterproof trousers - (if you have them)
- Overalls or a boiler suit
- Rubber gloves
- Chocolate bar or a slab of lard

- Ball of string of a length suitable for the type of trip you're planning on
- **Money** - for breakfast, helmet/lamp hire, pub etc. - (cash or cheque book)
- Towel
- a *complete* set of clothing

### **GERROFF MOI LAAAND!**

It is important that a good relationship remains established between cavers and the owners of the land upon which the caves are situated. The Secretary is responsible for obtaining permission from the landowners (who are normally farmers) for the caves we visit.

WE MUST RESPECT his walls, gates and livestock encountered on the walk to and from a pothole. Similarly we mustn't drop litter or have relationships with his sheep, at least without prior permission from the farmer in question. Failure to respect these simple courtesies will incur the justifiable wrath of the farmer and jeopardise future caving. It should also be noted that most Dales farmers carry shotguns and are not adverse to a bit of shooting practice.

### **CAVE CONSERVATION**

As a society we are dedicated to the conservation of caves. We therefore try to limit the damage that our presence inevitably has on the underground environment.

Crystal formations such as calcite stalagmites and stalagmites look far nicer in their natural underground setting than on a mantelpiece. Similarly trampling mud into delicate, clean, brimstone pools ruins them forever. Many cave formations have taken many thousands of years to form. We hope that they may last for thousands of years to come.

A wise man once said,

**"Take nothing but photographs, leave nothing but footprints, eat nothing but lard".**

## MEETS LIST 1999/2000

**To sign up for an event, write your name down on the list on the society noticeboard (upstairs in the Union building) early in the week of the respective busmeet. Alternatively you can give us a ring on 275 4058 (Antony) and tell us.**

### **Sunday, 26 September. Ladder Meet, Ilkley Moor**

This will be held at Cow and Calf Rocks on Ilkley Moor. Public transport will be used, please be at the Parkinson Steps at 9:00am. No caving gear is needed, but bring money and waterproofs. Ladder and lifeline techniques will be taught and there will also be an introduction to abseiling. Following this we will adjourn to a nearby pub. We will return to Leeds by late afternoon. (Note this is on a Sunday rather than the usual Saturday for busmeets).

### **Tues 28 October. Introductory Slide Show Evening**

This is your chance to find out more about what to expect in the coming year and meet the older members of the club. Antony will be showing you slides of the things the club has got up to recently, plus there will be a showing of the ULSA Movie, your introduction to a year in the life of the club, from Tonk Video. The venue will be 'The Fenton' pub, our usual Tuesday night drinking haunt, which is on the main road just down from Leeds University towards Leeds Metropolitan University on the right (see map). We'll be in the upstairs function room with its own little bar (isn't that nice!). After the slideshow we'll all bugger off to a curry house.

### **Saturday 2nd October. Coach Meet, Chapel le Dale (N. Caves vol.2 pp 236-265)**

**Great Douk Cave.** An easy cave which has an entrance at both ends making a through trip possible.

**Sunset Hole.** Classic Yorkshire streamway leads to damp cascades and a 50ft pitch.

**Roaring Hole.** A deep pot with wet climbs and a couple of pitches.

**Tatham Wife Hole.** One of Yorkshire's deepest. A wet trip with five damp pitches and a duck.

### **Friday 8 - Sunday 10 October. Mendips Weekend .....Hooray!**

**Celebrate** the birthday of our esteemed President and wise man of Somerset. Mendip is an area with lots of classic, sporting beginners caving trips and breathtaking original (!) ale pubs. Relax in style at the Shepton Mallet Caving Club Hut (or tents if you like space!). Should be quite a bash. Ideal opportunity to get together and bond ☺.

### **Saturday 16 October. Birkwith (N.Caves vol. 2 pp 104-118)**

**Birkwith Cave.** An easy cave, streamway leading to deep canal passage.

**Calf Holes.** A classic beginners trip with a 30ft entrance pitch leading to streamway with crawls and climbs to emerge lower down the hillside.

**Coppice Cave.** Another through trip, but a more difficult cave.

**Dismal Hill Cave.** Crawling flat out to emerge in stream passage of larger proportions.

**Old Ing Cave.** Pleasant walking in streamway with deep pool to cross.

**Red Moss Pot.** A more difficult part of the Birkwith system. Crawls, climbs and much water.

**Saturday, 23 October. Masongill** (N. Caves vol.3 pp 74-117)

**Ireby Fell Caverns.** A Classic stream cave with long easy passage and five short pitches.

**Low Douk Cave.** Narrow Entrance series with two pitches drops into a streamway.

**Marble Steps Pot.** An older drier cave with longer pitches.

**Friday 29 - Sunday 31 October. Pennine Hut weekend** - (N. Caves vol.2 pp 137-148)

NOT TO BE MISSED! A weekend at the University hut in Ribblesdale, two full days caving can be enjoyed by those hardy enough to survive the Saturday night piss-up. There are many worthwhile caves in the area including the spectacular **Alum Pot**. The easiest route down has four pitches, or alternatively there is a 220ft abseil from the surface. They'll be an opportunity to buy cheap crates of beer in advance through the club. See the Society noticeboard upstairs in the union for details nearer the time. You will note how the weekend ties in closely with fireworks night... bang.

**Saturday 6 November. Gaping Gill** (N.Caves vol.2 pp 173-206)

The famous **Gaping Gill** system is well worth visiting to see the incredible Main Chamber, the largest in the country and the spectacular 360ft waterfall which falls into it from the surface. None of the entrances are easy and it is important to have been on at least a couple of previous trips and be competent on ladders. The easiest entrance, **Bar Pot** has a narrow 45ft pitch followed by a more spacious 90ft pitch. Other entrances such as **Disappointment Pot, Flood Entrance** and **Stream Passage Pot** may also be visited.

**Saturday 13 November. SRT Day - Kingsdale** (N. Caves vol.3 pp 54-72)

**Your golden opportunity** to take the Single Rope Techniques (SRT) you've learnt in Chapel on Tuesday nights underground. Experience the spectacular delights of caves such as Rowten, Bull Pot and Jingling Pot .... on a rope!

**Other possible trips (not necessarily SRT) ....**

**Valley Entrance..** Easy access to the Kingsdale Mastercave via one short ladder pitch.

**Simpsons Pot and Swinsto Hole.** Both these superb pots lead to the Mastercave via a number of wet pitches, through trips possible. It is necessary to be confident at abseiling.

**Friday 19 - Sunday 21 November. South Wales ..... Cwm by Yer**

**South Wales** sports caves of an utterly different character to the Dales. The caves go on for miles and are very big, so you can just romp along and bring a few beers with you etc. Also the local sheep are very friendly, and Gavin can speak to the natives in their local lingo (bleating).

**Saturday 27 November. Tatham Wife Area** (N. Caves vol. 2 pp. 216-235)

**Tatham Wife Hole.** Another classic long easy stream cave with five short pitches.

**Black Shiver Pot.** If you speak nicely to Ben he may take you down.

### **Saturday 4 December. The Christmas Cracker ...Ho, Ho, Ho!**

**It's a surprise** and nobody's supposed to know (not even the little pixies or the committee!). Have you been a good boy or girl this term? If you have then Santa has a special package in store for you. Caving in a exciting and secret location with lots of magic and bells and stuff.

### **Wednesday 8 December. The 'Caff' Christmas Party.**

During the afternoon of the last Wednesday of term we'll have a big lunchtime party and then an esoteric pub-crawl around Leeds for the remainder of the day. Prepare yourself for some bizarre jellies.

### **Bibliography**

If you want to find out more about the caves, have a read in the guidebooks. They're in the ULSA section of the Edward Boyle Library (Level 8). Note that each busmeet area on previous page has a volume and page reference for:

**Brook**, Dave *et al.* 1988, 1991, 1994. *Northern Caves - vols. 1, 2, & 3.* Clapham: Dalesman Books.

**Jarratt**, Tony & Dave **Irwin**. 1999. *Mendip Underground.* Third Edition. Wells: Bat Products Publishing.

**Stratford**, Tim. 1995. *Caves of South Wales.* Fourth Edition. Leicester: Cordee.

also of interest (a selection of Britain's top trips):

**Marshall**, Des, & Donald **Rust**. 1997. *Selected Caves of Britain and Ireland.* Leicester: Cordee.

### **World Wide Web**

Visit the ULSA website on: <http://www.ulsa.org.uk>

This includes information about club events, contacts for the committee, trip write-ups, photographs, songs and links to other caving sites on the Web. Also included are reproductions of 'classic' club journals dating back to the 1960s.

If you have any suggestions or contributions to this site they are always very welcome. Please contact Jon, [the ULSA webmaster](#) for details.

### **TRIPS FOR THE SECOND AND THIRD TERMS**

There is a celebratory, end of semester exams trip to **Derbyshire**. The annual **Dinnermeet** will be on the 13th March (see section on Social Events). And a possible second **South Wales** or **Mendip** weekend may materialise sometime in May. There may not always be buses provided for meets after Christmas. The extortionate cost of hiring minibuses means that the club cannot afford to subsidise half empty buses, so if there are not enough people to justify hiring transport

then we have to resort to other ways of getting to the Dales. These include hitching, public transport and other cavers' cars.

Further technical training will continue through the second term, although after the inevitable lull during the exam period. Tuesday nights at Chapel and the The Fenton will start running again the first week of semester two.

Plenty of other trips take place as well as the busmeets, these being organised either in the pub on Tuesday and Thursday nights. These range from midweek trips to the Dales to mini expeditions. In the second and third terms the emphasis is generally shifted from organised busmeets to amore flexible, individually tailored timetable. This way you're able to decide what you'd like to do and become a more experienced, capable caver, ready for leading trips next year !

## **RISK**

CAVING IS A POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS SPORT. Although caving accidents are relatively rare, there is always a risk of the unknown occurring. In all cave rescues more than 95% of incidents are due to inexperience and poor training. It is for this reason that we as a club make sure that every beginner trip is supervised and supported by experienced club members.

ULSA is exceptional as a student caving club in that many of its older members stay on after graduation to help out.

In addition the caving club TACKLE STORE is maintained by the Tackle Officer who carefully monitors the ropes, ladders and other safety equipment. If the state of any rope or ladder is in any doubt it is immediately retired from use and destroyed. Needless to say caving ropes and ladders are tested to the highest manufacturing standards.

We also follow and adhere to the codes of safe practice and recommendations for student caving clubs as stipulated by two national governing bodies of which ULSA is affiliated to. These are the NATIONAL CAVING ASSOCIATION (N.C.A.) and the BRITISH CAVE RESEARCH ASSOCIATION (B.C.R.A.). We have regular correspondence with these two associations on matters of safety, training and conservation.

FINALLY there is a requirement for YOUR OWN RESPONSIBILITY for your actions both above and below ground. You must make your own judgement. If you are unwell or your fitness is not up to scratch on a particular day DO NOT COME CAVING. You will be putting others at risk as well as your self. It is up to you to ensure that you eat a proper breakfast in order to have the endurance to participate in what a very strenuous activity. The trip leader is there to guide, train and supervise. The rest is up to you.

## **Acknowledgements**

This booklet is an adapted and abridged version of an earlier document of the same name originally written by members of the club in 1965. The full version can be found in the library. It has been updated several times since by the following members:

1965 - D. Adamson, R. Chilton, R. Grandison, I. Gasson & D. Howitt; 1981 - N. Thomas & P. Brocklebank; 1983 - N. Clark; 1988 - J. Watt; 1993 - J. Watt & Footleg; 1994 - R. Smallshire; 1996 - J. Haynes; 1999 - A. Butcher & J. Haynes.....