



British Cave Rescue Council

The representative body for voluntary underground rescue in the British Isles

Registered charity: 1137252

MEDIA BRIEFING NOTE – 26 February 2019

First member of the BCRC cave rescue diving team named in the New Year's Honours receives George Medal

The British Cave Rescue Council is delighted for the recognition given to the cave divers involved in the successful Thailand cave rescue in June and July, last year. Today, John Volanthen was the first of the cave divers, named in the New Year's Honours list, to attend an investiture ceremony at Buckingham Palace. John received the George Medal from Her Majesty the Queen for his "great courage" in the diving part of the rescue operation in support of the Thai authorities (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-47375687>). This is the highest honour for bravery that can be bestowed upon a civilian outside the field of human conflict.

John dived with Rick Stanton in the initial search for the boys, which also involved laying a heavy duty dive line through all of the river cave and fully flooded passageways, an essential guide for all divers later in the operation. John then participated in the rescue to bring the 12 boys and their football coach to safety over the three days, July 8-10. This involved a much larger team consisting of BCRC cave divers, with critical medical support from Australian cave divers, Richard Harris and Craig Challen, and other international cave divers who fulfilled essential roles to support the Thai authorities during the critical rescue phase of the operation.

John said he was "highly honoured" to receive the award and that "The biggest reward I could have was knowing all the children survived".

Peter Dennis, Chairman of the British Cave Rescue Council said "We are very proud that the BCRC and international cave divers were able to support the Thai Navy divers and contribute specialist cave diving skills to assist the Thai rescue effort in that most difficult search and rescue operation. We are delighted that the contribution made by the cave divers to save the lives of those boys has been recognised in the New Year's Honours, today for John in particular, as he was presented with the George Medal by Her Majesty the Queen at the investiture ceremony".

Martin Grass, Chairman of the Cave Diving Group said: "It's a great honour for John Volanthen, a leading member of the Cave Diving Group, to receive the George Medal today from HM the Queen. John was one of the first divers requested to attend the rescue of the boys from the Thailand cave because of his knowledge and expertise of cave diving rescues in many parts of the world. And this expertise was one of the major contributing factors to the success of the operation".

This search and rescue was an extraordinary and unprecedented operation. The BCRC is proud of the critical role its team played in the operation and for all the support provided by individual cave rescue teams across the UK. Those individual efforts ensured that the cave divers and essential rescue equipment reached Tham Luang cave in time, when it mattered to make a difference to the outcome. The BCRC is full of admiration for the courage and dedication of the individuals involved and pleased that their contributions have received well deserved national recognition.

Explanatory notes

British Cave Rescue Council

The British Cave Rescue Council (BCRC) is the national representative and co-ordinating body for underground search and rescue. Searches and rescues underground in the British Isles are carried out by the Council's fifteen member teams who each provide cover for a particular geographical area. The Council does not ordinarily serve as an operational body except in circumstances when a request for assistance with an underground incident is received from overseas. On those rare occasions, like the Tham Luang incident, a specialist team of experts has to be drawn together from around the network, sent abroad and supported there. The Council then forms a special operational unit to run and support the underground search and rescue.

All involved with the BCRC from national officers to the newest recruit on a team are unpaid volunteers. All are experienced cavers whose sport is cave exploration. The cave rescue service is supported by the other national caving organisations such as the British Caving Association and the Cave Diving Group and it relies on successive generations of cavers volunteering to serve on its teams and to help raise funds. In effect, the caving world provides its own specialist rescue service but also one willing and capable to go to the assistance of anybody in trouble underground either at home, or when needed, abroad. For more information, please see www.caverescue.org.uk.

Cave Diving Group

The Cave Diving Group is the representative body for Cave Divers in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Its function is to educate and support cavers for recreational and exploratory operations in British sump conditions. It has pioneered the development of technical cave diving equipment and techniques since 1946. It is the oldest amateur technical and cave diving organisation in the world. Divers are drawn from the CDG to provide the individual cave rescue teams across the UK and Ireland with specialist, cave rescue diving capability. Several of the CDG divers agree to be contactable on the BCRC international call-out list at any time, to respond to incidents such as the Tham Luang cave rescue operation.

For more information, please see <https://cavedivinggroup.org.uk/>.

Questions on this media briefing or requests for further information on the BCRC or cave rescue may be addressed to the following BCRC officers:

Chairman: Dr Peter Dennis, 07840 763743

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