



British Cave Rescue Council

The representative body for voluntary underground rescue in the British Isles

Incident Report for Period 1st January 2021 - 31st December 2021

	Cave Rescue Organisation ⁽⁴⁾	Cumbria Ore Mines RU	Derbyshire CRO	Devon CRO	East Cornwall SRT	Gloucestershire CRG	Irish CRO	Mendip Cave Rescue	Midlands CRO	North Wales CRO	Scottish CRO	South East CRO	South & Mid Wales CRT	Swaledale Mountain Rescue	Upper Wharfedale FRA	West Cornwall SRT	TOTALS
Caving Incidents	3	1	1	1	-	-	2	1	-	1	-	-	3	1	-	1	15
Assisting Authorities ⁽¹⁾	-	1	2	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	2	-	-	-	8
Persons Assisted	3	2	2	4	-	-	1	5	-	1	-	-	4	3	-	-	25
Fatalities	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
Persons Injured ⁽²⁾	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	-	-	4	-	-	-	7
Helicopter assistance ⁽³⁾	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Animal Incidents	3	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	1	-	-	8
Reported Standbys	1	-	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	3	-	-	-	7
Assistance to other teams	1	1	1	1	-	1	-	1	1	1	-	1	-	-	1	-	10
Totals Underground Incidents	6	3	3	3	1	0	2	1	0	2	1	0	6	2	0	1	31
<p>'Surface Incidents' include fell/moorland rescues and searches. Teams, chiefly although not exclusively in the north, carry out these duties as part of their normal workload.</p> <p>These incidents are usually recorded in the Mountain Rescue (England & Wales) Incident Report for 2021.</p>																	
Surface Incidents	80	-	-	-	24	12	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	30	44	25	217
Persons Assisted	79	-	-	-	13	2	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	35	39	4	173
Fatalities	3	-	-	-	4	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	4	1	15
Persons Injured	46	-	-	-	11	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	25	31	4	118
Surface Animal Incidents	6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	8
Reported Standbys	5	-	-	-	-	5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	2	2	16
Assistance to other teams	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	16	12	-	30
Totals Surface Incidents	86	0	0	0	24	12	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	31	45	25	225

Notes:

1. This row records incidents where assistance is requested by the authorities for non-caver incidents. These are identified on page 2 of the report.
2. Injuries include those assisted for a medical condition, but exclude cavers assisted through exhaustion.
3. This row records use of helicopter to evacuate a caving casualty.
4. The Cave Rescue Organisation is based in Clapham, North Yorkshire.

Further details relating to this incident report or about the BCRC and its membership can be obtained from the BCRC Secretary, Emma Porter via secretary@caverescue.org.uk



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Summary of Incident Report, 2021

1. There were 0 underground fatalities in 2021

There was one surface fatality associated with an underground incident

Incident 3, where DevCRO were assisting in the search for a missing person

2. There were 8 incidents where teams assisted the authorities in the execution of their duties – incidents 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 12, 17 and 22
3. The main causes and injuries sustained over recent years are recorded here. The *Injuries Incurred* table includes fatalities and exhaustion/hypothermia incidents.

Table 1: Incident causes

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Total
Assist authorities	3	4	9	9	8	33
Cave diving	-	-	-	1	-	1
Exposure/exhausted	-	1	1	1	1	4
Fall	6	3	4	3	2	18
Flooding	-	-	1	2	1	4
Hung up	-	-	1	1	1	3
Lost/overdue	15	8	7	8	4	42
Marooned	-	-	-	2	-	2
Medical emergency	3	-	2	3	-	8
Other	-	1	1	-	-	2
Physically stuck	5	2	3	-	-	10
Rock fall	-	-	-	-	3	3
Self marooning	-	2	-	-	-	2
Slip/trip	-	-	2	2	2	6
Unable to climb	1	2	2	-	1	6
Total	33	23	33	32	23	144

Table 2: Injuries incurred

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Total
Arm/shoulder	1	1	2	2	1	7
Drowning	-	-	-	1	-	1
Exhaustion/hypothermia	1	2	4	3	3	13
Femur/pelvis	2	-	1	1	-	4
Head injuries	1	-	-	1	-	2
Knee injuries	-	1	-	1	-	2
Lower leg/ankle	1	1	2	1	3	8
Medical condition	2	-	2	3	-	7
Multiple	1	-	-	-	2	3
Other	-	1	1	-	3	5
Spine/back	-	-	1	-	-	1
Total	9	6	13	13	12	53

4. The underground animal incidents included 4 dogs, 4 lambs, 3 ducks and 2 sheep.
5. In 2021, there was a total of at least 9500 hours spent on callouts by teams, with an average of 18 team members and 349 person-hours per incident. Normally teams spend between 2000 and 4000 hours per year on callouts, so the OFD rescue (no 23), which involved at least 7500 person hours and 280 rescuers hugely impacts on these figures. Excluding this rescue, there was a total of 2000 hours spent on callouts, with an average of 8 team members and 73 person-hours per incident. These figures do not include resulting equipment maintenance and re-equipping of rescue vehicles. In this report, incidents are recorded where personnel have been deployed to the site; other problems or alerts are not included.



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Summary of Incidents for 2021

1. **Sunday 7th March at 12:00 by DCRO: 7t, 2h**
Tunnels under Queens Park (Crewe), assist authorities

The team were contacted by Cheshire Police to assist in the search for a missing person, thought to be in the Crewe area. They wanted assistance in searching a river that runs underneath Queens Park in the centre of Crewe. A small team, complete with gas meters, searched and surveyed around 1km of tunnels, including some which turned out to be sewage overflow. Nothing was found

2. **Thursday 1st April at 17:35 by DCRO: 8t, 4h 10m**
Cracken Edge Mines (Chinley), assist authorities

A vulnerable adult (f23) absconded from a local care home and hid in a gritstone mine, refusing to come out. The same person was involved in a similar DCRO incident a few months ago, and several other MREW incidents over the past 6 months. The casualty refused to exit, and was requiring restraint by police and fire crew in a very small mine passage. As this was becoming extremely complex, EMAS doctors were requested to attend, and sedated the casualty, at which point they were extracted by the DCRO team and transferred to the care of KMRT/EMAS.

3. **Sunday 11th April at 16:31 by DEVCRO: 18t, 1h 32m**
Walls Hill (Torquay), assist authorities

Devon CRO were contacted by the police to assist local MR teams in the search for a missing person (m). Several caves had been found in the vicinity which needed searching. Whilst the team was en route, a trainer was found on the cliff face, eventually identified as belonging to the missing person. The search was called off as the police decided that it was likely they had fallen over the cliff. Sadly, a body was recovered from the sea the following day. FATAL

4. **Friday 30 April at 13:41 by COMRU: 15t, 4h 38m**
Skears Firestone Level (Middleton in Teesdale), hung up

3 cavers (m25, 30, 45) entered Skears Firestone Level. Two of them descended the first shaft on the through route, but on ascending the rope one became hung up, trapping the other at the shaft bottom. Their companion exited the mine and raised the alarm. COMRU assisted the person on the rope to the shaft head and escorted them out. The remaining person, who had now been underground for a few hours was unable to ascend the rope themselves. It transpired that he was diabetic. He was hauled up the shaft, given some food, and then escorted out.

5. **Tuesday 4 May 2021 at 10:18 by COMRU: 3t, 3h 30m**
Rigghead Slate Mine (Borrowdale), assist authorities

On the evening of 3rd May, Cumbria Police were informed of bones found in one of the closeheads in Rigghead Slate Mine by hillwalkers who had entered the

mine. The decision was made to deploy a small search team the following day to investigate. A small party searched the mine and found animal bones in a pool of decayed animal matter.

6. **Sunday 9 May 2021 at 00:46 by SMWCRT: 1t, 2h**
Ogof Draenen (Blaenavon), assist authorities

A group of cavers (2m, 1f) were seen going underground at 07:30 and had not returned to their cars by midnight. The local police were contacted and started to make inquiries. Along with tasking other forces to attend next of kin homes, they also contacted SMWCRT, who made contact with the partner of one of the cavers. The cavers had a 06:00 next day callout time, and so the team were stood down. False alarm with good intent.

7. **Wednesday 2 June 2021 at 21:10 by DEVCRO: 3t, 25m**
Pridhamsleigh Cavern (Ashburton), lost/overdue

A family group (2 adults, 2 children) went underground having left a callout for 20:00. At 20:30, their callout became concerned, contacting several local cavers and then informing the police. Two members of DevCRO who live nearby were contacted and decided it to do a hasty search in case they might be needed whilst the rest of the team mobilized. The group were located near the entrance but in a complex part of the system. They were uninjured, but the children were cold so the decision was made to walk them out. The police arrived at the cave entrance just as the group exited the cave. The team were stood down, and the family were checked out by the team paramedic, before being escorted back to their car.

8. **Tuesday 15th June at 15:23 by CRO: 10t, 2h**
Great Douk/Sunset Hole (Chapel-le-Dale), lost/overdue

A party of 3 cavers were reported overdue from one of the caves in the Great Douk/Sunset Hole area. As CRO members were en route across the fell, it was discovered that the party had emerged safely some hours before, but not informed their callout. The team were stood down before going underground.

9. **Wednesday 23 June at 00:00 by CRO: 30t, 6h**
Gaping Gill (Ingleborough), unable to climb

2 climbers descended Gaping Gill main shaft, intending to follow a climbing route back out. The route was green, they were showered by loose rock and were unable to reverse the route, becoming stranded on a ledge 40m down. Team members descended to them and established a hauling system to recover them, uninjured, to the surface

10. **Saturday 3rd July at 21:23 by SMWCRT: 7t, 1h 30m**



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Ogof Ffynnon Ddu 2 (Penwyllt), lost/overdue

A party of 3 cavers (f20, m20,20) were reported overdue on a trip in OFD. One member of the party (f20) had damaged her foot/ankle in the streamway, and as a result they had made slower than expected progress back to Cwm Dwr. SMWCRT members provided assistance on the entrance climb with ropes and a harness.

11. Sunday 4th July at 15:20 by ICRO: 1t, 15m
Polliska (Geevagh, Co Sligo), lost/overdue

A party of 3 cavers were reported overdue from a trip in Polliska by their callout. The weather on the surface had been wet all afternoon with ongoing heavy rain. As the local warden was starting to contact the rest of the team, a call was received from the delayed party and the rescue stood down.

12. Thursday 29th July at 12:00 by SCRO: 1t, 1h
Smoo Cave/Elephant Cave (Durness), assist authorities

The coastguard requested the assistance of a local SCRO member to search for a missing fisherman who had mentioned 'going to a cave'. The SCRO member walked from Smoo Cave to Elephant cave, but didn't find anyone. The fisherman was later found, without needing further SCRO assistance.

13. Friday 6th August at 17:14 by CRO: 8t, 3h
White Scar Cave (Ingleborough), slips/trips

A visitor (f20) slipped at the far end of White Scar Cave, sustaining a lower leg injury. Show cave staff assessed and treated the casualty's injured leg and moved her to within 300m of the entrance. However, the profile of the passage was such that they were unable to complete the evacuation. CRO members splinted her leg and evacuated her on a stretcher where she was handed over to YAS paramedics.

14. Sunday 8 August at 15:37 by NWCRO: 7t, 4h 16m
Nant y Gadwen manganese mine (Porth Ysgo), fall

NWCRO were called out by the coastguard to help rescue a casualty (f19) who entered a horizontal mine entrance and fell down a mineshaft just beyond daylight, breaking her arm. Access was challenging, but the team were able to enter via a lower entrance and help evacuate the casualty to the surface, where she was flown to hospital.

15. Thursday 12 August at 20:46 by DCRO: 4t, 1h 15m
Knotlow Cavern (Monyash), slips/trips

A party of cavers (3m) called for assistance when one of the party (m50) injured their lower leg. As the first team members arrived, the injured caver was slowly making his way up the entrance rope. After he exited the cave, the party were escorted back to their cars.

16. Saturday 4 September at 14:30 by SMWCRT: 23t, 8h 46m

Ogof Ffynnon Ddu 2 (Penwyllt), rock fall

During a pull through trip in Pendulum Passage in OFD2, a rock fall caused significant bruising to 2 members of a party of 3 (m50, 50). The uninjured member exited the cave to alert the team. The casualties were assisted up a number of climbs by rescuers in order to exit the cave.

17. Saturday 18th September at 09:37 by SMWCRT: 10t, 24h

Multiple unnamed mineshafts (Machynlleth), assist authorities

SMWCRT were requested by the police to assist in the search for a missing person south of Machynlleth. There were several old mine sites to search, and the team also assisted Mountain Rescue with surface searches. The searches took place over 2 days. Nothing was found.

18. Tuesday 21 September at 20:00 by SMRT: 14t, 6h
Low Skears Mine (Middleton-in-Teesdale), rock fall

A group of 4 descended the top entrance, with 3 planning on completing the through trip. When the de-rigger got to surface there was no sign of the others. They made their way to find the lower entrance where through trip party would have emerged only to find a roof collapse consisting of mud and rock. SMRT was alerted, and rescuers started digging through the collapse, while another group started to re-rig the mine. The collapse was successfully dug through, and the stranded party located cold but safe and well. Assisted by COMRU.

19. Tuesday October 12th at 13:44 by ICRO: 4t, 3h
Pollnagollum Slieve Rushen (Swanlinbar, Co Cavan), fall

Two cavers were prospecting on Slieve Rushen. On encountering Pollnagollum Slieve Rushen, one climbed down the eastern gully using a dynamic rope, but slipped and fell 8m into the shaft. He was able to tell his colleague he had injured his hand and ribs, and was unable to climb out. ICRO were called out, with the PSNI Search and Rescue team also on standby. Team members descended to find the caver on a ledge 16m down. He was hauled out in a sit harness, before being taken to hospital for a check up, where he was found to have broken his wrist and ankle, as well as injuring several ribs.

20. Thursday 14 October at 18:10 by WCSRT: 8t, 1h
Wheal Ellen (Mount Hawke), exhaustion/hypothermia

WCSRT received a request from CFRS to attend an incident at Wheal Ellen, where a mine explorer (m30) was unable to reascend a 30 metre shaft. The team were mobilised, but the Fire Service were able to successfully rescue the man before they arrived.



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21. Thursday 21 October at 00:49 by MCR: 7t, 3h 35m

Eastwater Cavern (Priddy), Flooding

A party of 5 cavers (3m, 2f) were reported overdue from a trip, having become trapped by flood water blocking the entrance. The Fire Service pumped water away to allow a small MCR team to enter and locate all 5 safe and well in a dry part of the cave near the entrance. They were escorted out and taken to the nearby Wessex Cave Club hut to warm up.

22. Saturday 23 October at 14:21 by DEVCRO: 12t, 6h

Lopwell Dam (Milton Abbot), assist authorities

Devon CRO was called to assist in the ongoing search for a missing military person who went for a run and did not return. The police had concern for his wellbeing. Two mines in the Lopwell Dam area were identified as potentially of interest. These were searched and nothing found so the team returned to the RV. Just as the debrief had ended, information came through that the individual had been located safe in the house next door to where he lived.

23. Saturday 6 November at 14:00 by SMWCRT:280t, 54h

Ogof Ffynnon Ddu 2 (Penwyllt), rock fall

A caver (m38) fell 8-10 m when a rock fell from under him while he was traversing in the Upper Smithy area of Cwm Dwr. He suffered multiple injuries, including significant facial injuries, a broken leg, multiple rib fractures and a severe splenic laceration. It was clear from his injuries that he would not be able to be evacuated via the Cwm Dwr crawls, and would need to be taken out via Top Entrance. The nature of his injuries and the location resulted in a particularly long and arduous stretcher carry, in one of the most protracted and logistically challenging rescues ever undertaken in the UK. Over the course of 3 days, team members from CRO, DevCRO, DCRO, GCRG, MCR, MCRO, NWCRO, SECRO and UWFRA also attended, as well as the local HART team and WBMRT.