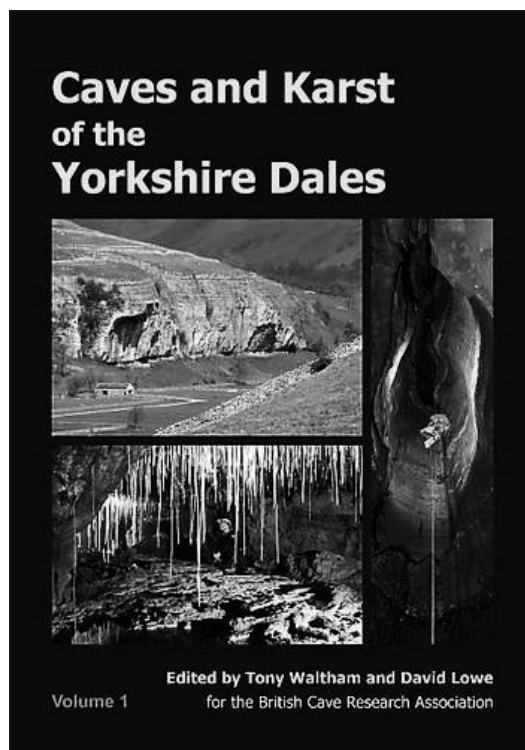


TONY WALTHAM AND DAVID LOWE (EDS.), 2013: CAVES AND KARST OF THE YORKSHIRE DALES, VOLUME 1

British Cave Research Association, 264 pp., 165 maps and graphics, 354 photographs. The Old Methodist Chapel, Great Hucklow, Buxton SK17 8RG, UK. ISBN 978-0-900265-46-4 (paperback); ISBN 978-0-900265-47-1 (hardback).



The book (two volumes) is intended to be just the first of a series of similar publications that will cover all important karst regions in Britain. The actual (printed) A4-format Volume 1 will be followed by an electronic Volume 2. It will consist of individual chapter files about the known caves in specific areas within the Yorkshire Dales. Such an arrangement will fully exploit the modern technical possibilities.

Individual chapters in Volume 1 have been contributed by 20 outstanding British karstologists and experts in related sciences, while the *Acknowledgements* section lists many more specialists who were in some way associated with development of the book. A number of them, including the two editors, are (or have been) active cavers for many years, and this ensures that the text displays a rare homogeneity.

The contents of this full-colour book are arranged into 16 main chapters, covering more or less the “standard karstological”, underground and surface, aspects of the karst in the Yorkshire Dales. Chapters are further split into “sub-chapters” providing more detailed information about the more important aspects of the main topic. The text is supported by many high-quality pho-

tos, together with 165 maps and other drawings. A very welcome addition is the provision of boxed texts explaining background information about a variety of specific topics, which would disrupt the main line of the text if included there. The book’s scientific core is preceded by (general)

Contents of Volumes 1 and 2, Preface and Acknowledgements, and Detailed Contents of Volume 1. At the end of the main text is an *Index of localities* (4 pages) with site locations by British National Grid Reference.

The *Preface* by the editors outlines the double interest of the BCRA in the Yorkshire Dales “... as the major area within Britain for sport caving ...” and “... also for the magnificent glaciokarst landscapes ... and the vital role of the caves ...”. “This book covers both the descriptive and scientific aspects of both the caves and the karst landforms ...”, “maintaining sound academic standards in its data recording and also of presenting its material in a style that is readable and comprehensible by a non-specialist.”

The main chapter titles speak for themselves: *The Yorkshire Dales (1); Geology of the limestones (2); Glaciation and Quaternary evolution (3); Karst geomorphology*

(4); *Limestone pavements* (5); *Travertine and tufa* (6); *Cave geomorphology* (7); *Geological influences on the caves* (8); *Hydrology of the karst* (9); *Chronology of caves* (10); *Speleothems and palaeoclimates* (11); *Holocene environments* (12); *Subterranean biology* (13); *Bats in the caves* (14); *Cave palaeontology* (15); and *Cave archaeology* (16); Individual chapters are supported by relatively rich lists of References. Though the contents list of individual chapters follows a fairly standard “karstological template”, deviations evident within the list of titles clearly reflect the specifics of the Dales karst, especially the dominating influence of Quaternary development.

Inevitably the book focuses upon aspects of the local karst. Nevertheless, abundant general introductory sub-chapters within the individual chapters (plus graphics and boxed texts, some of which contain specialized glossaries about the topic in question), supported by discussion of recent developments in general karst (and related) science(s) provide an excellent summary of the actual state of the art. In places, rather intricate and arcane details are explained in a way that will be understandable even to the more general public. This approach is of great importance, because it makes the book readable to cavers whose primary interest is in finding new passages, but – possibly – now supported by basic scientific knowledge, not just by physical efforts.

The main virtue of the book is the way that a mass of data is presented; explanations are short and straightforward, and relationships to physical reality always remain evident. Besides a large number of photos that would not be out of place in a textbook or a scientific monograph, carefully chosen and excellently interpreted Landsat images contribute additional information about the karst surface evolution. Even the graphics are somehow adapted to this goal – the information shown is reduced to just what is really needed to grasp the point. Thus, the number of keyed symbols or colours used rarely exceeds a dozen. Geological maps do not follow all common standards but are simplified and drawn in a way that makes them extremely easy to understand, es-

pecially when including cave ground plans. Such adaptations could profitably be used as a general start-point by other authors preparing illustrations for future publications of this kind.

Being arranged in whatever way, such a wealth of high-quality data and information had to be collected in some way. “Between the lines” the reader becomes aware of the enormous amount of work, carried out over decades by many cavers and, in parallel, the high-quality scientific work that has built upon this foundation. My congratulations to generations of cave explorers and researchers in the Dales!

At first glance, this book might appear to be just one more compilation of the cavers’ and karstologists’ knowledge about a specific karst region at a certain moment. But it is much more. While generally following existing standards of comparable literature, but with intentional deviations (i.e. simplifications) where needed, its authors and editors have achieved almost the ultimate embodiment of the genre. The book is organized in such a way that it will obviously become a standard for similar publications in the near future. At the same time, it might become a handbook, providing pointers to how and what one can search for in a karst area. Each serious caver in the English-speaking world should keep a copy beside the Bible (or equivalent) on his/her bedside table. Because English is understood (if not spoken) by much of the rest of the caving world, this suggestion spreads more widely too. And this highlights the only important “weak point” of the book – being in essence locally oriented, it is unlikely that it will ever be translated into other languages.

The aim of the book’s publisher has been achieved in great style. The promise that the book is the first in a series of new books that will cover other karst areas in Britain is just another attractive piece of information worth noting. Thanks to the BCRA, the editors and the authors of individual chapters for such a publication!

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