

NAMHO CONFERENCE 2026

VENUE

The conference in 2026 was held in Swaledale in the village church of Grinton from 19th to 21st June. The conference was arranged by North York Moors Caving Club, Moldywarps Speleological Group, Yoredale Mine and Cave Group and Earby Mine Research Group with support from NAMHO officers. I arrived on Friday afternoon and left on Monday morning as the conference events were only organised for the Saturday and Sunday. Below, I have described the sites I visited over the weekend.

Friday 19th

As usual, the evening was spent getting up to date with other delegates who I had not seen for a year or more and enjoying a barbecue laid on in the churchyard along with a bar in the church itself. Pete Ryder of Moldywarps SG gave a talk and performance during the evening.



Left: Inside the church at Grinton where the conference was held.
Below: The river Swale at Grinton



Saturday 20th

On Saturday morning, I walked with Alex from the Wealden CMS to the parking area for Devis Hole trips. Fortunately, a short while after we started, we given a lift by one of the members of another trip into Devis that day. At the car park, we waited for the others and then walked up – five delegates, Tony Harrison the leader and James backmarking – to the entrance of Devis Hole Mine. The walk-in took most of an

Right: Approach to Devis Hole; the arrow marks the entrance.
Below: In the mine.



hour but although the weather was very good, it was windy as well which kept us cool. The entrance is a sloping concrete pipe – quick enough to descend but slow to ascend – and soon we were all in the level. The first section is a fairly straight tunnel heading south of reasonable (but not good) height. On the way in, we went down a mined passage to a sump then back and had a quick look into a tiny part of the Devis Hole Central Maze, an incredible network of narrow passages. The total length of this maze is in

the order of a mile long. Back to the main level we continued to the Wellington Vein, a natural fissure but which contained lead ore which was easily extracted. We went west along this noting the natural features in the walls and roof. Then we turned round and headed east past the entrance adit until we passed Cranehow Level and then met Robinsons Level on the right (south). Going up this took us to a blockage, possibly caused by a shaft from surface, which had been dug through by the MSG. On the further side, rails were still in place (T-shaped in metal chairs) showing that the collapse occurred before the mine was stripped. Along this level, there are three sumps on the right going down about ??? m deep including Pearson's Sump, the only one which connects to further passage in the South Series. Another group had gone down the sump, we stayed on adit level. The trip out was fairly brisk as we didn't digress off the main route so we emerged in sunshine at about 2pm. On the way back to the road, we looked in the smelt mill and peat store buildings.



Left: The smelt mill (left) and peat store (right).

After that trip, I managed to get to a talk by Kevin Wilson of the HSE. He is the Chief Mine Inspector and gave an interesting talk particularly covering the differences between our sort of sport exploration and any sort of "undertaking" such as the led trips round Alderley. More of this in a later write-up.

In the evening, there was a hog roast (well just roast pork baps really) and a long quiz/game session in which the team I joined did not exactly excel.

Sunday 21st

We left the camp fairly on Sunday to make sure we could get parking spots at Gunnerside where we met Nick Green who was leading our trip to Sir Francis Level. This time there ten of us including the leader. It is quite a long walk (a mile or so) up to the adit entrance but as most was in trees and the rest on fairly flat grass alongside the gill, it didn't seem to hard even through we were carrying all our kit. At the entrance most of us changed into wetsuits for the deep water in the mine. Dropping down a short air shaft of about 7m, we soon got into the cold water of the level and started the slog northwards to the engine room, the main target for the trip. The water depth varied from chest deep to wellie deep. On the way, Nick's O₂ alarm started chirping signifying levels below the norm but this had no effect on our progress as we were moving at a moderate speed. He was also carrying a CO₂ meter which never went off so the lower level of



O₂ was probably caused by shale beds

exposed in the walls. At the engine house, we spent some time photographing and looking at the incredible machinery that is still there. Maybe in a



Above right: The entrance and a kibble in the level.
Left: The water powered pumps.

few decades time, the sheaves will drop but for now, it is mostly intact complete with the pumps and cages – one of which is of course at the bottom of the shaft. Leaving there, we went a little further into fresh air for a change and then started to return out. After a steady walk, we got to daylight and sunshine (fortunately not too hot!), changed and walked back to Gunnerside.

Below left: The water powered winder. Right: The cage in the flooded shaft.



After this trip, there were no more planned trips so after a couple of pints in the local pub, I headed home on the Monday.

On trips:

Saturday – Tony Harrison, Alex Thurston, Elin West, Geoff West, James ?

Sunday – Nick Green, Alex Thurston, Geoff Usher, Rob Cowther, Byron Machin, Bill Nix, Emma Key, Fred ?, either Mark Waite or Chris Hunter.

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