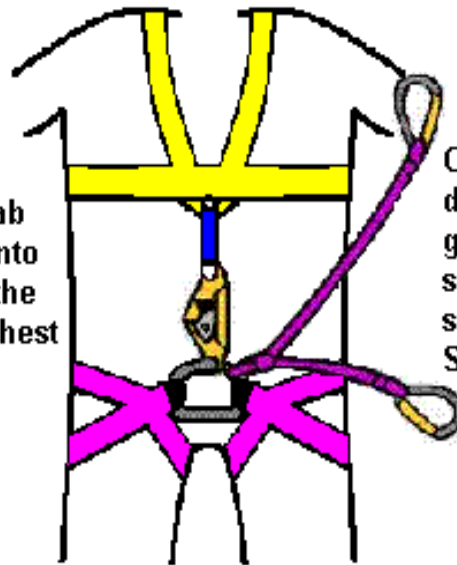


DACHSTEIN CAVING EXPEDITION SRT SETUP

A few people have asked me about SRT kit layout so rather than repeat the same thing to everyone I'll write a few bits down. Remember that this is my personal opinion and that there are other people out there who might disagree with me. Luckily for the safety of mankind they'll be wrong!

This layout is obviously very similar to most of the setups you'll see but it really does work well in the typical caves of the Dachstein. Everyone in the Welsh contingent has this rig and I believe that a standardised set-up is important for many reasons. First, at a glance anyone can see if there's something wrong/missing etc, even the less experienced ones. Secondly, if the lights go out and that attractive young lady is struggling to pass the rebelay below me then I can talk her through it with absolute confidence that she's taking off exactly what I tell her to. As it were! Far less chance of her unclipping herself from the rope and plummeting to her death. Thirdly, it's a versatile, easily releasable system that works well in caves where you need to strip kit off to get past obstacles. Fourthly, it's extremely versatile on expedition rigging. Fifthly (and hopefully the last of the "thlys") as a rescuer or as a rescuee it's easy to take bits of kit off and convert them into hauling systems, etc...

A small crab that clips into the top of the croll and chest harness



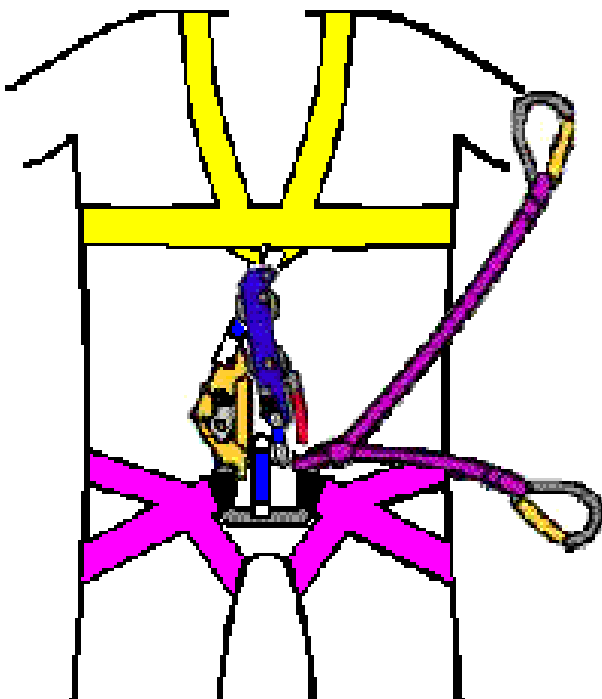
Cowstails (8 or 9mm dynamic with snap gates without snaggy hooky bits such as the Petzl Spirit bent gates)

I'll explain the rig and justify as much of it as I can be arsed with. Lot of it is long-winded blurb for the geeky types out there. Sections in bold are the important bits.

Imagine you're the caver wearing a harness and you're looking down towards your crotch (never done that sort of thing myself).

Central maillon (D-shaped and not triangular). Not going to justify it but triangular ones are pants.

From Left to right: **cowstails** (I use 8 or 9mm dynamic with snap gates without snaggy hooky bits such as the Petzl Spirit bent gates). I believe that for 99% of caving screw gates on cowstails are absolute and utter crap. My justification goes as follows:



If you're tired, got heavy bags, passing tight and awkward rigging, have been dragging your arse through muddy areas, your hands are cold, and the snow melt is starting to pump down the pitches, I can guarantee that at some point in your career you will be unable to undo a screw gate on your cowstail. Most of the time this won't really matter but it doesn't take much imagination to visualise what could happen in the worst case scenario. I've lost track of the number of people who I've had to assist when they can't undo the bloody things, and I've had loads of issues with my own kit over the years. You need to be able to pass obstacles rapidly and with little fuss. Screwgates offer nothing more than a psychological crutch that the nervous often feel the need to rely upon. The strength of most types of screwgate assumes that they're closed properly, and if you use them as snap gates then they're not much stronger anyway. Pointless, slow, fiddly. Use them for something else.

These (cowstail and croll) are the only permanent items on the harness (in some circumstances, such as really tight caves, cowstails can be attached to the central maillon with another maillon so that you can sack them off and put them in a bag to pass meanders, crawls etc. However, it's not a recommended procedure).

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Installed in between cowstail and croll when needed: **descender** (on screw gate crab, not maillon. You'll spend half your life taking your descender off and putting it back on your central maillon so attaching it with another maillon is madness. Gate on krab should be facing towards user and screws downwards to close. This is so that you can always see that the gate isn't coming open).

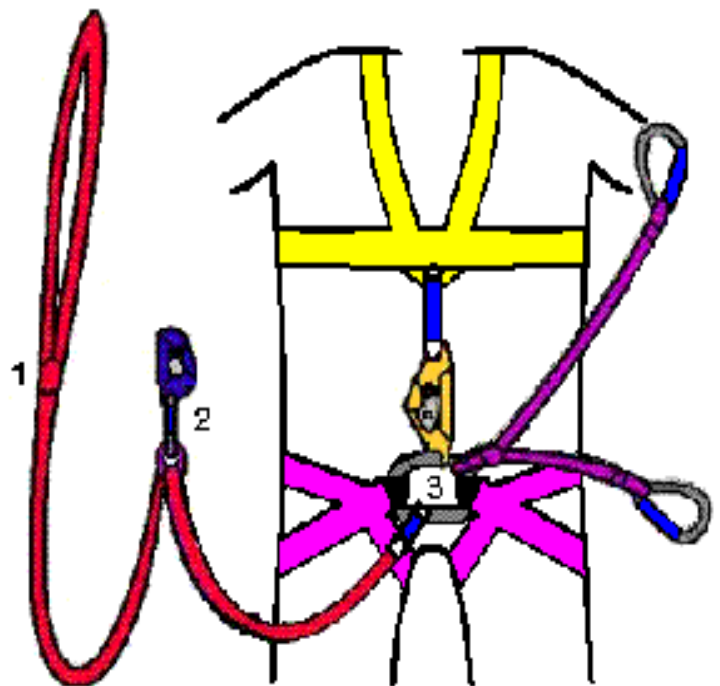
Installed to right of descender: **friction crab** (non-locking with opening side facing away from body. When rigging or rescuing can easily be used as an aiding-crab and clipped into a cowstail, allowing the user to get close to the anchor. Gate facing away makes this far easier. Obviously the hooky bit wants to be upwards and ideally filed off to prevent snagging).

The **hand jammer** assembly consists of a single piece of static cord (8mm works well, any thicker is unnecessary, and thinner can make feet tender on big trips), two crabs, and a jammer (I prefer the Basic non-handled version as opposed to the big cumbersome club-like thing with a handle).

The safety cord has a low-profile overhand knot tied in with a crab attached which clips into the underside of the central maillon (the upper half of the maillon is already cluttered so no reason to make it more so). The gate on the krab wants to be facing down and away from the user whilst the safety cord is at full stretch above your head, meaning that when in use the gate never comes into direct contact with the maillon (a potentially dangerous situation can occur in some situations).

Another overhand knot is tied in the safety cord which then has an oval (or HMS) crab and the jammer attached. Another important point: the gate on the jammer krab wants to be facing away from the user and screwed down to close. With the gate facing away from the user there is less chance of the gate catching on the croll cam and opening it. This can and does happen so beware. Finally, the footloop can be created in the end by using a bowline knot.

The standard European method (and the normal industrial rope access method) for footloop assembly is different. They do not use an integral safety cord but use their long cowstail instead. This means that they've got less kit to carry and snag but has potential drawbacks, including danger of dropping footloop/jammer and less versatility when passing obstacles. Saying that it works for them. The obvious arguments that I hear against the method I've described above generally include the lack of dynamic properties in the safety cord. Many people have a dynamic cord and a static footloop. I have nothing against this apart from the fact that I won't go caving with them! During emergency situations having that setup can be very troublesome indeed. It is difficult to turn your setup into a useful rescue tool when maillons, separate safety cords etc are involved. People with that sort of rig will find that their kit will be cut off them when the shit hits the fan. And if your safety cord is attached directly to your central maillon then you're asking for trouble. Obviously I've taken falls on my safety cord in the past but you only make that mistake once or twice. There are very few circumstances where you'll put yourself into a fall-factor situation with your hand jammer unless you're dumb. Nothing wrong with static cord if you've got a brain. Having a krab on the jammer also means that you can clip it into rebelays etc and it becomes an etrier. Very, very, very useful.



Chest harness. I use a bra-type thing with a small crab that clips into the top of my croll. Works well enough on everything except really big pitches (couple of hundred metre high beasts). For these I'll feed the chest strap through the croll to get me in closer. I favour these types of harness as they're very versatile for rigging, tight pitch heads, climbing etc... If you're going to buy your own I'd certainly consider these types over tapes.

Pulley + spare jammer/mini traxion + oval krab. Vital, even if you don't know what to do with it. Hopefully someone on the trip will have a clue and the more of this type of gear the better.

Bit of tat: Everyone from Cardiff Uni is issued a 5 or 6m length of static 8mm. So many uses (rigging, rescue, handlines, bag hauling, etc). Bits of cord: incredibly useful (prussic loops, deviations, releasable attachments for rescues etc...).

Knife, whistle, spanner: If you can't cut a rope then you're a liability; if you can't communicate in big/loud environments then you're a liability; if you can't check and tighten bolts then you're a liability.