

COUNCIL OF SOUTHERN CAVING CLUBS

## NEWSLETTER

November 2023



# Upcoming General Meeting

Monday 13<sup>th</sup> November 2023 from 19:00 via Zoom

Draft minutes from the August 2023 AGM and previous meetings are available on the [CSCC website](#) along with the agenda for the upcoming meeting and officers' reports. The Agenda is listed under "GM Monday 13 November 2023", and the minutes of the August meeting are under "GM Wednesday 16 August 2023"

Please follow the below link to join the meeting on Zoom:

<https://bristol-ac-uk.zoom.us/j/97745232435>

Remember that only nominated club representatives may vote, but anyone can attend as an observer and join the discussion. As ever, please follow the usual online meeting etiquette and ensure your microphone is muted when you are not speaking.

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## Important – Check Your Harness!

### Urgent advice to check your Petzl harness (Astro and Canyon Guide)

Due to a possible fault found with the attachment point on Astro and Canyon Guide harnesses, Petzl have issued an urgent request to stop using the harness and inspect it to determine whether it is safe. Full instructions on what to look for and what action to take should you find your harness is affected can be found on the following webpage:

[Petzl product recall](#)

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# Westminster Speleological Group



**Earlier this year, three clubs were added to the list of organisations who wish to be represented by CSCC. In the last newsletter we read about the newly-formed Birmingham Student Caving Club. In this issue, Judi Durber writes about the Westminster Caving Group, and a profile of Gloucester Speleological Society by Mark Tringham appears elsewhere in this issue.**

Westminster Speleological Group (WSG) recently became a member of CSCC. We organise caving and family orientated meets across the country as well as an annual trip to a classic caving area in Europe. Every second Tuesday of the month we meet socially, in London, at the Ship and Shovel pub on Craven Passage near Charing Cross and organise SRT training in Reigate and other caving areas.

As is often the case, the club was formed after a keen person, Don Hutchings, who had read an article about diving in Wookey Hole in 1945, did a few trips to Mendip and met up with a group of apprentice electricians from Willesden. In 1950 they thought they ought to put the motley group on a proper footing, gave themselves a name and formed a committee.

WSG own a cottage, Caerllwyn (or Cae'r-llyn), a two hundred and fifty year old traditional Welsh drovers cottage on the edge of the 'waterfalls' area in the Bannau Brycheiniog National Park in South Wales. It sleeps 18 people with ample camping, outdoor eating and parking areas. Caerllwyn is ideal for our big events such as our family firework party. We also hold regular 'novice' meets to enable new people to become confident cavers through enjoyable trips.

In August 2024 we are looking forward to taking the club to Trou du Glaz in France. If you would like to meet up caving, socially or find out more about us please go to our club website [www.wsg.org.uk](http://www.wsg.org.uk)

# Hidden Earth 2023: CSCC Clubs to the Fore!



*Duncan Price presents his Mendip Round-up to a full lecture theatre at Hidden Earth 2023. Photo: Peter Burgess*

Hidden Earth returned this year, and was based near Bristol, at Gordano School in Portishead. The event was held over the weekend 15th - 17th September. After much hard work by the organising team, the venue proved to be an excellent choice. There was a packed schedule of talks, with a choice of three to choose from at any one time. The trade hall was busy, and there were competitions to enter. The bar was run by members of Mendip Nature Research Committee as it has been in previous years, and the onsite catering provided plenty of food for both daytime meals and the Saturday night dinner.

Despite the fairly short notice, the conference was extremely well-attended, and CSCC clubs were well represented. I counted some 28 members from WCMS (my club), for example, and I am sure other clubs could come up with a number as high, if not higher. Congratulations to the organising team for another superb conference!

# CHECC News



There are three items of news from CHECC which student cavers in particular should be aware of.

## Big CHECC has been postponed.

We hope to schedule Big CHECC for mid-June. This has been done for a couple of reasons, namely, it spreads the CHECC organisational workload more evenly, and it allows an outdoor venue to be considered due to better weather at that time of year. This also removes the issue of having to find a suitable indoor venue, which has proved to be problematic.

## Regional CHECCs Brought Forward

In order to accommodate the new date for Big CHECC, the two regional CHECCs have also been rescheduled.

- NCHECC to be the last weekend of November in the Dales (replacing the original Big CHECC event).
- SCHECC to be late February 2024.

## Arrangements for CHECC AGM

With Big CHECC now postponed until Summer 2024, we still need an AGM. The 2023 AGM will take place ONLINE, most likely in the first week of December – further details to be released.

## **Mealy, CHECC Committee**

# The Gloucester Speleological Society

## *A Short Profile*



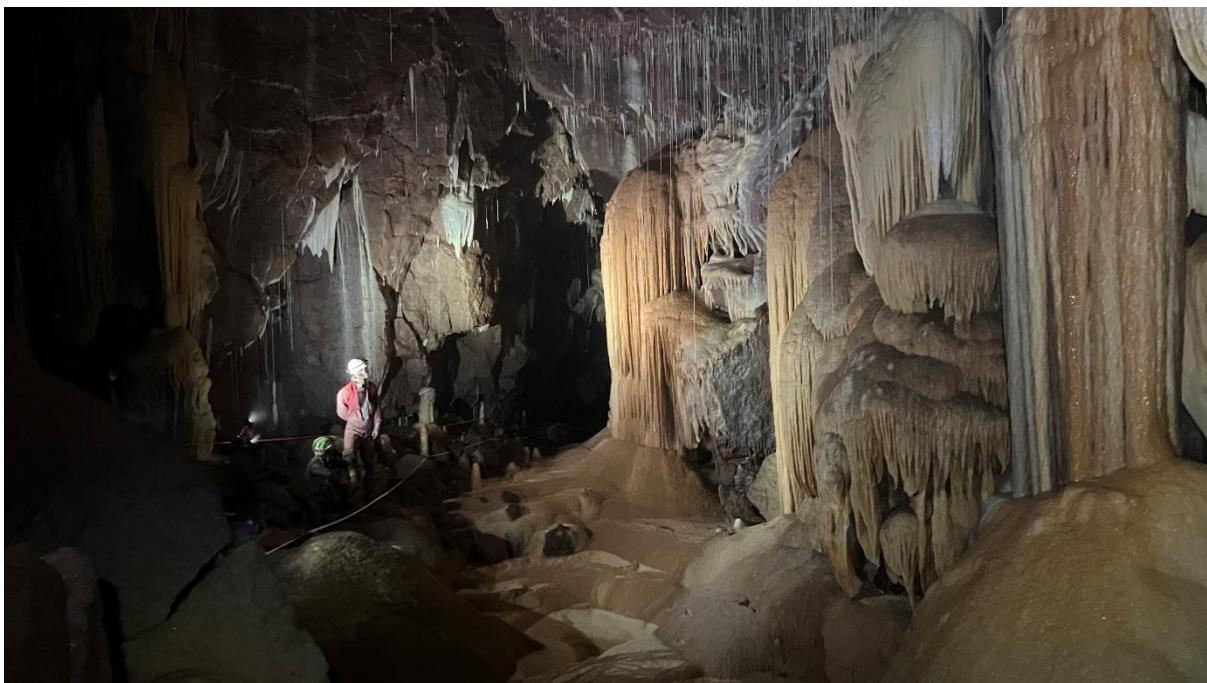
*Windrush Quarry, the Cotswolds*

The GSS was formed in July 1956 following earlier ad hoc underground activities from the late 1940's onwards by two groups of Gloucester and Cheltenham school boys/scouts. The school boys had been inspired not only by a spirit of adventure but by scientific curiosity about caves and local mines in the Cotswolds and Forest of Dean. Some of them had found a rare Bechstein's bat dying on the street in Gloucester and their science teacher further reinforced that inspiration, such that bat studies remained a core GSS interest and activity for many decades following.

The GSS was integral to the formation of the Gloucestershire Cave Rescue Group and to establishing a first class rescue depot and training centre at Cinderford, with the majority of active GSS members serving on it. The GSS is a member of the Council of Southern Caving Clubs, the Cambrian Cave Council and the British Caving Association.

Over the years GSS's core interests and activities have generally focussed on the Forest of Dean and Cotswolds with exploration and digging activities in many caves and disused mines. The Society's founders had been quick to recognise karst swallowets and springs in the Forest of Dean and the GSS has many digging projects which by the mid-1990's had already contributed to the Forest's presently known 25+km of natural caves. This exploratory digging effort is still very much on-going. Today, as a

result, the Forest caves include Otter Hole, one of the most beautifully decorated caves in the UK and the Slaughter Stream Cave which at 14km is the UK's longest cave formed in dolomite and which contains many interesting geological and speleogenetic features, such as unworked iron ore veins and manganese deposits.



*Long Straw Chamber, Otter Hole*

Many Forest iron mines and Cotswold stone mines have also been the subject of GSS exploration digging, surveying, conservation and archaeology, such as at Old Ham, Noxon Park, Westington and Windrush and significant GSS work is still underway in some of these and other locations.



*Lower Streamway, Slaughter Stream Cave*

Gloucester is handily located for many other UK caving regions and, as a result, the GSS holds frequent recreational and sporting caving trips to Wales, the Mendips, Derbyshire, Yorkshire and Assynt in Scotland. Foreign activities have included GSS-led expeditions to Montenegro and Namibia and presently a few members are involved with multi-national expeditions to Meghalaya India that are yielding world-class cave discoveries.

The GSS attracts most of its members from the Gloucester and Cheltenham area and holds regular evening social meetings and countryside walks in areas of speleological interest, as well as organising caving meets for evening, day, weekend and longer trips.

The GSS would like to welcome new members who have an interest in the underground whether it's for purely recreational/sporting pursuit or scientific interest; induction, training and equipment loan is available. The Society can be contacted by emailing [secretary@goucester-speleo.org](mailto:secretary@goucester-speleo.org)

**Mark Tringham (GSS Chair)**

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## Conservation and Access News



### Singing River Mine

The new lid has been installed on Singing River Mine and the new access agreement is up and running. A few trips have already been arranged. The access agreement has been [published on the CSCC website](#).

### Swildon's Changing Barn

An assurance has been given by Robin Maine, the owner, that the Swildon's changing barn will continue to be available for cavers for the foreseeable future. Given this, I've have arranged with Alan Butcher to replace the existing floor during the weekends of the 10th and 17th of November. If anyone would like to volunteer to help please drop me an email ([canda@cscc.org.uk](mailto:canda@cscc.org.uk)) . Please note that the barn will not be available from 10th to 20th November and cavers should arrange to change elsewhere.

### Longleat and Cheddar Gorge Caves

We have not had a formal response to the outline proposal we submitted to Longleat to restore access to the caves within Cheddar Gorge. While this is disappointing, I understand the reason for the delay is that the Show Cave Manager has been on long term sick leave. Hopefully this situation will be resolved shortly and progress can then be made.

### Loxton Cavern

Slow progress is being made to reinstate access to Loxton Cavern. We need to establish a definitive list of leaders so that familiarisation trips can be arranged etc. To this end please could any previous leaders or anyone that has been proposed as a club leader email me ([canda@cscc.org.uk](mailto:canda@cscc.org.uk)).

### Wookey Hole

Following an incident that caused Wookey Hole Caves to close part of the show cave for a weekend, the access agreement has been reviewed with their management. This has resulted in a few minor changes designed to help prevent future problems. The main changes are that cavers must provide contact details when completing the waiver form and must not alter or visibly change anything within the show cave.

The maillons on the rope climb down to the Land of Hope and Glory were replaced as the existing ones were showing excessive wear.

Visits to Wookey remain popular with 7 trips consisting of some 40 cavers having taken place since August.



*New maillons on the rope climb to Land of Hope and Glory. Photo: Peter Burgess*

### Sludge Pit Hole

I had an informal meeting with the owner of Sludge Pit Hole. He was unhappy that someone had taken it upon themselves to empty the donations bucket, inside the cave, and put their own padlock on it. If anyone knows who was responsible then please could they contact me so that we can at least reimburse the owner with the missing money. An arrangement is in place to monitor the bucket and regularly empty it.

### Compton Martin Ochre Mine

The land containing Compton Martin Ochre Mine was recently sold at auction. The sale has yet to be completed (or at least the Land Registry has yet to be updated). Once I have established who the new landowner is, I will contact them to confirm they are happy to continue the existing access arrangement.

### Future Priorities

In the coming months I will be concentrating on the following priorities:-

- 1) Continue negotiations with Longleat.
- 2) Progress the access and leadership arrangements for Loxton Cavern
- 3) Progress the items listed in this report.

If anyone has anything else they would like progressing then please let me know.

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### **Wayne Starsmore**

C&A Officer, CSCC

[canda@csc.org.uk](mailto:canda@csc.org.uk)

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## **Training News**

This October saw a great day's surface training with UBSS at their hut on the Mendips. I received an invite to come along to talk to some of their students about the different knots that could be used, and give some examples of how to tie them. Whilst there, I also got the opportunity to get involved with some of their fresher training, focusing on an introduction to using ladders and lifeline.

It was a really positive day that I hope everyone took something away from. It was also really great to see so many freshers coming down and trying caving; the attitude and the camaraderie shown by everyone in UBSS was fantastic to see. It seemed that everyone enjoyed their first time caving and I hope they found the training useful!

### **Dave Keegan, Training Officer, CSCC**

If you would like to take part in future events of this kind (either helping to instruct, or to refresh/learn about caving techniques) then please email [training@csc.org.uk](mailto:training@csc.org.uk).

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# CSCC Treasurer's News

The accounts remain in a healthy position, with only some minor items being due to be paid.

I am still attempting to chase up any outstanding claims for money spent on CSCC's behalf and will provide an update at the next meeting.

I have also been discussing some proposed BCA membership form changes over email with the membership administrator, as the BCA look to potentially move to an online database in the coming years.

We have two clubs who have requested CSCC affiliation since the August meeting. These are:

- Cross-Regional Ensemble of Speleological Hooligans
- Cardiff University Caving Club.

**Thomas Harrison, Treasurer, CSCC**

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## Important Advice - Suspension Trauma

### What it is and what to do about it

The BCA has recently published a very helpful guide by Imogen Campion on their website about suspension trauma. Any caver who uses Single Rope Techniques will certainly benefit from being aware of what suspension trauma is and how to deal with it. Please visit the [BCA news item](#) and take time to understand the information there.

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# BCA News



## BCA NEEDS YOU

We have vacancies for volunteers in the following positions:

**Treasurer**

**Publications and Information Officer**

**FSE (European Speleological Federation) Representative**

**Convenor for the CRoW Working Group**

**An Individual Representative on Council**

**A Group Representative on Council**

For information about these positions, contact:

Russell Myers - Chair: [chair@british-caving.org.uk](mailto:chair@british-caving.org.uk)

Allan Richardson - Secretary: [secretary@british-caving.org.uk](mailto:secretary@british-caving.org.uk)

**During the conference look out for Russell at the BCA stand for an informal chat.**

The wheels on the BCA bus keep turning, despite the lack of some key personnel. BCA was represented at Hidden Earth by chair Russell Myers, who was present for a lot of the day in front of the BCA banner, next to the stands for BCRA, the British Caving Library and UBSS.

In addition, Russell put up vacancies around the venue advertising the positions. One person has shown interest in the individual representative's position on Council, but other positions still remain to be filled, particularly the treasurer's role. As has been mentioned before, the workload for this job has been considerably eased by BCA taking on a paid bookkeeper. Please do consider coming forward or talking to someone in your club who might be a good fit for the job.

Linda Wilson, BCA Representative for CSCC

# Submitting Articles for the CSCC Newsletter



I would like to thank Judi Durber of Westminster Speleological Group and Mark Tringham of Gloucester Speleological Society for responding to my appeal for club information, and would encourage others to write something similar. Longer more detailed prose, if you have the inclination, is just as welcome as a concise summary. Please send photos with anything submitted, whether long or short, as a good image makes for a more interesting read.

Personal stories from individuals would also be welcome. Perhaps an account of a project, past or present, that you think would be of interest to others.

**Peter Burgess, Communications Officer**

[comms@csc.org.uk](mailto:comms@csc.org.uk)

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