



# COUNCIL OF SOUTHERN CAVING CLUBS

A constituent member of the British Caving Association

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on Saturday 8th May 2004 at 10:30am.

## 1. ATTENDANCE & APOLOGIES

### 1.1. Attendance:

Chris Binding (CSCC Secretary, CHCC), Alan Butcher (SMCC), David Cooke (CSCC NCA Rep., WCC), Martin Grass (CSCC C&A Off., BEC), Alan Gray (CSCC Chairman, ACG), Lee Hawkswell (MCG), Graham Mullen (UBSS), Rob Norcross (MOLES), Graham Price (CSS), Jonathan Roberts (CSCC Treasurer, MCG Obs.), Andy Sparrow (CSCC Training Off., CHCC), Chris Whale (SBSS), Les Williams (CSCC Equipment Off., WCC), Linda Wilson (UBSS).

### 1.2. Apologies: Andrew Atkinson (UBSS), Tim Fell (SBSS), Doug Harris (ACG), Steve King (SBSS).

## 2. READING OF THE MINUTES & MATTERS ARISING

The minutes of the last meeting were read and considered an accurate summary of events; no alterations were forthcoming.

### 2.1. Matters arising: Para. 2.5 - Alan Gray asked for an update on:-

2.1.1. The P-bolts in Swildons Hole which required testing by 10th March 2004.

2.1.2. Has Andrew Atkinson been trained as the Mendip Bolting Trainer?

2.1.3. When will a course be held for Mendip Bolters/Inspectors?

### 2.2. Chris Binding had received an update from Andrew Atkinson last night stating that AA is to attend a training course with Les Sykes on 15th May (next Saturday) after which testing of bolts and training of placers can be done (AA had tried to organise an earlier date but this fell through).

### 2.3. Also on the topic of bolts, there has been a suggestion that many/all of the bolts in Rhino Rift are loose (5 year rechecking date due: 18th November 2005); this is to be investigated to confirm/deny the report.

**ACTION: ANDREW ATKINSON**

### 2.4. Para 3.6 - update required on CSCC involvement in piping Holly Bush Shaft. Mark Ireland had previously applied to CSCC for funds to assist work on the shaft, the total cost of which was estimated at £995.94. Martin Grass reported that the work has since been done and that as HBS is an old mine working it was not within the remit of CSCC to support it; NAMHO are better suited to dealing with this type of project. The Belfry Bulletin carries further information on Mark Ireland's discoveries.

## 3. OFFICER REPORTS

### 3.1. CHAIRMAN - Alan Gray

(Written report)

I have enjoyed my year as Chairman of the CSCC; the low points being the closure of caves due to the insurance problems, but hopefully this is now behind us. I am happy to continue in this post and will stand again.

### 3.2. SECRETARY - Chris Binding

(Written report)

2003-04 has been a busy year so far; additional SGMs caused by issues regarding BCA/NCA and insurance meant that there were six CSCC meetings (one of which I was unable to attend due to work); I also attended two meetings with English Nature, and Mendip 2003 required some input.

Apart from receiving journals from DCA and minutes of meetings etc. from NCA/BCA, DCA, CCC etc., correspondence successfully lobbied for a change to Mendip Hills AONB Draft Management Plan 2004-2009 proposals which could have restricted digging activities on Mendip - thanks to Dave Morrison for bringing this to attention.

This year saw me purchase a computer which enabled the creation of an emailing list which meant a reduction in postage and printing costs from around £150 per year (my estimate) to around £60 (SGMs excluded!) - (again, my estimate - Treasurer should be able to confirm the true figures). This also meant a vast reduction in the amount of envelope-stuffing I had to do.

On the practical side, some positive action saw improvements in the state of Maine's Barn, Goatchurch Cavern and Manor Farm Swallet. Also the placement of a sign at the entrance to Swildon's Hole re: bolts.

I should like to thank Dave Cooke, Alan Gray, Jonathan Roberts, Andy Sparrow, Les Williams and Martin Grass for their kind assistance during my term as secretary. Also thanks go to Andrew Atkinson for stepping in to help resolve the bolting issue - another topic which seemed to lurk in the background for a long time and which involved no small amount of email correspondence and phone calls.

Sadly I will not be standing for re-election to the post; I shall assist the new Secretary to make the changeover as smooth as is reasonable.

### 3.3. **TREASURER** - Jonathan Roberts

(Written report and emailed to member clubs)

**Balance sheet.** A balance sheet is attached for income, expenditure and assets during calendar year 2003.

Administration. Thanks to a NCA grant for £400 relating to previous years' activity including £200 towards Star Mine work, we ended the year with a surplus on income. We are very grateful to Mendip Caving Group for a recent grant of £130 towards cave conservation. We administered NCA subs in our region during 2003, on behalf of the National Caving Association. We agreed an increase in subs at the 2003 AGM, and this took effect at the start of 2004. Unfortunately the income benefit from this was immediately eroded with the need to pay £100 for CSCC insurance. In 2003 I gave advance notice that I might resign this year. It is now 2004 and I shall be resigning at the AGM.

**Membership and income.** 42 clubs paid subscriptions for the year 2003, including 2003's subs received in 2002. Since then, East Sussex Scouts Caving Team has had to suspend membership because of lack of support, and there has been a slower rate of renewal in 2004 than in previous years. As I write (4th May) only 32 clubs have renewed for 2004. Recent years' problems affecting caving (foot & mouth, university club constraints, and latterly the insurance scare) are continuing to have a significant effect on participation levels. The following clubs are hereby reminded about 2004 subs: Avon & Somerset Constabulary Caving Club, Barnet Caving Group, Combined Services Caving Association, Cotham Speleological Society, Hewlett Packard Caving Club, Southsea Speleological Society, Surrey Youth Caving Group, University of Portsmouth Caving Club, WAYA CC incorporating ISG.

**National Caving Association.** There is a separate NCA sub, £15, and £60 for constituent bodies including CSCC. NCA membership in the CSCC area is similar to our own: 39 of the 42 clubs paid for 2003. We are grateful to NCA for granting £400 to CSCC in January 2003 towards 2001 and 2002 access and conservation expenses. Unfortunately, because of further changes in NCA eligibility rules, no CSCC work in 2003 was eligible for grants.

**Looking ahead.** The end of 2003 saw the start of the British Caving Association, initially to manage caving insurance. BCRA and NCA members during 2004 were granted free membership of BCA, though of course insurance had to be paid for. 2005 or 2006 now looks like being the earliest year when BCA extends its links with the regions, with tithing from subscriptions by BCA members who nominate CSCC as their primary region. My 2003 AGM report and the paper "Funding the Regions" took the view that we might have about 35 club members in that scenario. I do not see tithing being higher on average than £15 per club, though there might be banding (between £10 and £20) to allow consistency with other parts of Britain. As we currently operate we require 'steady state' income of roundly £800 a year, including costs of insurance. The £800 includes provision for some CSCC involvement in funding shaft work. On that basis, the income gap is now about £170 per year after allowing for insurance costs. I do not propose that we increase subs again this year, as they were only increased last year, and we are now around the norm for larger regions. I do however propose that we now agree to implement individual membership from 2005, having agreed the principle at the 2003 AGM. Provisionally we should aim for a £10 sub for individual members. The BCRA in particular has a large number of individual members, some of whom may want to tithe their membership to individual regions as the BCA links develop. I would hope that this source of income would be useful to CSCC.

**Reserves.** I was asked at a recent CSCC meeting about the 'right level' of CSCC reserve funds. There are now around £3,500-£4,000. The simple answer is that there is no 'right level' - we are simply better able to intervene and help than if we didn't have the fund. The attached table (after the balance sheet) shows that overall sources of reserve income have effectively dried up - the main gain was in the period 1997-2000. So the reserves are a finite resource. With farming land costing £2,000 or more per acre, reserves could quickly diminish if just one major cave entrance suddenly needed large scale CSCC intervention. With the current fund level, CSCC now has the flexibility to support a range of projects, if it chooses to. Jonathan Roberts.

3.3.1. The current account balance is £48.27 while the reserve account is £4089.77.

3.3.2. Alan Gray "I would like to propose a vote of thanks to Jonathan for his work and efforts in this post since 1996. Over this seven year period as well as the reserve CSCC fund steadily increasing he has brought a professional outlook to the CSCC accounts". 2nd: Graham Mullen. Passed by acclamation.

### 3.4. **EQUIPMENT** - Les Williams

(Verbal report)

3.4.1. Confirmation that there will not be an authorised bolting trainer until next week.

3.4.2. LW also stated that the National Body has a new convener, Andy Pryke, so meetings will resume in future.

3.4.3. Les Williams is prepared to stand for re-election.

3.5. **TRAINING** - Andy Sparrow

(Verbal report)

3.5.1. There is no Mendip 2004 event this year but one is possibly on the cards for 2005 (Martin Grass and Les Williams added that the British Cave Rescue Council are having a 2005 meet and Hidden Earth 2005 comes to Mendip also).

3.5.2. There is a first aid course planned for around October/November in time for the 3 year renewals following the last first aid course Andy organised. The cost will probably be similar, i.e. £60 and it is uncertain whether NCA can part-fund this. Andy is prepared to stand for re-election.

3.6. **CONSERVATION & ACCESS** - Martin Grass

(Verbal report)

3.6.1. Martin Grass stated he has held this position for 8/9 years and will be standing down today. A brief summary of the various C&A events followed: during the year tape rolls have been distributed for various projects (Tony J's discovery, Manor Farm, Fairy Quarry etc.); apart from the insurance problems access has not altered; some clearance work was undertaken in Goatchurch Cavern following some major littering.

3.6.2. Crook Peak and the caves thereon has received some recent press coverage but there are no major problems with the caves themselves.

3.6.3. Maine's Barn on Priddy Green has had some work done to reduce the problems associated with the pigeons and this is still ongoing (a possible cull has been diverted for the moment).

3.6.4. Some reports about the CSCC locks on Loxton caves resulted in the padlock being changed. The previously lost cave of Loxton (now found) may soon be fitted with the CSCC standard padlock but some consideration is being given by the discoverers whether club leaders will need to be appointed for conservation reasons.

3.6.5. Stainsby's Shaft has had a new grille top installed and is on the CSCC standard padlock; both the grille and the fence gate are padlocked. Originally the plan was for the fencing to be removed as it was considered an eyesore but following consultation the fencing is to remain to deter miscreants who could throw rubbish down the hole and/or animals getting feet caught etc..

3.6.6. Priddy Green Sink is also on the CSCC standard padlock.

3.6.7. (Linda Wilson reported that she has a supply of tape & pegs courtesy NCA/DCUC)

3.6.8. Tape stocks remain healthy but Martin stressed the importance of avoiding use of the red/white tape which leeches into the mud.

3.6.9. Martin thanked Linda Wilson for the occasions when she had attended C&A meetings in Derbyshire etc.. Meetings with English Nature re: SSSI monitoring on Mendip and elsewhere continue and an interim report is due later this year.

3.6.10. The continued uncertainty about the mines around Bath/Corsham continues.

3.6.11. Alan Gray proposed a vote of thanks for all of Martin's efforts; 2nd: Graham Mullen. Passed by acclamation.

3.7. **NCA REPRESENTATIVE** - Dave Cooke

(Written report)

It has been a traumatic and eventful year on the national scene. The trauma was insurance. A new national scheme is in place. It is more complex than the previous scheme and has been a steep learning curve for everyone. Although it has yet to reach its target, the early signs are that the scheme has been a success. Assuming the premiums are in line with this year, it should run again next year.

The eventful part was the formation of the BCA. I attended the inaugural meeting on the 20th March. A milestone in British Caving History. Most active cavers in the country are now voting members of the National Body. Have your say, use your vote, get involved. You have the power to shape the new BCA!

Eddy Hill of the UBSS was elected Secretary, Andy Pryke was elected Equipment Convener, Les Williams of the WSS was elected Publications & Information Officer, the post of SpeleoScene was left vacant but a volunteer, Jim Cochrane, has subsequently been found. The existing NCA officers have filled the other posts.

It was resolved that all the functions of the NCA would be transferred to the BCA by the end of this year. The NCA would then be expected to wind itself up at its final AGM in March 2005.

As far as the One-Stop-Shop goes, that has been on hold whilst everyone takes a rest after forming the BCA. But the process of incorporating the Regional Councils and BCRA kicks off again with a Hub meeting tomorrow. Fortunately it is tomorrow so maybe we can escape talking about it for one meeting...

Other items: the BCA has issued a Handbook to all its member clubs, direct individual members and subscribers. It is packed with useful information, mostly culled from the regional handbooks.

The Training Committee is to look at producing some self-assessment training materials. The National Council made it clear that they are worried about a link to certification and that the matter needs to be treated carefully.

As I've mentioned before, the HSE is currently proposing to extend the Safe Working at Heights Directive to caving and other adventurer activities. In brief this would require the use of two ropes on a pitch, completely undermining SRT. Initially this would only affect commercial caving, but there is a fear that it would be the thin end of the wedge. The Adventurous Activities lobby group represents adventurous activity interests and is chaired by a caver. It has been negotiating with the HSE for some time. It is now calling for letters to be sent to MPs. If you also wish to lobby your MP please contact Dave Cooke (ncarep@cscc.org.uk) for a pro-forma letter.

Back issues of SpeleoScene 1-9 are available for a small fee from Jenny Potts (jenny.potts@ukonline.co.uk).

For my sins, I'm willing to stand as NCA Representative for another year. David Cooke.

#### 4. ELECTION OF OFFICERS

| Post                  | Person        | Proposed | Seconded |
|-----------------------|---------------|----------|----------|
| Chairman              | Alan Gray     | LindaW   | LW       |
| Secretary             | Steve King    | CB       | GM       |
| Treasurer             | Chris Whale   | LW       | GM       |
| Equipment Officer     | Les Williams  | AG       | GM       |
| Training Officer      | Andy Sparrow  | MG       | LindaW   |
| Conservation & Access | Chris Binding | MG       | LW       |
| NCA Representative    | Dave Cooke    | GM       | CB       |

#### 5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- 5.1. Minutes should be available on the CSCC website even despite not being approved (as long as a note states they have yet to be approved).
- 5.2. Promotion of caving - results of discussions. WCC & ACG responded "Yes" to the proposition that caving should be promoted, Moles were "not against" the proposition and SMCC were "ambivalent". Andy Sparrow reminded the meeting that the question was whether National Policy should be to promote caving but that this needs the support of the regional councils and then the support of the National Council. The question of whether there should be a separate meeting to debate this concluded "Yes" and Andy Sparrow is to write further on this topic.

**ACTION: ANDY SPARROW**

- 5.3. Support of young cavers.
- 5.4. Training material. Both these latter points would be dealt with during the proposed meeting to follow on from 5.2 above.
- 5.5. Rob Norcross reports that the CSCC handbook is ready to go out.

**ACTION: ROB NORCROSS**

- 5.6. Graham Price asked for CSCC to issue a reminder to clubs with regard to their policy over loaning out the use of the CSCC standard padlock key. Rob Norcross asked for the wording to be included in the handbook and for the record it is reproduced here now:

"Dear CSCC Member,

3rd September 2002, Re: CSCC Key I wish to reiterate that if you issue your CSCC key to persons who are not members of your club and an accident occurs you may be liable to an insurance claim from those persons. CSCC does NOT have insurance for its member clubs or non-members or guests. It is strongly recommended that you obtain adequate insurance for guests/non-members or have a system of appointing temporary membership with insurance cover. Alternatively only issue your CSCC key to paid up members.

Additionally, any claim by a landowner on a non-member will involve your club and its liability. The onus is on you.

Regards, Martin Grass CSCC C&A Officer."

**ACTION: ALL CSCC MEMBER CLUBS**

- 5.7. Martin Grass reported on the latest work at Fairy Quarry. The new car park is now finished and visiting cavers are asked to make use of this facility rather than parking in the road - the road has been narrowed, the laybys removed, and despite its appearance, the road takes a lot of 38ton lorry traffic so please do not park in such a way that they cannot pass you. CSS still allow cavers to park at their HQ and walk down to the quarry. There have not been any reported car break-ins but you should always remove valuables from display anyway.
- 5.8. Jonathan Roberts mentioned the need to organise changes of signatories with the handover of the position of Treasurer. A minuted mandate from CSCC may be necessary. JR earlier reported that East Sussex Scouts Caving Team can't pay and are having difficulties and perhaps this links in with Andy Sparrow's proposition to support younger cavers somehow; Andy Sparrow was passed a letter from them via JR and will follow this up.

**ACTION: ANDY SPARROW**

- 5.9. Rob Norcross asked about the subs level and JR suggested it was kept at the present level, 2nd: Graham Mullen.

**6. CONFIRMATION OF THE DATES OF MEETINGS 2004-2005**

September 4th 2004

December 4th 2004

February 5th 2005

May 7th 2005

All meetings convene at the Hunters Lodge, Priddy, for a 10:30am start. Please arrive early to avoid disturbing the meeting once it has begun. All meeting dates are Saturdays.

Please park in the "new" field car park if attending the meeting.

**POST MEETING NOTE**

Brian Prewer, of Fairy Cave Quarry Management Committee, reports that "All non-leader caves (in the quarry; i.e. Balch's, Fairy, Hilliers etc.) are to be locked with CSCC locks and keys are available from most Mendip clubs". Chris Binding, the new C&A Officer can be contacted for further details. The car park has a combination lock on it and the combination is available to bona fide visitors (call 07968 275969).