



COUNCIL OF SOUTHERN CAVING CLUBS

A constituent member of the British Caving Association

N(B)CA REPRESENTATIVE'S REPORT TO THE CSCC MEETING 4TH DECEMBER 2004

Since I've last produced a written report for you I've attended the N(B)CA National Council meetings on the 22nd May and 9th Oct. I've also attended the Hub meeting on the 13th June. The CSCC had no representation at the Hub meeting on the 25th July; the Hon. Treasurers' car broke down halfway there. The Treasurer did attend the BCA Treasurers' meeting a separate report is available.

I'll cover the non-political stuff first in no particular order.

In the aftermath of the "Mexican Incident" it was felt that having a Press Officer would be a good idea. Thinking more widely it was felt that regional Press Officers would be needed because of the local knowledge that is often needed. The BCA will be issuing some guidelines for talking to the press.

The National Council overturned its longstanding policy and agreed that there was a need to actively promote caving. To that end some promotional posters will be produced.

As part of the Government's push to devolve power, grants are increasingly available locally rather than centrally. We should cultivate good relations with our local authorities and local regional sports board (Sport England – South West)

The National Body is looking at the Community Amateur Sports Club (CASC) legislation. This is a status that might benefit the larger caving clubs, especially those with property. It confers some of the benefits of charitable status, without as many strings. More details are available from www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/casc.

The N(B)CA C&A Officer reports finding the right person in the National Trust to talk to regarding access. Might this person be able to help resolve the digging issues at caves such as Shute Shelve Cavern?

The BCA Logo Competition's deadline has been extended to the New Year. If you want your design to be the new BCA logo or win some money see www.hidden-earth.org.uk/info/competitions.html.

The old NCA website (not to be confused with the current NCA website at www.nca.org.uk) is still live, hosted by the former NCA Webmaster. This causing a problem for us, not to mention the NCA, because search engines are finding CSCC pages with information several years out of date. A letter has been written requesting its removal, but to date that hasn't occurred.

Jim Cochrane has been appointed editor of the BCA Newsletter which is already up to issue two. There is space in it for CSCC news and items if we wish.

Pat Hall of SWCC has been appointed the N(B)CA Auditor. He replaces Pete Haigh who should be thanks for his many years of service.

It looks like, at last, the HSE has taken on board the Adventure Activity Communities representations and the Working at Height Directive or (DRT to us) will not be apply to us.

As part of its policy of verifying that club members are genuine clubs the BCA will need to see your club constitution if it hasn't already. Please be prepared for the request. Guidelines on what constitutes a club and what is an acceptable constitution are available from www.british-caving.org.uk/bca/admin/memform.htm.

The BCA Insurance Officer has announced that it will only be necessary to insure with you first club. There will be no need to pay £6 to your second club etc. A very welcome improvement.

Now the politics.

The CSCC proposal passed at our Emergency GM on the 26th Sept. that **"The CSCC believes that the costs of the BCA Administration should be borne by Clubs and Groups"** after much heated discussion and argument was accepted by the National Council and the CIM subscription was set to zero (for this year at least).

Unfortunately our second proposal **"That the CSCC should continue to set its own subscription to be collected locally"** was not accepted and the BCA set a £15 tithe element effectively collecting our subs. for us. Therefore, to no avail, I voted against the proposed BCA subscriptions. The arguments I put forward in writing were:

- The process of integrating the Regional Councils is happening too fast without proper explanation or consultation.
- No justification has been provided as to why the new system is better than the old.
- There is uncertainty about spending the tithe element. Is it by formula or by grant? If by grant as seems likely, the recent CSCC experience of NCA grants hasn't been entirely happy. There are cash-flow implications to grants. How would the shortfall be made-up if a full grant wasn't forthcoming?
- If Regional Councils are to be fully funded from the centre, where are the controls on a profligate spending council? The RC members spending the money are insulated from the BCA members providing the money.

The meeting accepted that there was no agreed mechanism to distribute the tithe and decided to hold a meeting of Treasurers on 28th Nov. Our Hon. Treasurer attended and has produced a separate report so I'll not repeat its contents here.

The Club subscription set by the National Council was thought to be too high for the smaller clubs. The Treasurers' meeting considered this came up with three solutions. Firstly it proposed a banded subscription, details in the Hon. Treasurers report. Secondly it has reduced the total amount to be collected from £13500 to less than £9500. Thirdly the BCA Journal charge of £5 is now optional. All welcome changes in my opinion.

Now the real politics. You might want your ear defenders ☺

I'm sad to report we are being bullied. A wholly new method of funding Regional Councils (RCs) was proposed at the Treasurers' meeting. It has been labeled the 'Post Prospectus' method and centres around budgets being set for each of the RCs. I don't believe any member of the CSCC was aware of it before the 28th Nov., your elected Representative certainly wasn't. There has been no opportunity to take this back to our respective clubs, and none will be given because it all has to start in less than a months time on 1st Jan. There is no complete description of the new proposals. There has been no opportunity to debate it. There has been no opportunity for consultation. There is no opportunity to put forward alternatives. We are being bullied because our choice isn't whether to accept or reject this proposal, our choice is whether to stay in BCA or not. The minutes of the Treasurers meeting state that if we do not accept this proposal we will be deemed to have 'opted-out'.

It was clear to me that the 'BCA Prospectus' method was deeply flawed. I note that the Treasurers meeting subsequently agreed with me stating that it suffered from "unforeseen difficulties". So subsequent to the National Council meeting I continued to ask "The CSCC currently opposes the tithing mechanism because: A) No justification has been provided as to why the new system is better than the old. B) The mechanism to distribute the tithe has not been defined making it impossible to judge the merit of the new system". To this date I've still not had an answer, being told that by this stage I should know the answer. With no answers and therefore no clear idea of the benefits being sort, I tabled my own thoughts on RC funding that I thought might be a possible compromise/improvement but they were sidelined just as my questions were. The Treasure's meeting agenda said that ALL options for RC funding would be discussed – clearly not.

Anyway, despite this background I urge you to head for the high moral ground and evaluate this new proposal upon its merits. It is certainly an improvement upon the one proposed in the BCA Prospectus. But is it the best possible method?

Improvements over the current system include:

- A single fee gives you membership of all the RCs.
- All RCs will have enough money to do their work because they are guaranteed to receive the funds they require for core services upon request to the BCA.

But the detail is very thin and need fleshing out. Fortunately the BCA Treasurer will be on hand to answer our questions. Here are a few that I have thought of:

- Are BCA C&A grants still available on top?
- How is the budget set?
- Can we see the RC figures used to set the 2005 budget?
- Will this year's budget of £570 be paid on Jan 1st 2005?
- Will emergency C&A work be covered in the following years budget?
- What happens if the BCA has insufficient funds to cover the budget?
- What happens if the RC's Hon. Treasurer hasn't got his figures together?
- What controls are in place to stop an RC asking for more than it needs?
- What controls are in place to check that an RC spent its money wisely and as it said it would?
- Is there a saving on beurocracy and paper pushing?
- Will the CSSC Secretary have to post out 300 sets of minutes?
- Will each club receive minutes from all five RCs at no extra cost?
- Will it be possible for a Club to send a voting representative to any RC general meeting?
- What is the tithe element for a DIM?
- What subscription are the other RCs charging for their non-core services such as 'Derbyshire Caver'.

If the BCA Treasurer puts forwards a convincing case then the crisis is over. If not we will need to ask him one further question. What are the consequences of 'opting out'?

David G Cooke

3rd December 2004