

COUNCIL OF SOUTHERN CAVING CLUBS



A constituent member of the British Caving Association

Minutes of the Open Meeting held on Saturday 2nd December 2006

The start of the Meeting was delayed for 20 minutes by the late arrival of the Secretary (he had only returned to the UK the previous evening!).

1. ATTENDANCE (6, 6 eligible to vote)

Alan Gray (CSCC Chairman, ACG), Steve King (CSCC Secretary, SBSS/SMCC), Dave Cooke (CSCC Webmaster, Wessex CC), Chris Binding (CSCC C&A Officer, Cheddar CC), Alan Dempster (Avon Scouts), Graham Price (Cerberus SS).

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (9)

Chris Whale (CSCC Treasurer, SBSS), Les Williams (CSCC Equipment Officer, Wessex CC), Alan Butcher (CSCC Training Officer, SMCC), Andrew Atkinson (CSCC Bolting Coordinator, UBSS), Jonathan Roberts (MCG), Tim Francis (MCG), Graham Mullan (UBSS), Linda Wilson (UBSS), Toby Maddocks (BEC).

3. APPLICATIONS FOR MEMBERSHIP

None notified.

4. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Secretary said that a note requesting clarification of Item 13.4 had been received from Martin Grass, MRO: The MRO does not have Wardens for specific areas. Nor does it get involved in access negotiations or endorse or condemn the placing of bolts. The Secretary therefore proposed that the words "...the MRO Warden for Portland..." be struck from the Item. This was agreed.

Under Item 18, AD said that he had merely 'noted', not 'complained'!

The Minutes were otherwise agreed to be a true and accurate record. The amended Minutes will be put before the Chairman for signing at the next Meeting and also posted on the Website.

5. ACTIONS FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Item 10.2 – CB/DC to put some photographs of the Star Shaft capping on the CSCC website. **Ongoing.**

Item 10.2 – CB to pass some information on the capping to the *Descent* correspondent. **Done.**

See Descent #193.

Item 10.6 – *Anyone* to pass information on the landowner of the field at Cuckoo to CB/PH. **Done.**

Wayne Starsmore located the landowner. A new concrete ring and lid are at the Wessex awaiting installation. Phil Hendy is liaising with WS.

Item 10.14 – SK to look for details of a Mines Inspector in the CSCC records and pass to CB. **Done.**

A note has also been placed on the CSCC website about the state of the roof in West Twin Brook Adit.

Item 11 – DC to investigate whether training@csccl.org.uk is working correctly? **Fixed.**

Item 13.1 – AA and Les Sykes to finalise bolting certificate proposals to put before BCA. **Taken under Item 13.**

Item 13.3 – AA to coordinate a date, or dates, for bolting Lateral Pitch. **Done.**

Item 13.5 – LesW to deposit the replacement Blue Pencil chain in Swildons as soon as possible. **Ongoing.**

CB noted that he had received two emails from cavers about the poor state of the maillon attaching the present chain. AA & Alison Moody had already placed replacement bolts ready for the new chain. It was agreed that this job needed doing as soon as possible.

Item 14 – DC to consider the issues raised at the last Meeting about Digital Access Data. **Taken under Item 14.**

Item 15 – SK to liaise with AB & CJ on a CSCC Spring Training Event. **Done.**

Item 15 – SK to distribute the BCA/CHECC Youth & Development Campaign proposals. **Done.**

Item 18 – AG to provide dates for Bristol Open Doors in 2007 as soon as possible. **Done (by AD)!**

6. OTHER MATTERS ARISING FROM THE PREVIOUS MINUTES

There were no other matters.

7. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Chairman did not have anything to report.

8. HONORARY SECRETARY'S REPORT

8.1 - Publications received

BCA Council Minutes & Officers Reports, Oct 06

Draft of revised BCA Guidelines on Radon Exposure

8.2 - Correspondence

There is a new contact for the Bristol Exploration Club:
Toby Maddocks, Caving Secretary (BEC), 7 Homefield Close, Winscombe, North Somerset, BS25 1JE.

CSCC Members are asked to amend their records accordingly.

No further correspondence had been received from the Croydon CC (see previous Minutes).

9. HONORARY TREASURER'S REPORT

The Treasurer was not present but had emailed a report to CB (while SK was enroute to the UK). The Current Account stood at £538.55 and the Reserve Account at £3662.26. Since the last Meeting some locks had been paid for and a large reimbursement had been received from the BCA for C&A works conducted in 2005/6 (see Item 10). Otherwise the Treasurer said that he had received little correspondence.

The accounts should be done by the end of the year. Anyone with outstanding expenses should forward them to CW as soon as possible.

The long awaited "summit meeting" of the Regional Treasurers was now due to take place early in the New Year (also see Item 16).

9.1 – **Bedlams Bank Quarry:** SK said that the background to this was that the WCMS had informed the CSCC that they had recently renewed and formalised their access agreement to Bedlams Bank Stone Quarry in Merstham with the landowner's agents. Unfortunately the new agreement had required the WCMS to make the entrances secure, to implement a leader system, and to indemnify the landowner in the amount of £5M. As the BCA insurance policy only provides cover of £2M the WCMS had extended, at extra cost, their existing special cover with another insurer (for the Reigate Caves).

[Note added in proof: Subsequent to the Meeting the WCMS Treasurer provided details of the exact costs incurred; gating materials: £760, locks & keys: £138, policy excess: £120, land agents fees: £250. Further expenditure was envisaged at the time of writing for the hire of a welding generator in order to fit the gates.]

SK proposed that as the WCMS were incurring these costs in order to maintain access to the site for all cavers/mine explorers the CSCC might consider reimbursing the additional insurance premium in its capacity as the regional representative of the NGB whose own insurance policy was proving inadequate in this instance. However others present felt that this would set a precedent that other Clubs with Access Control obligations might argue for, and that in the long run this would represent an annual drain on the CSCC's finances that would not be sustainable. The Meeting considered that the root of the problem was in fact the inadequacy of the BCA cover. Indeed anecdotal evidence suggested that the BCA itself had found its £2M cover a handicap when looking for venues for Hidden Earth! Others noted that £5M cover was now the statutory minimum for employers liability cover. GP suggested that the CSCC should actually ask the BCA to investigate the feasibility of raising its cover from £2M to £5M. The Meeting agreed.

The Meeting then proposed that the legitimate 'one-off' costs incurred by the WCMS in securing and maintaining access to Bedlams Bank should be added to the CSCC's C&A budget for the coming year. Dependent on the level of core funding received and its other works in hand the CSCC would then look to reimburse some or all of those costs to the WCMS.

ACTION: SK to raise the inadequacy of the BCA's indemnity cover with the BCA Council and BCA Insurance Manager.

ACTION: CB to incorporate the WCMS 'one-off' costs into the CSCC C&A budget for 2006/7.

10. CONSERVATION & ACCESS OFFICER'S REPORT

The C&A Officer presented a comprehensive verbal report which is abstracted below:

10.1 - **CSCC C&A Claims:** "Hearty thanks are extended to BCA for coming up trumps with financial support for two major Mendip projects during 2005-06; Star Shaft – full funding received of £1,595.20; Gibbets Brow - full funding received £450."

Outstanding project expenditure remains for 2006/7. Letter(s) have been sent to Bob Mehew/Elsie Little detailing the planned projects (note that this list pre-dates the developments at Bedlams bank, see Item 9 above):

Cuckoo Cleaves: The owner has asked whether funding is available for fencing materials; barbed wire, fence posts etc. CSCC aims to purchase a cement ring and pay for its transportation across the fields. Apparently the lid is being provided FOC.
Funding being sought: £150.

Coral Cave: New recessed lid and cement works, belay/anchor.
Funding being sought: £250.

Star Shaft/Mine: Internal grill in to protect in situ C18th miners' tools and associated industrial archaeology.
Funding being sought: £250.

Hollowfield Swallet: Permission from the landowner to secure this site on Mendip by excavating it has been granted but the works have been pending funding. To reopen and cap entrance to this presently "lost" cave using a Hymac.
Funding being sought: £400.

Loxton Cavern: Major works: Create foundation for a course of walling at the entrance. Build a small wall around the shaft. Gate the entrance. Install a fixed metal ladder, using the newly built wall as a shoring point.

Total being sought: £482.

Cow Hole: MCG believe that RSJs, cement, sand and sundries of approximately £1,000 would be required to stabilise this cave.
Funding being sought: £1,000.

Conservation tape restocking after discovery of Upper Flood Swallet Master Extensions.
Funding being sought: £24.

Grand total being sought: £2,556.

Note: it has also been suggested that cave sites on Mendip should have a “further information” contact (perhaps a web address) – this could tie in with a rolling programme of replacing name plates at Mendip Cave entrances with updated ones including the new procedure for initiating a Cave Rescue. Funding for this is also being requested.

10.2 – **Upper Flood:** A further 400+m was found 1st December! CSCC have made offers of tape/disto etc.

10.3 – **Loxton Cave:** The padlock was vandalised in November. Replaced.

10.4 – **West Twin Brook Adit:** The combination lock/chain was ripped off in November. Replaced. (Note: second lock in 3 months).

10.5 – **Compton Martin Ochre Mine:** The entrance needs urgent work as it is not presently secure – a “job vacancy” advert has been put on line but offers are scarce.

CB said that Compton Martin Ochre Mine was one example of a job, Coral Cave another, that needed doing but for which he did not have the necessary skills or access to the necessary equipment. He said that what he needed, ideally, was a ‘retired engineer with tools and time’ that he could hand off projects to. CB wondered therefore if the CSCC would be willing to consider ‘employing’ someone to get such jobs done. The Meeting had no objection in principle to this, but wanted to discuss the matter further if such an individual came to light.

[If anyone knows someone who might be interested in providing this help to the CSCC, please contact the C&A Officer. SK]

10.6 – **Thrupe Lane:** Anecdotal evidence during the Autumn and early Winter suggest that this cave is now much more susceptible to flooding than it was historically. Beware! Also see Item 13 and the report in *Descent #193*.

10.7 – **Blacknor Hole:** See Item 13.

10.8 – **Swildons Hole:** The vandalism investigation is progressing. The Blue Pencil chain has still not been replaced. Also see Item 13.

Some other C&A issues arose at the Meeting:

10.9 – **Sale of Cave Fossils & Speleotherms:** AG said that *Descent #193* carried a short article by him about someone allegedly selling cave bear bones and teeth from a cave a Westbury-sub-Mendip. As the site is not scheduled it was unlikely that anything could be done to stop the trade, save bringing strong moral pressure on the individual to desist. CB added that he had written to *eBay*, via the BCA C&A Officer, about recent sales of speleotherms from UK caves. A similar campaign in the US had apparently been successful and CB had reused many of the NSS arguments. Further developments are awaited on both issues.

10.10 – **Little London Slocker:** GP said that the Highways Agency were doing works to alleviate surface water flooding in Oakhill; the problem in question being the run-off from the higher ground that uses the road as a conduit. The Highways Agency decided to put in gullies to intercept the water, collect it and then pipe it across a field and into Little London Slocker; a swallet that takes a steady stream most of the year. The known cave is about 50m long. In constructing an outfall at the cave entrance the contractors opened up a previously unknown void alongside. As GP lived in the village and is a drainage engineer his opinion was sought. GP said that the new cave is almost certainly part of Little London but there is no obvious connection at the present time.

Unfortunately the new hole has caused a number of Health & Safety problems for the contractors and further work at the site had come to a halt (as of the date of Meeting). The landowner had then said that he wanted a gate on Little London. The Highways Agency had already built a ‘conning tower’ around the Little London entrance but apparently did not intend to fit a lid or grille, and was flatly refusing to do anything to the hole it had opened up! GP wondered if the CSCC should step in to keep the landowner happy. This was seen by those present as a risky strategy and not one that could be actioned without careful consideration.

ACTION: GP & CB to make a joint site visit.

ACTION: CB to report back to the CSCC.

1011 – **Withybrook Slocker & Parfitt’s Hole:** GP also had news that he and his wife had become the new owners of Withybrook Slocker and Parfitt’s Hole. Both caves form an important part of the upstream Fairy Quarry cave system and had fallen into a very poor state of repair. GP said that Withybrook Slocker, which lies beside the road, had long been used for drainage. In 1934 the old Shepton Mallet Rural District Council had built up the entrance and installed silt traps. The entrance was further underpinned in 1947, and it was regularly maintained until the 1970’s. However since then the silt traps had not been emptied and there was now evidence of subsidence. GP said that he had been concerned that if there was a collapse a lot of silt could have been released into the Master Cave with potentially devastating consequences for Withyhill Cave, etc.

GP said that the caves were actually an SSSI and that he had been in contact with Natural England. They wanted to see remedial works put in place and had estimated the cost at £50k. GP was hoping(!) that this would come in the form of a grant, and that Natural England would bring pressure to bear on the Highways Agency to fulfil their obligations.

Added in proof:

10.12 – **Cookswood Planning Application:** *The MCG were contacted by email by the Planning Department at Mendip District Council on 7th December and asked if they wished to comment on a planning application to build 140 holiday chalets in Cookswood Quarry near Stoke St Michael (see <http://www.mendip.gov.uk/pods/AppInfo.asp?AppNo=067818%2F010>). The consultation period expires on 1st January 2007. MCG forwarded the email to the CSCC. After a flurry of emails over the following weekend it became apparent that some local cavers were aware of the application and had been following developments. Stoke Lane Slocker lies outside of the proposed development area but Brownes Hole, Twister Rift, Hurricane Hole and Arachnid Rift do not. The application seeks to place a grille on Brownes Hole to protect the bats, but does not specifically mention the latter three sites. As Arachnid Rift is a very important bat hibernation site Martin Grass approached Bob Cornes at Natural England. NE were unaware of Arachnid Rift! As at 11th December Martin/CSCC are waiting to hear what NE plan to do in respect of the application. However the general consensus seems to be that the locals are in favour of the development, that the developer has done a good environmental impact study, and that the impact of the development on known caves will be negligible (though obviously any potential future access negotiations for Brownes Hole and Stoke Lane Slocker might be more complicated).*

11. TRAINING OFFICER'S REPORT

The Training Officer was not present but had passed on a message (via DC) that he had nothing to report.

12. EQUIPMENT OFFICER'S REPORT

The Equipment Officer was not present but had provided DC with a copy of the summary notes from the Meeting of BCA Equipment Officers held on 11th November. DC noted that:

- The Meeting had been considered to be very constructive;
- The EO's were proposing to adopt the 'mountaineering standard' for bolt placements. In essence this means that bolters will be required to attain a slightly higher level of expertise (including SRT rigging competency), but once bolts have been placed they will not be regularly checked. Bolts will only be checked/tested if a problem is reported. (This change in protocol is being driven by the practicalities of keeping the already large number of bolts placed underground within the present inspection regime);
- BCA will purchase three Hilti drills (one for the CNCC, one for the DCA, and one to be shared between the CSCC, CCC & DCUC);
- Efforts are underway to unify and digitise the record keeping across the Regional Councils associated with the training of bolters and the bolts that have been placed;
- There will be no further bolt installation workshops in 2007 pending the overhaul of the system. Workshops will recommence in 2008;
- The national bolt stockpile is now depleted. New stock will need to be sourced and type tested which will inevitably lead to long delays for new bolting projects.

[NB: Please consult the Minutes of the BCA EO's meeting for the actual wording on these issues. SK]

13. BOLTING COORDINATOR'S REPORT

The Bolting Coordinator was not present and had not sent a report, however CB and SK were able to provide some updates.

13.1 – **Bolting Certificates:** see Item 12 above.

13.2 – **Swildons Hole:** The Blue Pencil chain still needs to be replaced. See Item 5 above.

13.3 – **Thrupe Lane Swallet:** Thanks to sterling work by AA, CB & Alison Moody all of the trade routes in the cave have now been P-bolted. This includes Perserverence Pot, the bottom of the Marble Streamway, Lateral Pitch, Ledge Pitch, and Slither Pot. The team has noted that additional bolts could be placed in High Atlas but currently have no plans to install any there, partly because of the weather (see Item 10 above). DC said that the list of bolts on the website needed updating.

ACTION: AA/CB to provide DC with an updated list of CSCC bolts for the website.

13.4 – **Blacknor Hole:** Following the last Meeting Ed Waters/Hayley Clarke (SMCC) paid a visit to the cave whilst 'in the area':

"Suffice to say the fact that the bolts are 'out of test' is a bit academic as the bolts at the top of the cliff have been 'chopped'. In fact there are no belays of any description left at the top of the cliff by which a descent to the Main Entrance could be made. This is presumably due to the dispute between climbers and the owners of Blacknor Fort, there are plenty of big signs stating that climbing is verboten, and I assume this includes caving.

Looking over the edge showed the rebelay bolt just over the lip to be intact, though I was not brave enough to jump over and look at the bolts in the entrance, I think it is safe to assume that these are still there. Access to the cliff top path is still OK.

We also had a look round the undercliff, the entrance to Sandy Hole (lower entrance to the Blacknor system) continues to climb up the cliff face (well in fact the undercliff is slipping down, so it is higher up the cliff). Judging by the bits of wood and scrap iron wedged into cracks in the rock plenty of people are still visiting this cave.

Though I know the access is a bit delicate (if the landowner knows any is taking place) this may be a place to consider a fixed aid to prevent the inevitable accident. Though probably on a very QT basis. It is unlikely anyone will object judging by the impressive number of resin anchors placed on the cliffs by climbers."

A discussion followed about the relative merits of placing a bolt in the entrance to Sandy Hole; viz safeguarding the climb up versus making the entrance *too* accessible. It was also pointed out that if people *were* visiting the system they might do a reverse through trip and abseil out of Blacknor using the bolts in the entrance. No conclusions were reached. SK suggested that a site visit might be necessary to assess the situation at first hand?

[If anyone has any strong views on what should be done at Blacknor Hole, please contact the CSCC C&A Officer. SK]

ACTION: DC to place a note on the website explaining why the Blacknor bolts are out of test, and to update the access information.

14. WEBMASTERS REPORT

The Webmaster said that all of the CSCC access data was now in a database. This made it much easier for him to update, or to export (in XML format) to anyone requesting it in the future.

In respect of comments made at the previous Meeting about cavers providing updates on descriptions of caves, DC said that he was looking at making the cave descriptions on the website into a Wiki – the access descriptions however would stay under tighter control. After the inevitable explanation of what a Wiki was, the Meeting concurred with DC's suggestion.

15. ASSISTANCE TO UNIVERSITY CLUBS

CSCC University Club Training Event: SK said that following the previous Meeting he had emailed Chris Jewell outlining the terms under which the CSCC were prepared to host this event, and to seek Chris' views on a possible date. Chris had replied that "*An event as you describe sounds fine. I would suggest the 24-25th February or a weekend very near this*". The dates suggested had then been circulated to the Officers and no objections or problems had been raised.

As Roger Dors was in the room at that moment, the Meeting asked him if the Long Room at the Hunters Inn was available on those dates. Roger said it was but did ask for confirmation of the event nearer the time. AG said that given the general agreement and willingness to do something the event should proceed. CB volunteered to take the lead on the organisation.

CSCC Clubs, particularly those on Mendip, are asked to consider what help they might provide for the event. Please liaise with CB.

[Note added in proof: CB has emailed Chris Jewell and the new CHECC Chairperson, Maxine Bateman (maxb727@hotmail.com), with details to get the ball rolling.]

16. BCA MATTERS

SK, DC & LW had all attended the Meeting of BCA Council on 7th October.

SK said that provided there were no surprises with the insurance renewal, Council had agreed that subscriptions should remain at their 2006 level. Furthermore it was agreed to set a budget for 2007 that would exceed income by about £13k. The purpose of this is to make some measured funding available for a number of projects and initiatives that should help to promote BCA and its work; e.g. C&A work, the *So You Want To Go Caving?* campaign, expeditions, etc.

[On behalf of the CSCC, CB has already submitted a programme of costed C&A work for 2007 amounting to over £2.5k. See Item 10. But this was before the WCMS issue arose, see Item 9. SK].

Bob Mehew made a recommendation that the BCA should register as a CASC (to avoid tax). This is being considered by the Executive.

There have been a number of personnel changes on the BCA Council and its Committees:

- Jenny Potts (the DCA Secretary/Treasurer) is presently Acting BCA Secretary until a new Secretary can be found;
- DC has taken over from JR as Acting BCA Treasurer pending confirmation at the AGM in March;
- Pat Ramsden has 'retired' as the Administrator for the BCA Training Committee and a replacement is needed;
- Idris Williams has indicated that he will step down as the BCA Training Officer at the AGM in March and a replacement is needed.

DC said that he would call a Meeting of the Regional Council Treasurers early in the New Year.

Correspondence had been received from the Speleological Union of the European Union (FSUE, www.fsue.org) which has a funding available for Euro Speleo Projects:

"EuroSpeleo Projects can fund activities like educational, technical or scientific trainings, exploration and youth camps, expeditions in or outside Europe, media publications (books, films, softwares, photos, etc), caving meetings (festival, symposium, exhibitions, congresses, etc) ...

EuroSpeleo Projects can fund every club, local federation and national commission or federation who belong to a country member of FSUE. It can also fund the FSUE European technical commissions. For projects organized by a club or a local federation, please send the request form by email to your national federation that will transmit it to the FSUE Bureau.

The submitted activity should be opened to all European cavers, and should include cavers from at least 5 European countries. It can of course also include cavers from outside Europe. It should be held in several languages in order to facilitate as much as possible the participation of cavers from all parts of Europe, if possible including the two working languages of FSUE (English and French).

For this first year of functioning going from 1st of October 2006 up to 30th of June 2007, 1.500 euros have been planned for grants, going from 100 to 500 euros per project. If necessary this budget line could be reviewed according to the number of projects received. The idea is to develop the level of grants in the coming years and to adapt EuroSpeleo Projects to the needs of cavers according to your remarks.”

17. FORTHCOMING EVENTS

BCA Council Meeting, January 13th 2007.

CSCC University Club Training Event, February 23rd-25th 2007.

BCA Annual General Meeting & Council Meeting, March 24th 2007.

Bristol Open Doors Day, September 8th 2007 - <http://www.bristoldoorsopenday.org/>

18. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

19. DATES OF NEXT SCHEDULED MEETINGS

(all at the Hunters Inn, Priddy, 10:30)

February 3rd 2007

May 5th 2007 (AGM)