

General Meeting of the Council of Southern Caving Clubs

The meeting will take place on Monday 19th August at 7.00pm and will be held online using Zoom.

A link to join the meeting will be circulated closer to the date and be available on the website. The meeting is open to all cavers.

The agenda will be published on the CSCC website and can be downloaded from this link: [CSCC AGM agenda 2024](#).

Chair and Guest Editor Report

Welcome to the latest Newsletter. Peter as the Comms. Officer would normally produce the Newsletter but has passed the task over this quarter due to other commitments. Along with the usual officer reports there is news, events and other odd items I hope are of interest.

Topics to be discussed at the meeting include improving the situation at Bethel Quarry, re-gating Cow Hole, an update on the Loxton caves and the best way to move the Exploratory Anchor Placement Guide forward.

Forthcoming events include the launch of Somerset Underground Vol. 4, the final book in Rob Taviner's epic series covering almost every conceivable underground site in the historic County of Somerset. Hidden Earth, the national caving conference is in North Wales this year and further afield is the International Congress of Speleology. The ICS is held every four years. It is Hidden Earth on steroids and will be held in Brazil in July 2025.

David Cooke

Chairman

Conservation & Access Officer Report

Please find below the Conservation & Access Officer's Report. This covers the period since the last meeting in May 2024.

Longleat

We continue to make positive and significant progress with Longleat to regain access to their caves in Cheddar Gorge.

In June, Mendip Cave Rescue conducted a successful practice rescue from the Boulder Chamber in Gough's cave. Cheddar Show Caves consider a rescue from this area to be the most likely real-life situation, so it was good that practice went smoothly.

Also, in June, I had a meeting with Matt, the newly appointed H&S Consultant for Longleat. We discussed the proposed access agreement and he had no objections from a H&S point of view.

In a follow up meeting with Paul (Cheddar Facilities Manager) on 02/08/2024, it was confirmed that Matt has submitted a H&S report to the board in favour of re-establishing caver access. Even though the proposed access agreement has yet to be formally presented to the Longleat Board, Paul is still hopeful that it will be approved during September 2024.

Bethel Quarry



Following a report of increased anti-social behaviour at Bethel Quarry (Bradford-on-Avon), a joint visit was arranged with the MCG to assess what could be done to reduce this. The Quarry is has two entrances, an adit in the centre of the town and an escape / air shaft in a field above the town. It is a very popular site for both Mine and Urban explorers. It has a very interesting history, including being operated as a mushroom farm and containing the remnants of one of the largest illegal cannabis farms ever found in the UK.

Both the entrances were inspected and both are insecure. We visited the farmer responsible for the field which contains the air shaft entrance and he explained his concerns (strangers wandering around late at night, making noise, disturbing his cattle, leaving gates open, etc). He would like the fixed ladder removed from the air shaft and a secure lid installed. He believes this would dissuade the

“undesirable” visitors but still allow access to bona fide Mine and Cave explorers.

The building containing the air shaft belongs to different person and, as I explained, it would only be possible to do the suggested work with the consent of this owner. The farmer has provide some contact details for the owner but believes they won't want to get involved. I have tried to contact the owner and have yet to get a response.

Cow Hole



A report was received from the MCG that the lid for Cow Hole (Ubley Hill area) was in a poor state. An inspection was conducted and the lid does have some issues. The hinges are pretty much seized, the lid frame is not secured and thus the whole lid and frame can be lifted, the lid is bowed and the top concrete tube has started to crumble away. Most of this is probably due to it being run over by a tractor.

The landowner has been identified and I will discuss with them the options for addressing the situation, including raising the entrance above ground level (this will make it much easier for cavers to find and tractors to avoid).

Singing River Mine

The Singing River Mine access agreement has now been in place for 10 months and is running smoothly. During this time there have been 15 trips, involving some 90 cavers.

Wookey Hole Cave

A report was received that the rope around Sting Corner in Wookey 24 was broken. The rope is used primarily by divers to allow them to pass the deep water in high flow conditions. A

replacement rope was sourced but members of the CDG managed to repair the in-situ rope.

The access agreement with Wookey has run without issue over the past three months. There have been 7 trips since the May CSCC meeting, involving some 40 cavers.

Pressure Washers

The CSCC Pressure Washers have been loaned out on two occasions since the last meeting. The BEC borrowed them for clean-up in St Cuthberts but, unfortunately, the planned visit did

not happen. The diggers at Grebe Swallet then borrowed them but, unfortunately, could not get them to work after carrying them to the underground site. This was due to one having a seized motor (now unseized and working fine) and another having a cracked coupling, causing it to suck air rather than water (now repaired).

Hopefully the next people to borrow them will have more success!

CSCC Access Guide

A fair number of updates have been made to the online CSCC Access Guide. This includes a warning about potential bad air in Pinetree Pot, updated Tween Twins information and updates to 7 East Mendip caves as a result of research for the new MU6.

Future Priorities

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

1. Continue negotiations with Longleat.
2. Cow Hole entrance work

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

Wayne Starsmore

C&A Officer

BCA Officer Report

Since my last report, BCA now has a new chair, Rostam Namaghi, and a new secretary, Aiden Kuhlmann. Chris Bolton was confirmed in post as treasurer. The two individual representatives are Andy Eavis (re-standing from last year) and Jess Brock, joining council for the first time. The group representatives are Jenny Potts (re-standing from last year) and Aodhán Ó Gabhann, also joining council for the first time. Zac Woodford is now BCA's Publications and Information Officer.

Speaking personally, I am delighted to see more female representation on Council. Jess has just graduated from the University of Bristol and, having been brought up in a caving family, has been an excellent tackle officer and training officer for UBSS during her time at uni. I'm also delighted that council has been joined by Aodhán Ó Gabhann as he is the current chair of SUI (who are both the National Body for Irish caving and also a member club of BCA). Many Mendip cavers have strong links with Ireland, and it's good to see these ties being strengthened at national level as well.

The first meeting of the new council was chaired efficiently and pleasantly by Rostam, with the main job of the meeting being to confirm the various working groups. The minutes aren't yet available, but from memory (for once I failed to take notes!) there was nothing contentious. I voted in favour of the minutes containing a record of who voted which way. This had in fact been agreed some time ago, but not implemented due to administrative hassles. I also asked for council members' attendance records to be recorded and added to the minutes, as I think it's

important for cavers to know how often their representatives engage with the organization. This was agreed and will be implemented.

A proposal by the new secretary to publish video recordings of council meetings and publish them on a YouTube channel was withdrawn after some discussion. Myself and several other people spoke against this for various reasons, one of which being that this might inhibit discussion and could make it easy for parts of the meeting to be taken out of context (the spectre of tik tok videos doing the rounds raised a laugh, but also illustrated the point about how things can take on a life not entirely of their own making when released into the wild). Such a step might also be a barrier to participation and recorded meetings often devolve into a sea of black with only names appearing on screen. Any cavers interested in the workings of council are able to join the meeting as observers, and if anyone wishes to do this, please let me have your name and email address and I will pass these to the secretary so you can be sent the link for the meeting.

Rostam has proposed a return to in person AGMs, rotating around the country, to allow face to face meetings and the wider engagement that goes with that, but meetings will still allow online attendance and will be set up and managed on a hybrid basis. On that basis, I had no objection to the proposal.

BCA are in the process of migrating their membership system to an external provider, JustGo, and it is hoped that parts of this system will be going live shortly. The Qualifications Management Committee have been using this system successfully for some time.

Chris Bolton is getting to grips with the treasurer's job. In his report to council, he said, "Since BCA now has limited reserves it is necessary to be a bit tighter on budget and prediction. This autumn I will be asking Regional Councils (as well as Working Groups and Committees) to estimate their likely costs in 2025. This should include planned items (a conservation project, a batch of bolts, etc) and an allowance for things that typically come up. Council can then compare the potential total with the available funds and agree a budget. I don't expect that budgets will be set in stone and there will be flexibility during the year. The objective is to be able to monitor how things are going, know where any spare cash is and avoid shocks at the end of the year." This is clearly something that CSCC will need to consider and get to grips with. His approach seems both sensible and financially prudent.

However, it's not all been plain sailing. BCA members will be aware of a recent data breach. Once this was notified, the problem was quickly dealt with. A full statement can be found on BCA's website here: <https://british-caving.org.uk/data-breach-dims/>

As ever, if you have any questions or issues relating to BCA, please contact me and I'll do my best to respond/help where I can.

Linda Wilson

BCA Representative

Equipment Officer

There was a report of a loose anchor in Hunters Hole. It has been checked and showed no signs of movement. One common reason for this behaviour is the resin not being adhered to the rock. These then can 'stick' depending on the way they are loaded and then not moved by hand. Previously these anchors have remained safe to use, especially given safe rigging practice.

My recommendation is to leave for now and if it is found to be moving again it will be replaced. I've reported back to the person that sent in the loose anchor concern.

At the meeting it would be good to get feedback and possibly agreed adoption of the exploratory anchor placement guide.

Andrew Atkinson

Equipment Officer

Training

Currently there are no training events organised. The Training Officer is very happy to organise training for clubs if they contact him directly.

Fun Fact



Apparently Cheddar Gorge and the caves inspired Tolkien's Lord of the Rings. Gough's Cave inspired the Glittering Caves of Aglarond and the Gorge with its high cliffs inspired Helm's Deep. This and other fascinating stories from Somerset are told in Radio Somerset's series Secret Somerset. Have a listen at

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p0j9ssw6>

News

STOP PRESS Sludge Pit Breakthrough

This week members of the Cheddar Caving Club have joined two digs in Sludge Pit Hole that connect the upper series to the streamway by an 11m pitch. This link, and two others opened over the last 18 months, create a long, complex and varied round trip which includes two new pitches.

GB Cavern – Waterfall Route Re-opened



The Waterfall climb in GB Cavern, Somerset was closed in 2021 after a major rockfall. Following a recent inspection, Charterhouse Caving Company Ltd (CCC Ltd) have now re-opened the route and have issued the following statement:

A major rockfall occurred in GB Cavern in April 2021, and following a safety inspection by the CCC Ltd Conservation officer and two CCC Ltd directors, cavers were informed that the route down Main Chamber via the Waterfall climb should not be used and that cavers should take the alternative route over the Bridge and via White Passage etc to reach Main Chamber.

The intention was to a) see if any further falls would occur and b) to see how the unstable collapse of rocks and mud settled with the benefit of higher water conditions over winter.

CCC Ltd have monitored the area since the collapse occurred and following a recent trip to assess the stability of the area, the directors and conservation officer of CCC Ltd are pleased to announce that there appear to have been no further major rockfalls and that the mud and boulder fall appears stable, so far as can be ascertained from a visual inspection there, and that there have been no significant changes since April 2021, despite some severely wet periods, therefore as a result of this inspection, the warning signs and tape has been removed from the top and bottom of the Waterfall climb. However, the warning tape above the left-hand side (when facing upstream) has been left as there is a sharp drop on that side and mud has slumped from there in the past.

Cavers are advised to take care when using the Waterfall route, particularly the boulder slope below the waterfall since more settlement may still occur here as cavers use the route. Cavers are requested to report any changes to CCC Ltd for further assessment if needed. Thank you all for your patience.

Gabriel Littler

CCC Ltd Secretary

May 2024

Photo: The rock pile at the base of the waterfall climb just after the wall collapsed by CCC Ltd director Dave King.

Cavers Cycling To Keep Air Ambulance Flying



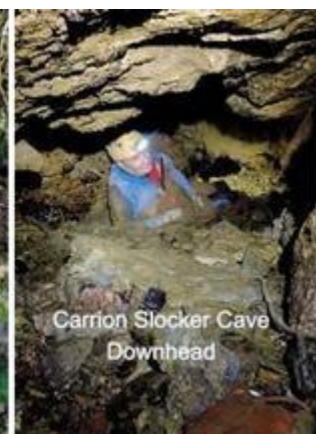
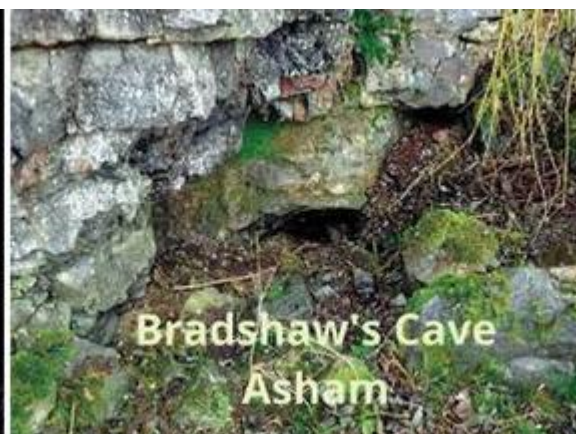
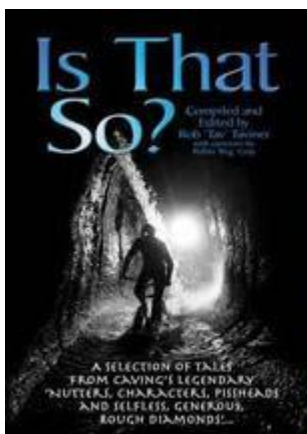
Rich, Jude, Andrea & Richard will be cycling over 1000 miles from Lands End to John O Groats this August. Please support them on their long journey to raise essential funds for Dorset and Somerset Air Ambulance.

The DSAA provides life-saving, pre-hospital critical care, to patients in need. They are a vital part of the community across Dorset and Somerset and they rely on your support. Last year, they were tasked with no less than 2,424 incidents. They are 95% funded by charitable giving.

Please support the team in this challenge by donating at <https://www.justgiving.com/page/richard-marlow-1718733636185>

You can follow the team's progress on their Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61562058151687>

Mendip Cave Registry & Archive News



The MCRA website is a constantly expanding resource of data for cavers and those interested in the subterranean world. The information primarily to caves and mines in the area of Bristol, Somerset, Bath, Wiltshire and Dorset.

Recently the MCRA have added three books excellent to the website that are free to download from the Articles and Books section.

The first is Rob 'Tav' Taviner's, long out of print, Is That So? A rude, naughty and downright bizarre tales from some of the UK's best-known cavers.

The other two are by Andy Watson, both are photo-books telling the story of digging and discoveries in Carrion Stocker, Downhead and Bradshaw's Cave, Asham Wood, Mendip.

SAP 6 Launched

The Shetland Attack Pony 6 is a cave surveying tool. It is completely open source, all the code and hardware designs are available in a public GitHub repository.

Since the DistoX went out of production cave surveyors have been searching for a replacement at a sensible price. The SAP 6 might be it. It costs £280 and is available from

<https://www.shetlandattackpony.co.uk/>

Forthcoming Events

BOOK LAUNCH
BACK ROOM · HUNTERS LODGE
SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 7th · 7.30pm

£10
£12.50 inc. p&p

SOMERSET UNDERGROUND
VOLUME 4
East Mendip, Bath and South Somerset
R. M. Taviner

Volume Four of Four covering the caves, mines & associated features of the whole of Somerset.

MCRA

Hidden Earth 2024 Announced

The UK's National Caving Conference

The location is Llangollen Pavilion in North Wales from the 20th to 22nd September 2024. Keep an eye on the website and social media for updates and ticket info - <https://hidden.earth>

Hidden Earth is the name for the British Cave Research Association's (BCRA's) annual caving conference. This weekend-long event taking place in September every year is a friendly, educational, inspiring and social gathering of hundreds of cavers from across the UK and overseas.



The weekend is packed with lectures, with two or three parallel sessions running both days. Topics include new and old exploration from the UK and overseas as well as workshops covering cave science, research, technology and photography. There are competitions, games, videos and a trade hall with caving equipment vendors from across Europe selling their latest products. We also have our own bar (with excellent beer) and conference dinner with entertainment on the Saturday night to make this a great social occasion.

This is the premium opportunity for cavers from across the UK and overseas to get together, celebrate caving, and be enthused about British cave exploration and research.

19th International Congress of Speleology

20 – 27 Jul 2025, Belo Horizonte, State of Minas Gerais, Brazil

The Brazilian Speleological Society (SBE) and the National Center for Research and Conservation of Caves (ICMBio/CECAV) are proud to host the 19th International Congress of Speleology (ICS) in 2025, which will include the 38th Brazilian Congress of Speleology (CBE) into a single combined event and will also host the major celebration of the 60th Anniversary of the UIS.



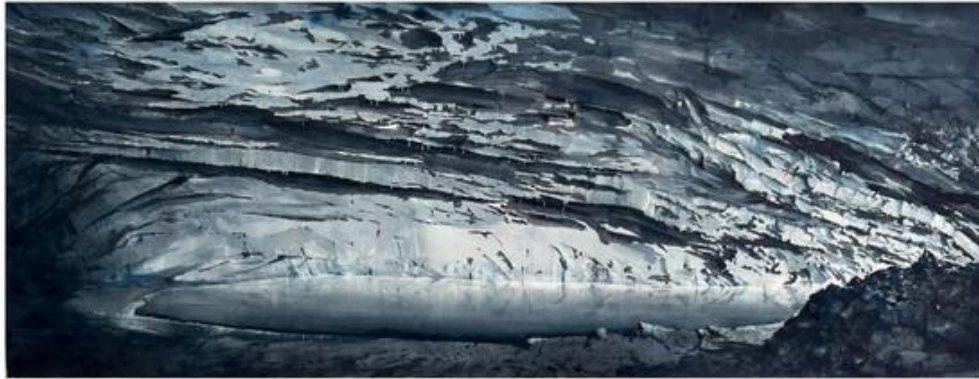
Seventy-two years after the first ICS (Paris, 1953), for the second time we will have an ICS in Brazil.

While the 13th ICS (Brasília, 2001) had “Speleology of the Third Millennium: Sustainable Development of Karst Environments” as its theme, the host city of the 19th ICS in 2025 will be Belo Horizonte (BH), capital of the state of Minas Gerais, and the theme will be “60 Years of the UIS: History to the Future.”

The Minascentro Convention Center will be the venue, but you will be the honored guest!

For more information see <https://www.speleo2025.org/>

Out of Time: Underground Mendip



**Herbert E Balch : John Hassall : Ben
Rivers : Harry Savory : Emma Stibbon**

9 July - 7 September 2024

Entry to the exhibition is included in the Museum's entry charge.
8 Cathedral Green, Wells, Somerset BA5 2UE



Made possible with

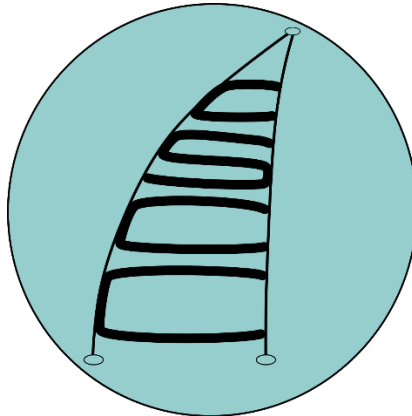
**Heritage
Fund**

Out of Time: Underground Mendip

The final exhibition as part of the Search & Learn project, Out of Time: Underground Mendip is now on display in the museum's Exhibition Room and the Balch Room until Saturday 7 September. Curated by Josephine Lanyon, the exhibition features a series of black and white pen and ink drawings by the museum's founder Herbert E Balch, alongside works by his contemporaries John Hassall and Harry Savory, and contemporary artists Ben Rivers and Emma Stibbon.

Netherworld of Mendip

The Wells Museum's also houses a permanent exhibition on caving called the Netherworld of Mendip. It explores the fascinating subterranean world that lies hidden beneath the Mendip Hills. The exhibition charts the development of caving and cave diving, and the history of cave exploration.



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Our mailing address is:

Council of Southern Caving Clubs
Hunters Lodge Inn
Priddy
Wells, Somerset BA5 3AR
United Kingdom