



COUNCIL OF SOUTHERN CAVING CLUBS

NEWSLETTER

May 2024



**Templeton Pot
Photo: Peter Burgess**

Annual General Meeting of the Council of Southern Caving Clubs

The meeting will take place on Friday 10th May at 7.00pm and will be held online using Zoom.

A link to join the meeting will be circulated closer to the date.

The agenda has been published on the CSCC website and can be downloaded from this link:

[CSCC AGM agenda 2024.](#)

Some News in Brief

St. Cuthbert's Swallet - a new rescue cache has been placed in the entrance series of the cave for emergencies. All leaders are aware of its location.

Pressure Washers - CSCC holds cleaning tools in the form of pressure washers, which may be borrowed for cave conservation purposes. If you or your club have a project that would benefit from the use of this equipment for cleaning calcite formations, please contact Wayne Starsmore with your project and a request to borrow the washers.

Conservation & Access Report - May 2024

This report covers the period since the last CSCC meeting in February 2024.

Longleat

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

In March, the Board of Longleat gave their blessing to getting an access agreement in place. Sarah, the Longleat Estates Director, has asked that we formulate and submit a proposal. Subsequently I have met with Paul (Cheddar Facilities Manager) and Ben (Saville's Land Agent) to discuss and agree an outline access agreement that covers Recreational Caving, Cave

Digging and Cave Diving. This has been written up and submitted to Longleat for their consideration.

We are hoping to have some feedback towards the end of April / beginning of May and can then move to drafting a formal agreement. Initially this agreement will be quite restrictive but both parties will seek to ease the restrictions and simplify the agreement as time progresses and trust builds.

Goatchurch Cavern

A boulder fall was reported at Goatchurch Cavern. As this is one of the most popular caves on Mendip, especially with Scout and Novice groups, it was inspected the same day. Fortunately it was not a serious issue, a large block had been “washed” out of the fill to the left of the main entrance and had slipped onto the floor.



Goatchurch Cavern entrance. The offending boulder is highlighted. Photo: Wayne Starsmore

The boulder was “Plugged and Feathered” into manageable pieces and stacked out of the way. A follow-up inspection two weeks later revealed no further issues.

Loxton Cavern

The Cerberus Caving Club have approached Loxton Parish Council directly and appear to have entered into an access agreement that covers all the caves in the parish. This seems to supersede and replace the agreement the parish council had with CSCC stretching back some 20 years. We have written to the parish council asking for clarification and await their response.

Singing River Mine

The Singing River Mine access agreement has now been in place for a little over 6 months and is running smoothly. During this time there have been 13 trips, involving some 80 cavers.

Wookey Hole Cave

The access agreement with Wookey has run without issue over the past three months. Trip volumes are falling back from the initial high volumes. There have been 5 trips since the February CSCC meeting, involving some 26 cavers.

Future Priorities

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

- 1) Continue negotiations with Longleat.
- 2) Clarify the access situation for Loxton Cavern

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

Wayne Starsmore
C&A Officer
CSCC

BCA News (Linda Wilson, CSCC BCA Representative)

As reported in our last newsletter, current BCA chair Russell Myers is not standing for election at the AGM in May. Russell has served a three-year term as well as acting as secretary for nearly three years prior to that. He has steered BCA away from a period of toxicity that saw the resignation of two chairs in quick succession into a period of calm where BCA has simply got on with the job of supporting cavers through its provision of insurance, training, funding for conservation and access in the regions and the support of youth and development. All these areas are vital for cavers in general but so often BCA attracts unwarranted criticism and rarely gets the credit for the work it does. Having served as CSCC's rep on BCA Council for approximately seven years, I've seen at first hand the good it does, and I hope the new chair will continue to look forwards rather than backwards, and that he will maintain the air of calm and good-humour that has prevailed in council meetings under Russell's guidance.

In the past two months, BCA has been successful in filling two of the vacant positions. Firstly that of treasurer, with Chris Bolton indicating a willingness to take on the role. He attended the last council meeting and I think he will bring both robust common sense and sound financial knowledge to the role. Second, Zac Woodford was co-opted to the vacant individual member position. Zac succeeded admirably in lowering the average age on council considerably.

However, Council still lacks sufficient diversity to enable it to be truly representative of British cavers and I hope this is something that can be addressed in the future. Perhaps clubs could give some thought to staking a step to redress this at the meeting by making a nomination from the floor for the vacant group representative position.

The following nominations have been received for posts at the AGM.

Nominations

Chair

Rostam Namaghi (10644) Prop Josh White (14859) 2nd Jonathan Lester (17140)

Secretary

Allan Richardson (00022) Prop Russell Myers (00708) 2nd Jenny Potts (00062)

Aidan Kuhlman (20697) Prop Rostam Namaghi (10644) 2nd Pete Knight (09382)

Treasurer

Chris Bolton (07006) Prop Russell Myers (00708) 2nd Allan Richardson (00022)

Individual Representatives

1. Andy Eavis (07816) Prop Russell Myers (00708) 2nd Allan Richardson (00022)

2. Zac Woodford (19834) Prop Linda Wilson (02552) 2nd Jenny Potts (00062)

Group Representative

1. Jenny Potts (00062) Prop Russell Myers (00708) 2nd Allan Richardson (00022)

2. Vacant

Discussion Document - Proposed anchor practice during new exploration

Our Equipment Officer Andrew Atkinson has put together some proposed guidelines for the placement of anchors during the exploration of newly-discovered cave passage. We publish it here and encourage you all to feed back your suggestions to Andrew.

When a new pitch or other vertical feature is found whilst exploring new passage, there is often a fever to explore and survey as quickly as possible. However, if the explorers are lucky enough to discover significant or interesting cave beyond there is a real likelihood that the obstacle will need to be passed by many other cavers in the future.

Good rigging often can only be done in very limited places, so the placement of the 'exploratory' anchors is important as they may reduce the possibilities for future rigging.

With this in mind the following has been drafted as a guide.

Whatever anchors are placed, at some point they will wear out or corrode. A method of replacing the anchor at the end of life is important, as often they will be in the best place for future anchors. Some types of anchor form a tension cone whether loaded or not, others form this only when loaded. As a result, anchors need to be a suitable distance away from other anchors. This distance varies with the type of anchor.

Current best practice is to use resin anchors as, if chosen well, these can be removed and the hole reused. This document is written on the assumption that the vertical obstacle will eventually be rigged with British Caving Association (BCA) approved resin anchors.

Descending Vertical Obstacles

The following is the preferred method of rigging a pitch discovered while exploring:

1. Use of natural belay points.

This causes very little damage leaving a clean canvas to work with, but natural belays should be chosen with care for safety reasons and not to damage the scientific and aesthetic value of the passage.

2. Petzl Pulse anchors or equivalent.

These require an eight or twelve millimetre hole and the anchor can be removed on every trip if required. This leaves minimal damage to the pitch head and might be suitable for long term rigging if the pitch is very rarely visited. Although not cheap, most exploration on Mendip uses explosives and when compared to that cost it is likely to be far cheaper per metre of passage.

3. Concrete Screws.

Various sizes are available, but do not work well in some limestone. These can be removed and the hole used for something else.

4. BCA approved resin anchors.

If done correctly this would be ideal. Modern resins are very quick to set and come to full strength, so could be used on the same trip. However, the final best anchor placements may not be apparent until sometime after the anchors are first required for exploration to continue, therefore due consideration should be made for future anchor placements.

5. Removable rawl bolts.

These have been used for many decades, however the hole needed is very large, but could be reused for resin anchors. The knowledge of this use is limited.

6. Spits or equivalent.

Although these do produce a cone of tension when not loaded, their small size (10mm for drilled drop in and 12mm for hand drilled) means that they can be drilled out with a core bit and the tension removed allowing either the hole to be reused or a very close location used instead.

7. Through bolts

Anchor should be chosen with a consideration to future removal. While remaining suitable for the rock conditions, thinner and shorter tends to make removal easier, stainless steel is harder to drill through. The holes should be always over-drilled to a depth where the bolt can be fully knocked into the rock to remove the tension and hide the anchor. Hopefully this is not what will be done, as it leaves a piece of corroding metal in the rock with unknown consequences. The over-drilling aids removal, however it is still difficult and not always successful.

What not to use

Anchors that come with a built in plate that cannot be removed are extremely difficult to remove. If they are the type that tensions the rock, it is often not possible to relieve this tension, therefore producing a larger area that cannot be reused. It is also known that certain resin anchors, the helical ones in particular, are extremely difficult to get out and often damage a very large area when removed.

Aven climbing

This often requires a large number of anchor placements, many of which will not be reused. Exploration should be done with the aim of leaving behind the least amount of equipment, preferably nothing. The anchors used for the climb should be removable and should be removed when the exploration of the aven has been concluded with the only anchors remaining in the cave being the anchors used for descent if natural belays are not available.

Andrew Atkinson
CSCC Equipment Officer
January 2024