



## Changes at the May 2023 AGM

Ed Waters, who had done such a superb job chairing Council meetings for few years, stood down as chairman from 2023. Regrettably, although he'd given plenty of notice that he wouldn't be standing again, nobody came forward to take on the role, so, for the time being, meetings will be chaired by whichever of the officers is happy to do so on a meeting by meeting basis.

Pete Hall has also stepped down as Communications Officer, but following a last-minute bit of arm-twisting, I have agreed to give it a try! That's me, on the right in the photo below.

I will put my hand up and admit to being an infrequent Somerset caver, generally spending more time over the border in Cambrian Country, or beneath the North Downs in Surrey. My primary club is the Wealden Cave and Mine Society, with a significant membership across south-east England, the Mendip area, and elsewhere. As such, I am somewhat detached from the Centre of the Universe and much that goes on under the Mendip plateau. That said, it is worth reminding everyone that CSCC represents southern clubs, many of which are not Mendip-based. It would be great to hear from you, regardless of your "home" region, and to that end I refer you to the last item of this newsletter. Please read it.



Peter Burgess (right)

**Peter Burgess, Communications Officer**

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# Upcoming General Meeting

Wednesday 16th August 2023 from 19:00 via Zoom

Draft minutes from the May 2023 AGM and previous meetings are available on the [CSCC website](#) along with the agenda for the upcoming meeting and officers reports.

Please follow the below link to join the meeting on Zoom:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/81703742903?pwd=SUZtNWV6dDU5WmNobjZEcjhJZzBBZz09>

Remember that only nominated club representatives may vote, but anyone can attend as an observer and join the discussion. As ever, please follow the usual online meeting etiquette and ensure your microphone is muted when you are not speaking.

# Three more clubs join CSCC



**Earlier this year, three clubs were added to the list of organisations who wish to be represented by CSCC. These are Westminster Caving Group, Plymouth Caving Group, and a newly-formed society, the Birmingham Student Caving Club.**

Kai from the BSCC introduces the club:

*We are Birmingham Students Caving Club. We are a new club and so far we have completed two trips. Our members, including some of the committee, are mainly new to caving and others have been caving for a while. We welcome anyone living in Birmingham and the surrounding area. We are a society of Birmingham City University but welcome anyone of any ability. Our first trip was in April 2023 staying at the TSG and the weekend saw members take on their first caves. We visited Peak Cavern on Saturday and the Giants Hole round trip on the Sunday. We did not appreciate not having knee pads!*

*These trips also set the precedent that caves are often very wet but, as one of our members found out last weekend in South Wales, that is not always the case. Our second trip was to Penwyllt staying at South Wales Caving Club, which included a slip n slide, singing, a Dan yr Ogof trip and several trips down Ogof Ffynnon Ddu. On our most recent trip some of our members had a go at seconding which they took to like a duck to water.*

*We have a club mascot, Muck the bat, who joins us on all trips and doesn't complain about the abuse he endures underground.*

*South Wales was our last trip of the academic year. We will have trips running at least once a month from September. This will include weekends and day trips as well as joint trips with other clubs. We are also looking at getting some training and socials in. If you see us around or underground come over and say hello!*

*Kai*

# Hidden Earth is back!



The Plague combined with problems finding a large enough venue to suit hundreds of boozy cavers has kept Hidden Earth, the UK's largest caving extravaganza, off the calendar since 2019, but it's finally back, and it's happening near Bristol!

After much hard work by the organising team, the venue for 2023 has been confirmed as Gordano School in Portishead, only a short drive from Bristol. The dates are the 15th - 17th September. There'll be a wide variety of talks, workshops, competition, club and trade stands, and plenty of time to meet friends and mingle in the bar.

Tickets are not yet available, but some talks have already been confirmed, with loads more to follow.

[Keep an eye on the Hidden Earth website for ticket sales and other information.](#)

# Conservation and Access News



## Singing River Mine

The landowner has agreed an outline access agreement. This includes a minimum 12 month access duration and the return of the lid if the agreement is subsequently cancelled. The lid (see photo) has been fabricated by Phil Candy (Blacksmith and caver) and collected. I am currently arranging to get it installed.

## Swildon's Changing Barn

The planned work to replace the floor in the Swildon's changing barn has been put on hold. The owner is considering their future options and the barn may be redeveloped and no longer available to cavers. The situation is being monitored.

## Longleat - Cheddar Gorge

Following some encouragement by Tom Chapman, the management team at Cheddar Show Cave indicated they are willing to re-commence talks about caver access. Linda Wilson and I met with them (the Show Cave Manager and Facilities Manager) and discussed the options available. Subsequently we have submitted an outline proposal and are currently awaiting their response.

## Fairy Cave Quarry

The padlock code for access gate to Fairy Cave Quarry has changed. Please contact me if you need the new code.

## Compton Martin Ochre Mine

The land containing Compton Martin Ochre Mine was recently sold at auction. Once the sale has completed, I will contact the new landowner to confirm they are happy to continue the existing access arrangement.

## Waterwheel Swallet

Following a report that the gate on Waterwheel Swallet was difficult open, the hinges and lock mechanism have been re-greased. The gate opens and closes fine but it is rather heavy.

## Future Priorities

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

1. Continue negotiations with Longleat.
2. Progress the access and leadership arrangements for Loxton Cavern
3. Progress the items listed in this report.

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

**Wayne Starsmore, C&A Officer**

[canda@csc.org.uk](mailto:canda@csc.org.uk)

# Training News

The CSCC held an SRT training course from 16th to 17th of June, at the Wessex CC HQ. On Saturday they covered various techniques on the tower, then on Sunday it was off down Hunters Hole to consolidate. Dave Keegan says "Well done to those who took part, some excellent progression and skills you'll be able to use on trips in the future!" Those who attended said it was well worth the cost and effort to attend.



If you would like to take part in future events of this kind (either helping to instruct, or to refresh/learn about SRT) then please email [training@csc.org.uk](mailto:training@csc.org.uk).

# Equipment and Techniques News

Our Equipment Officer, Andrew Atkinson, is still recovering from a shoulder injury, which prevents him carrying much weight whilst caving. If anyone would like to volunteer to help Andrew with some outstanding work that needs doing, please let us know! Email [equipment@csc.org.uk](mailto:equipment@csc.org.uk).

# BCA stuff

**Linda Wilson has a few words to say about her role as CSCC's rep on BCA Council.**

When Ed Waters took up the reins as Chair, I suffered a moment of madness and offered to put my head in the lions' den again and volunteered to take up the post of BCA rep for CSCC, as it seemed unfair for this to fall to the chair as well, in the absence of anyone else to take up the job. BCA Council didn't seem a terribly pleasant place at the time, as BCA's current chair, Russell Myers has alluded to on more than one occasion. The then chair 'Madphil' Rowsell [also referred to this in an open letter](#) when he took on the job following the resignation of Les Williams.

At first, all I did was keep my head down and represent CSCC's interests. However, Madphil's efforts to make Council a pleasanter place gradually bore fruit and following his resignation, current chair Russell Myers continued that trend. BCA now gets on with business without sniping and infighting and for the most part there isn't a huge amount to report, which is good. That means we're all getting on with what we like best - going caving. However, behind the scenes, there are still a lot of people beavering away to make sure we can keep doing exactly that, for instance Josh White, BCA's Insurance Manager, spends several hours a week as a volunteer on his role, as does Russell as Chair and Allan Richardson as Treasurer. Then there are all the working groups. From CSCC's perspective, one of the most important is Conservation and Access, which deals with all our funding requests. Richard Vooght from Devon has now taken the job as Convenor (and I volunteered to take the minutes) and the group now meets regularly.

There are still some vacancies, though, and so I asked Russell to pen a note to CSCC members in the hope of attracting some additional help. So please take a moment to read this, and if you would like to join the national team please do contact either myself or Russell for a chat. Please think about it!

**Linda Wilson, BCA rep**  
[bcarep@csc.org.uk](mailto:bcarep@csc.org.uk)



## **Russell Myers writes: Message from the BCA Chair**

What follows is to some extent a precis of my last report to BCA National Council on 27<sup>th</sup> June so apologies to anyone who has read that for repeating myself; it comes with age!

First things first, BCA is not the same organisation it was only a few years ago, especially during what I describe as the "troubled years". I got a taste of that "toxic atmosphere" in my early days as Secretary but it quickly dissipated in the following months. I place great store on the use of Zoom for that.

We are now where we should be, functioning for the benefit of the caving community in a business-like manner but sadly, BCA still carries the legacy and burden of those "troubled years". This has tainted the name of BCA at member level and still does so despite a complete change to the more caring, considerate and supportive organisation that you would expect in this day and age. I gauge this by the number of times we get a laugh in Council meetings! More than you might imagine.

Unfortunately, that perceived legacy has impacted our ability to attract volunteers to help run BCA and we have a number of vacancies that we have been unable to fill, not least, a Treasurer. To help with this, Council agreed to create a paid book keeping position which is now functioning and keeping our day-to-day financial commitments in good order. The Treasurer's position would still be to keep an oversight of the finances but freed of the "hands on" financial work to concentrate on strategy and overall management of BCA as a member of the Executive Committee. Hopefully, this more attractive situation will encourage someone to take up the position. If this might be of interest to you, please contact me to discuss if you would like any more information.

Talking of recruitment, one area BCA Council does need to address is the under representation of women and ethnic minorities on Council and on our various working groups, and we would like to address this wherever possible. More details can be found on [the BCA website](#) where the vacancies are displayed below the AGM notification.

On a positive note, membership continues to rise with an increase from last year of about 200 to approximately 6500, which is encouraging although I am not naïve to the fact that this is principally due to the need for the insurance cover which comes with BCA membership. However, what should not be overlooked, is the significant amount of funding distributed by BCA, for example, into the Regions for conservation and access work, which gravitates down to impact at grassroots level looking after our caves. The benefits of BCA membership are worthy of a more detailed article, something I'll work on.

Bearing in mind the vacancies/lack of volunteers outlined above, I feel we are at a turning point where the whole structure of BCA needs to be reconsidered along with the way in which we do things – something for the Constitution and Operations Group (COG) to take on board although I'm open to ideas and suggestions on this from anyone.

In very positive news, Hidden Earth is happening on 15<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> September and is a great opportunity to meet as many cavers as I can (with my recruitment hat on!).

**Russell Myers**

Chair, British Caving Association

# Charterhouse Caving Company permits to go paperless



(GB Cave.)

Since the Dawn of Time (the early 1950s), access to caves in the Charterhouse area of Mendip, including GB Cave and Longwood Swallet, has been managed by cavers for cavers on behalf of successive landowners.

This long and occasionally tedious work is carried out by the Charterhouse Caving Company Ltd (CCC Ltd) for Somerset Wildlife Trust (SWT). As a condition of access, each visitor to the land/caves must hold a permit acknowledging that they've read and agree to comply with the regulations. These permits are currently issued as slips of paper, familiar to most cavers who visit Mendip.

However, to save trees, bureaucratic hassle, and cavers' pocket money, CCC Ltd is introducing a paperless system! Once the new system is up and running – the target date is 1st September – cavers will be able to obtain their permits online 🌟 for free 🌟 directly from the CCC Ltd website.

Permits will be downloadable to be saved to your phone (or printed out, if you prefer). These must be shown by all members of the party when the key is collected. Paper permits will no longer be available from caving clubs once the new system goes live.

So don't forget yours when you want to visit the caves!

**The Charterhouse Caving Company Ltd.**

# Write Something and We'll Publish It!\*

\*Terms and Conditions apply.....

Finally, I am conscious that the CSCC newsletter has had limited appeal in many quarters. It often simply has news about things the CSCC has been doing, or wants to promote. It could, however, also be an excellent way to make your society better known and appreciated. It could be a useful way to spread news of events, ideas, or anything you want to publicise.

I will happily include articles you send me, along with any photos that would catch the attention of readers. Perhaps you just want to let other cavers know a little about your club - what you do, the caves you visit - perhaps a project you are undertaking. Maybe you want some help or advice - extra pairs of hands are always useful. If you think something topical published in your club journal would appeal to a wider readership, please consider sending it to me, after obtaining the relevant permissions of course!

**Peter Burgess, Communications Officer**

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