

## **Chair's Report**

The summer period tends to be a bit quiet with holidays and the like. But Wayne has been working hard and there has been progress and developments with several C&A issues. In particular improving the situation at Bethel Quarry, re-gating Cow Hole, an update on the Loxton caves.

Our equipment office has published a draft document on Exploratory Anchor Placement. This is a niche topic but an important one. Is it sufficiently complete to be officially adopted as guidelines?

David Cooke  
August 2024

## **Treasurer's Report**

There isn't much to say from me except that I've tracked down a few more of the Clubs that hadn't ticked CSCC this year and that other than that there have been no club changes since last meeting.

The CSCC's BCA claim went in, and we are awaiting this to be paid.

Bank balances stand at £4.8k in total not including the claim monies.

There is one new club as we didn't vote on them last time: Cardiff Underground Explorers. Same secretary as Cardiff Uni - Rosa Brew. I believe they became BCA members in May or June.

Tom Harrison  
August 2024

## Conservation & Access Report - CSCC Meeting 19<sup>th</sup> August 2024

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  
CSCC

## **BCA Representative**

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 expected 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  
August 2024

## **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  
August 2024

## **Training Officer**

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

Dave Keegan  
August 2024

## **Communication's Officer**

Huge thanks to Cookie for putting together the latest newsletter at short notice.

I have pretty much nothing to report beyond this.

Peter Burgess  
August 2024

## **IT Officer's Report**

Moving the website away from the BCA server to Krystal, the new Internet provider, continues to be harder than it should be. The mailing list software that we use has gone end of life and can no longer be used. I'm evaluating alternatives.

It was pointed out to me that the CSCC's postal address did not appear anywhere on the website. That has now been fixed. It appears on an updated Contact Us page.

David Cooke  
August 2024