

Conservation & Access Report - CSCC Meeting 9th February 2026

Please find below the Conservation & Access Officer's Report. This covers the period since the last meeting in November 2025.

Longleat

The access agreement with Longleat, covering the main caves in Cheddar Gorge, is up and running. To date some 15 Wardens have completed the training and assessment program, with another 5 in the pipeline. There have been 7 Recreational trips to date, along with 19 training and / or conservation trips.

The Cave Diving Group have started work on refurbishing the platforms in Lloyd Hall, in Gough's Cave, with the intention of commencing diving operations in the summer.

Work has also started repairing the conservation tape in Reservoir Hole. Grand Gallery has been completed, along with the first section of the Frozen Deep. The bolts leading up to High Country have been inspected. They aren't in the best condition and haven't been placed to facilitate SRT. I'm working with the CSCC Equipment Officers (Andrew) to look at what can be done.

An application has been submitted to recommence digging in Spider Hole. This is progressing through the approval process, as laid out in the Access Agreement. As this is the first such application, Longleat naturally have many questions and queries and thus progress has been quite slow. The next Longleat Estate's Meeting is early February and I am hoping this will approve the dig. The next step will then be to approach Natural England for permission, as the dig is within a SSSI.

Home Close

The BCA C&A Working Group have approved the budget for a new lid for Home Close. I have measured up the entrance and am currently designing a suitable lid. Once the design is complete, I will get quotes from a number of blacksmiths.

Stock Hill Mine Cave

A CSCC padlock was installed, a while ago, on Stock Hill Mine Cave and the cave is proving quite popular. The lid needs to be modified so that it can be locked and opened from the inside. The BCA C&A Working Group have approved the budget for the modifications. I have measured up the entrance and am currently designing a suitable modification. Once the design is complete, I will get quotes from a number of blacksmiths.

Lower Pitts Farm

The farm land at Lower Pitts Farm has recently been sold. The new owner has been approached and has confirmed they are happy to continue with the existing access arrangements for White Pit, Sand Pit and White Rabbit. Access to Templeton and Templetwin also remain unchanged.

Wookey Hole

The Show Cave Management contacted me to expressed concern over a YouTube video that they felt showed too much of the dry route to Wookey 24 and may entice "urban explorers" to attempt the trip. The owner of the video was approached and they promptly edited it appropriately.

Stainsby's Shaft

On two separate occasions, the hinge pins on the lid to Stainsby's Shaft, at the head of Velvet Bottom, have been removed by persons unknown in an attempt to gain access. They have been replaced and, on the last occasion, a sign has been placed on the lid explaining what is below and how easy it is to gain access.

Swildon's Hole

I assisted with a radio location exercise to confirm the position of Sandwich Chamber, in the Desolation Row area in Swildon's Hole, in relation to the surface. This confirmed that the grid location of the previous exercise, conducted in the 1990's, was correct but the written description was misleading.

I have inherited the radio location equipment, the Grunter Phone, from Brian Prewer. Despite it being as old as I am, it is still in working order and appears to remain accurate. If you have a radio location project you would like to pursue then please get in touch.

Hunter's Lodge Inn Sink

A loose boulder was reported at the top of the climb into the Barmaid's Bedroom, in Hunter's Lodge Inn Sink. It has now been cemented securely in place.

Future Priorities

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

- 1) Progress the Spider Hole digging application with Longleat
- 2) Complete the conversation and bolting work in Reservoir Hole
- 3) Finalise the access arrangements (on-line facilities) for Harridge Woods
- 4) Progress the new lids for Home Close and Stock Hill Mine Cave

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

Wayne Starsmore
C&A Officer
CSCC