

Conservation & Access Report to CSCC Meeting 23 Nov 2019 - Graham Price

I have dealt with / am dealing with the following (numbers refer to agenda items)

6.1 Maesbury Swallet

The new forestry company has been approached about the access route to the caves but have not been very helpful and it has been necessary to make an approach to the Trustees of the Estate via their agents. Some surface works remains to be completed to seal the hole adjacent to the entrance.

6.2 Loxton Cavern

Minor building work and surface clearance to finish the job is pending. The availability of a large trailer would be helpful. Taping of the right hand series (Catcotts Chamber etc) has been done but this used all the available supply of tape. Further supplies of the tape could not be sourced but an alternative has been found and a supply purchased. Completion of the work will be undertaken as soon as possible.

6.3 Ubley Warren

Work on the roof of the main chamber is pending confirmation from the Treasurer that the £400 approved at the February meeting is available from the BCA. Materials can then be purchased and the work progressed. In the time being the cave remains closed.

6.4 Cow Hole

An inspection has been carried out and some stabilisation and tidying up of loose steelwork and rotten wood was found to be essential for safe descent. Work on this has been started. P-bolts have been installed at the head of the first pitch. Descent of the pitch and inspection of the rest of the cave is pending the stabilisation work higher up. Bolts will be installed on the lower climb in due course. On completion of the works the owners will permit visits.

6.5 Elm Cave

The new gate is nearly ready to be fitted and currently there are no plans to lock the cave..

6.6 CSCC Locks

Most sites have been fitted with the new locks. Some remote ones are outstanding and I am awaiting confirmation from certain 'helpers' that sites they volunteered to do have new locks fitted.

6.7 Access Database

I have continued to update existing sites on the database and I believe that all entries are now correct. The problem of not being able to add additional sites (there are many missing) remains an issue and as soon as the facility is available this will be done.

Stoke Lane / Brownes Hole Access (Minute 6.1 from previous meeting)

Linda has obtained plans showing the registered boundaries. The roadside 'pull-in' above Brownes' Hole is not included within the registrations of the adjacent land and may form part of the highway. Somerset County Council have been asked to clarify this and their response is awaited. The quarry owners placed large boulders in the space to deter parking and it is questionable if they had the right to do this. The question of ownership of Brownes' Hole remains uncertain. The boundary as shown on the registry plans needs confirming in relation to the cave and will be attempted again when the undergrowth has died

back. The quarry owners contention that the cave (main entrance) is on his land is doubtful but in the meantime it is still advised to refrain from visiting as he has threatened to gate the entrance to stop access.

Heale Farm Cave

The owners have agreed that the cave can be reopened and a visit needs to be organised to change the lock.

Ubley Warren Reserve

All the gated sites now have the new CSCC lock fitted. As previously reported there has never been any agreed access to sites on the Reserve and although SWT are willing to ignore the current situation temporarily they require there to be a formal access arrangement in place as soon as possible. Prior to agreeing any arrangements for future access they require a formal bat survey to be undertaken by a 'suitably qualified ecologist' arranged by ourselves. In liaison with SWT and Natural England I have made arrangements for this to be done. Although informal access to the sites is available pending an agreement, digging is not permitted. SWT have stressed that any digging in the future will have to be agreed by themselves and NE on a site specific basis.

Blackmoor Reserve

Although fitting of CSCC locks to Stainsby's Shaft and Waterwheel Swallet is now official, the meeting with the AONB Officer to discuss future maintenance of entrances etc is pending.

Gates

The old Hunters Lodge Inn Sink gate and a new galvanised replacement for Ubley were stolen from the Cerberus during the summer. The Hunters gate was to be fitted on the last site at Blakes Farm where funding was approved to gate the open caves. The loss was not covered by insurance and replacements need to be obtained.

Star Shaft

Following damage to the fitted bolts I asked Andrew Atkinson to look at installing new rigging points to avoid potential issues of having long belays to nearby trees. Due to uncertainty of the construction of the slab fitting of new bolts is not straightforward and an engineer has looked at the construction and position of the of the reinforcement etc. He has advised that the slab is probably not strong enough and an alternative, possibly a ground anchor of sorts, is possible solution.

National Cave Conservation Policy

I attended the last online meeting of the BCA Conservation and Access Committee and was particularly concerned about the attitude to cave conservation by some attendees who seemed to be promoting access as a priority as opposed to conservation. They wish to re write the Conservation Handbook and do not like some of the existing content. This gives me great cause for concern.

Graham Price
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