

Conservation & Access Report

CSCC Zoom Meeting 15 February 2021

With the ongoing Covid situation and lockdown, it has not been possible to make progress with much C&A business. Work has been accumulating and it may take some considerable time playing 'catch up' when things return to some sort of normality. In the meantime I can report on the items below, everything else being pending.

6.1 Cheddar Cave Access

Contact with Longleat is being maintained however the situation remains that they are only working with a skeleton staff and will not be able to make any progress on this until later in the year. They have said that when lockdown ends their priority will be to get their business up and running again but will look at the access agreement as soon as it is possible to do so.

6.2 CSCC Locks

The supply of locks has been ordered.

6.3 Stoke Lane Slocker

Following on from the request by the Parish Council that the gate on the stream entrance is replaced they have also asked if the quarry entrance can be fitted with a gate.

6.4 Stoke Lane / Browne's Hole Access

It's not been possible to meet with SCC Highways to discuss the parking area and the boulders, however some online research has turned up a plan showing that the land with the Browne's Hole entrances is not owned by the developers of Bector Wood / Cooks Wood quarry despite their threats to stop access. Clearly access could be just as problematic if the genuine landowner did get involved so we will try and keep things low key whilst being aware of the potential issues.

6.5 Caves on Access Land

I now have a list of all caves on 'Access Land' should we need it.

6.6 Aveline's Hole

I received a report that the gate had been damaged. Details were forwarded to UBSS for them to deal with.

6.7 Box Mines

Following the recent rescue I was asked if something could be done about access to Box Mines. In 2005 CSCC negotiated an agreement which was terminated by Hanson in 2017 when they decided to close the mine and stop all access. This was a knock on effect from the sale of their Bath Stone quarry interests to Johnston's Quarry Group. Johnston's were not interested in taking abandoned mines as part of the deal so this left Hanson's with a liability.

I managed to track down and speak to their Landscape Manager who is responsible for the site. He informed me that to stop the continued illegal access, Hanson were planning to permanently seal all the entrances with mass concrete. He said that this was being done in liaison with Natural England to maintain bat access. He further said that Hanson were not aware of any interest in the mines by cavers and that he was not aware of any contact from CSCC.

As far as I can determine, we did not have any contact with Hanson in 2017 when they terminated our access agreement and closed the mine. I have asked Les what happened at that time but

have not been able to get any response and therefore have no point of reference or contact. The situation was discussed in detail with their Landscape Manger, and at his suggestion I put forward a case in writing for maintaining access to the mines for cavers. He said he would pass this on to the relevant people in their management structure. In my discussion with him it was not clear who was ultimately responsible for the mine and it seemed there were a number of possibilities, which is why he said he would get it to the right person. He did say that one of the managers at least, would not be sympathetic to any sort of access.

I am waiting for a formal response to my submission but as with everyone else they have a number of furloughed staff and are concentrating on operational aspects of their business so this may be very low priority. I am trying to find out who it may be worth approaching at higher management levels but it is critical to make approaches to the 'right' individual.

6.8 Star Shaft

The gate has failed completely. It is at end of life and not repairable, so needs replacing. As a temporary measure the entrance is not accessible and has been secured with a chain. Info has been posted on the web site and Facebook. This is also an opportunity to deal with replacement of the belay points for the pitch which has been an ongoing issue for some time. It has been suggested that the belay points could be incorporated in the gate which seems very sensible. Considering the additional work required with the belay points and the replacement of the fixed ladder we need to budget a minimum of £1000 for the work.

Graham Price
Conservation & Access Officer
February 2021