



COUNCIL OF SOUTHERN CAVING CLUBS

NEWSLETTER

February 2026



UBSS members visit Wales, photo: Peter Burgess

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Stainsby's Shaft Breakthrough

This is a story that broke in August 2025, but not yet reported here. Tim Francis of the Mendip Caving Group reports on the club's website:

"After years of determined effort, the digging team in Stainsby's Shaft has made a significant breakthrough, rediscovering the fabled "Miner's Cavern" of the 18-fathom level, last seen in the late 1840s."

"Following a highly productive digging weekend, the team pushed through the "Possible Passage" dig, breaking into an impressive natural chamber."

The [MCG website](#) includes surveys of the shaft and a [link to a video](#) of the discovery.

Keep it Clean! - Muddy Padlocks

It may seem obvious that mud and padlocks don't mix. However it may not be so obvious how easily a padlock can be jammed and prematurely worn out by the ingress of mud, particularly cave mud which often contains very hard and abrasive calcite grit. Recently a number of padlocks on various cave entrances have been replaced either due to wear or ingress of mud. Where possible padlocks are cleaned, lubricated with graphite and put back into service.



An exceptionally muddy padlock. Photo: Dave King

Bear in mind it could be your caving trip that's been aborted due to a jammed padlock. There are a few simple but effective ways to reduce the ingress of mud into padlocks. Before inserting a key, ensure it is clean paying particular attention to the grooves. Have clean hands when handling a padlock (wiping hands on furry suit and/or rinsing in a puddle works well), particularly if it is a combination padlock where rotating the wheels will drag grit inside.



Operating a combination lock with muddy hands will clog the mechanism. Photo: Date King

If you come across any issues with any cave entrances or padlocks please contact CSCC Conservation and Access Officer canda@csc.org.uk or for caves under the Charterhouse Caving Company Ltd access agreement please contact CCC Secretary secretary@charterhouse-caving-company.ltd.uk immediately and check an acknowledgement received such that the issue can be dealt with promptly.

Dave King, MNRC

Swildon's Hole Entrance Ash Tree - No Longer



The ash tree at Swildon's Hole entrance in 2011 when still in healthy condition. Photo: Paul Fairman

Ash die-back has finally claimed the tree that has overshadowed the Swildon's Hole entrance for decades. In January 2015, a large limb of this tree fell across the entrance blockhouse and had to be cleared away.

This January, the entire remainder of the dying tree fell, thankfully away from the entrance into the field. This is the tree where it has been possible to exit the cave by climbing up between its roots instead of using the stone-built blockhouse entrance. The tree has graced the entrance since first explorations took place in 1901.

Surrey Mine Conservation Work Progress



The first stal-cleaning session, Spring 2025. Photo: Lesley Eggleston

This is a wrap-up report on the work done earlier in 2025 (reported in the CSCC May 2025 newsletter) and into this year to clean up some stal floor in the Bedlams Bank stone quarry workings in East Surrey using the CSCC pressure-washers, and to renew some old tape which has definitely seen better days.

A small team of WCMS members has returned in recent weeks to the site of earlier operations which had been suspended due to a total lack of water. The exceptionally dry summer and autumn of 2025 resulted in a ready source of puddled water drying up completely.

The team set about replacing old hazard tape with bright yellow cord suspended on stainless steel "pigtail riser" pins, supplied by CSCC. Inspecting the remaining areas of floor to be cleaned showed that there was probably more harm than good to be achieved by cleaning with pressure washers as the thin layer of stal was probably prone to being dislodged under a strong jet of water. One area was identified which would definitely benefit from this approach, however, and now we had a deep puddle right next to the area to be cleaned, this will be completed soon.



Some calcite deposits in excellent condition but inadequately taped.

The floor of the quarry, being a fairly soft stone, proved very easy to drill, making suitable holes for the steel pins. Removing the old tape was a little tricky as we found that in the past 20 years it has developed its own skin of calcite and become cemented to the floor. We probably caught it just in time before it became a permanent red feature just under the surface. The shadow left by the removed tape will heal in time, if the speed at which it got stuck down is anything to go by.

At the time of writing, this last piece of the work is yet to be done, however with a new deadline to return the equipment to Somerset, it will be completed before the end of February.



This tape protecting archaeological features is only fixed with nails which are rusting quickly and may be replaced in the future. Photo: Peter Burgess

There is plenty more tape replacement work to be done, most of which will better protect archaeological features rather than cordon off "pretties". The use of stainless steel pins to raise the tape or cord from the floor will be the main purpose of such work. This will minimise the tape ending up trampled into the mud or dislodged from loose rocks currently used to hold the tape in place.

Anyone with similar work to do is recommended to borrow the equipment which is easy to use and can be carried in two Pelicases to wherever it is needed. Contact the [Conservation and Access Officer](#) to schedule your project!

Peter Burgess, Wealden Cave and Mine Society

CSCC Chair's Report - February 2026

I'm writing this whilst on the Caving in the Abode of the Clouds expedition in Meghalaya, India. The Internet connection is no better than a damp piece of string, I might be out of date on this topic, for which I apologise.

I would like the meeting to discuss the Forest of Dean Conservation and Cave Access Group (FoDCCAG) becoming a Regional Council. This proposal was put to and passed by the last BCA Council meeting. I've not seen the wording of the proposal (it wasn't published in the Agenda) so I might be basing the following on false assumptions.

The Forest of Dean is a significant caving area with exciting discoveries happening on a regular basis. More cavers are visiting the area so it makes sense that it should be a Regional Council. But I do think the BCA have handled this badly, primarily in that this proposal has been passed with no knowledge or discussion by CSCC members. The BCA have also passed this proposal without sight of FoDCCAG's proposed new Constitution or proposed area map. Without sight of the Constitution BCA have lost the opportunity to ensure an appropriate level of democracy and good governance. Having said that, knowing the people who are writing the Constitution I think this is unlikely to be a problem.

With respect to the area map, I'm not sure the boundaries were ever properly established when FoDCCAG came into existence. For example is South Gloucestershire part of the Forest of Dean? Now the boundaries are being fixed there should be a discussion between CSCC and FoDCCAG in the first instance rather than between FoDCCAG and BCA.

David Cooke
February 2026

CSCC Treasurer's Report - February 2026

Proposed New Clubs

None

Income and Expenditure Since Nov 2025

Payments received for Keys.

£124 paid for Server Costs.

£35 paid for Drill Bits.

2025 Accounts

I have completed last year's accounts, I'm just waiting for the final statement of the year to be produced by NatWest and then these will be sent to be examined.

Tom Harrison

CSCC Equipment Officer's Report - February 2026

(Written by Deputy Equipment Officer)

Progress Since Last Meeting

We have been working on developing technique and equipment for the complete extraction of expansion bolts, with the intention of fitting resin anchors in their place, including above ground practice on an inoffensive bolder at a Mendip Quarry

Spider Hole

Work has commenced on renewing the required anchors in Spider Hole ahead of commencement of trips again. One expansion bolt at the head of the 1st pitch was successfully extracted and a replacement resin anchor was fitted in its place, the other expansion bolt at the head of the first pitch unfortunately snapped during extraction with minimal force – definitely proving the need for its replacement, so a replacement resin anchor was fitted close by. Due to equipment difficulties we were unable to attempt to replace the expansion bolt protecting the approach to the 1st pitch and this has been left in place, with its hanger, pending further work.

Future Work Required

Spider Hole

Replacement of expansion bolt protecting the approach to the 1st pitch with a resin anchor.

G.B. Cave

We have received a report that one of the anchors securing the chain for ladder dig has significant wear. This will be replaced non-urgently as it is still considered sufficient for the immediate future, especially as the other anchor is fairly recent.

Thrupe Lane Swallet

We have received a request to place 9 anchors at Bridge Rift and Avalanche Pot in Thrupe Lane Swallet. This request will be reviewed in due course and, if appropriate, actioned in more agreeable conditions.

Hunters Hole

One anchor at Sago's Pot in Hunters Hole remains on the non-urgent replacement list.

Eastwater Cavern

Further work is still required to replace the snapped anchors for Lolly Pot.

Matty Dredge
Deputy Equipment Officer

Conservation and Access Report - February 2026

This report 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 Templewin 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:-

- Progress the Spider Hole digging application with Longleat
 - Complete the conversation and bolting work in Reservoir Hole
 - Finalise the access arrangements (on-line facilities) for Harridge Woods
 - Progress the new lids for Home Close and Stock Hill Mine Cave
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If anyone has anything else they would like progressing then please let me know.

Wayne Starsmore
C&A Officer
CSCC

Webmaster's Report - February 2026

I've kept the front page up to date with the current news and events. The welcome page now includes a link to the [Priddy rainfall gauge](#) in the weather section. This can be useful to give an idea of how wet your trip might be. The page provides links through to give the water levels at the Cheddar and Wookey risings. The weather section has link to the Met Office forecast. It also will show any weather warnings that might be in place for the CSCC area.

David Cooke
February 2026

BCA News - February 2026

From **Linda Wilson**, CSCC's BCA Representative (shadowed by Joshitha Shivkumar)

A significant point for BCA members is that in 2026, insurance costs are likely to have fallen back to in the region of half the cost of membership fees. This has historically been the case but by 2024 it had risen to something like two thirds of the fees, leaving little money over for anything else. The treasurer has stated that his prediction for only a small deficit in 2025 looks viable. This is better than expected and comes about in part due to lower than anticipated claims from regional councils.

BCA is making progress in its goal of incorporation and the treasurer hopes to make further progress on this when the accounts have been finalized.

So far for 2026 106 clubs had renewed their membership as of mid January and 3544 people have joined, including club members. The online membership renewals seem to be working well.

As you will have seen from the Chair's report, the Forest of Dean Cave Conservation and Access Group (FoDCCAG) applied to BCA to become a separate Regional Council rather than being part of Caving Wales. The principal landowner in the Forest of Dean is the Forestry Commission, with whom FoDCCAG already have an access agreement. FoDCCAG have also recently purchased the land around Wet and Dry Sinks and have done amazing work in Redhouse Lane Swallet. The area proposed for the new regional Council was the Forest of Dean and adjacent areas of Gloucestershire, Monmouthshire and Herefordshire. This proposal had been mentioned at the most recent BCA Conservation and Access Group meeting and also at the last BCA Council meeting so it was no surprise when this came forward to the vote.

I circulated the minutes and agenda for the most recent BCA Meeting on 20 January when I received them. I was unable to attend the meeting due to a prior commitment but Joshitha represented CSCC. An email from our Chair stating he felt a vote on this without prior discussions with CSCC to formalize boundaries was premature, only reached Joshitha after the vote, on which the CSCC vote was cast in favour of the proposal. Speaking personally, I don't understand the Chair's stance on this, as CSCC only borders the proposed FoDCCAG region where it touches Bristol and I regard it as a huge stretch of the imagination to think that CSCC has any historic or current interest in any areas north of Bristol. Bristol itself has only one significant cave, Pen Park Hole, which is managed by three CSCC clubs. Immediately north of this lies South Gloucestershire, where Fishmonger's Swallet is managed on an access agreement between Hades CC and the landowner. I believe the intention is for South Gloucestershire to go with the new region, but that is a matter for the Hades CC and not this meeting as CSCC has never had any involvement with that site.

On the above basis, I do not believe that CSCC has any cause for concern and that the matter of agreed boundaries can be handled easily and amicably with FoDCCAG under the aegis of BCA. I do not agree with the chair's suggestion that the BCA has handled the matter badly.

I would like to remind the meeting that many years ago, when Devon and Cornwall Underground Council came into existence, we supported their independence and dealt with the separation amicably without the need to have prior sight of constitutions and boundary maps. There is no reason to believe that their will be any bone of contention between FodCAAG and BCA and I believe that supporting their independence was the correct thing to have done.

Linda Wilson
Joshitha Shivkumar

Forthcoming Events

19th to 22nd June 2026 NAMHO 2026, Swaledale.

25th to 27th September Hidden Earth, Llangollen Pavilion.

Proposed Future meeting Dates

Friday 13 March 2026 23:59 Deadline for AGM nominations

Friday 13 March 2026 19:00 Deadline for AGM constitutional amendments

Tuesday 1 April 2026 23:59 Notification to members of AGM nominations

Friday 8 May 2026 19:00 AGM Zoom



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