



COUNCIL OF SOUTHERN CAVING CLUBS

NEWSLETTER

November 2025



The Frozen Deep, Reservoir Hole. photo: Peter Glanvill

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Longleat Estates Agreement – Cheddar Gorge Caves

The good news this quarter is that the long-awaited agreement between CSCC and Longleat Estates for managed access to the caves under Longleat ownership in the Cheddar Gorge area is now in place. More details of this very welcome news are in Wayne’s Conservation and Access Report.

New MCRA Content - Youtube channel

Thirteen archive videos have been added recently to the Mendip Cave Registry and Archive Youtube channel. Mature cavers will enjoy seeing their colleagues from a time when they were considerably more youthful.

- **Worlds Without Sun** – Wookey Hole – 1975
- **Discovering Mendip (ACG)** – 1970s?
- **Hunters Lodge Inn Sink**
- **Pen Park Hole and Otter Hole**, 2004
- **Wiltshire quarries – underground factories**, 2004
- **Fairy Cave Quarry caves** as a possible leisure park, featuring the late Willie Stanton (news story)
- **Fernhill Cave rediscovery**, ATLAS diggers
- **Wells Museum caving display**, featuring Chris Bradshaw and Swildons Hole (news story)
- **Cheltenham Stone Mines (Whittington)** (news story)
- **Wookey Hole record dive**, featuring Rick Stanton and John Volanthen (news story)
- **Digging Thrupe Swallet**, featuring Dave King, Clive North, Rich Whitcombe and Gonzo
- **Cave Rescue from the Black Hole Series**, Swildons (1992)

[MCRA Channel](#)

Freediving Swildons Sumps - A Warning - UKCaving.com

The following was posted recently to the UKCaving.com website and is repeated here with permission of the author.

I'm writing this as a warning to anyone considering freediving the Swildon's sumps but may not have really appreciated the risks involved. On previous trips to Swildon's 4 and 9, myself and others had exercised great caution regarding Sumps 2, 3 and 4 and used to be concerned that we would find them silty/impassable (especially in dry weather). On all of these previous trips, however, we had found each sump roomy and pleasant, and we gradually convinced ourselves that the stories we had heard of

cavers bailing out silt mid-dive were exaggerated, or for some reason presented no danger to us.

After two days of dry weather after Storm Claudia, a small group including myself decided to do a trip through the first few sumps. A few weeks ago the water levels had been extremely low, and now, unsurprisingly, the cave was a gushing river of white water. Sump 1 was no longer a duck but a deep scummy pool, and I noticed it felt slightly tighter than it had ever felt before (I'm on the thin side), requiring a good few hard tugs on the line to get through to Swildon's 2. This should have been the first warning sign that we would encounter problems in later sumps - the fact that we'd only ever worried about silt because of dry conditions mistakenly lead me to dismiss this.

With a mask and hood on, I lay in the Sump 2 pool and took a deep breath in. The visibility was poor, but the sump seemed as wide and roomy as it had always felt before. About 7 metres into the sump, I encounter the lowered ceiling, meaning I was close to the air bell. However, it was at this same point I noticed the floor level rising due to a large sediment deposit. I soon found my chest wedged between the ceiling and the floor; hard tugs on the line got me no further through the sump. I put my hand in front of me and felt the rope running through a gap only a few inches wide, with the floor a thick sediment bed; the visibility turned from poor to none. At this point I decided that to try and push through would be suicidal - even more so considering that the high water levels meant that there may not be air for another several metres after the constriction.

I managed to use the line to manoeuvre backwards out of the constriction, until I was free enough to flip my hands around on the line and attempt to reverse the significant distance I had covered so far. Any mistake whilst performing this, or a delay in deciding to, could have had fatal consequences. Emerging back out of the upstream end, I was panting and significantly more out of breath than I had ever found myself from Sump 3. We turned around and made a prompt exit, losing only a glove.

Before the trip, myself and my peers had led ourselves into a false security of thinking we understood how weather events correspond to the hydrology of the cave. We did not understand this then, nor do we now, and should have recognised that neither dry nor wet weather is a simple guarantee of the sumps being passable or impassable. I suppose that the gushing water through the cave picked up more sediment than usual from higher levels; when this sediment reaches the later sumps, where the pools are larger, the velocity of the flow decreases and leads to increased deposition. The lowering of the ceiling in Sump 2 limits the flow of water further, maximising deposition, which is potentially why I only encountered significant silting at that point. This is not to say that to dive these sumps in other (or even any) conditions would be safe, nor that this theory is correct.

I cannot offer any comforting advice to anyone who wishes to freedive sumps, but would urge you to consider whether you would dive into one knowing that you may have to turn around at the very end, or find yourself stuck in a constriction you could not navigate?

Read the follow-up discussion [here](#).

Longwood Valley Sink digging team wins 2025 J-Rat Digging Award



Longwood Valley Sink, Mike Wise at the start of Compass East, Photo: Ali Moody

Very well-deserved congratulations are due to Ali Moody and the rest of the Longwood Valley Sink digging team for winning this year's J-Rat Digging Award. The announcement was made in Priddy on 22nd November. Ali Moody provides the following appraisal of the team and its efforts:

It is essential to stress that LVS has very much been a team effort involving a considerable number of people over the last fifty years. ATLAS invested a lot of time and effort in this site in the early years, and 350 working trips have been logged since the present team started work after the entrance was re-opened in 2013, to prevent the Cheddar Gorge road being closed by flooding. To date LVS is 1,000m in length, 126m deep and unusually for a Mendip cave offers 13 pitches, the biggest being Colossus at 37m. The cave is too wet and flood prone to work safely in the winter months. A full article on the history of LVS will be published in the future.

The main players since 2013 (in descending order) are: Ali Moody, Pete Buckley, John Gisborne, John Cooper, Lee Hawkswell, Geoff Newton, John Biffin, Dave Walker, Mike Wise, Mike Kousiounis, Chris Seal, Sean Howe, Andrew Atkinson, Andy Thompson, Lee Venning

CSCC Chair's Report - November 2025

The big news is that the access agreement with Longleat for the Cheddar Gorge Caves has finally been signed. It has taken an extraordinary amount of work by the C&A Officer and he is to be commended. It has taken many years. The commitment, tenacity, patience and dogged determination have been extraordinary. Work to implement the agreement continues at a pace. Recreational trips should start soon.

I'd like to highlight the BCA Rep. report. The CSCC has long been against certificates to go caving. It's good to see the work the BCA and CHECC has recently done with the University clubs to fight for that cause.

The CSCC has a long-term structural problem. It has virtually no income other than from BCA which means it is slowly bleeding money spent on non-claimable items. I would like to discuss and receive feedback on charging CSCC members a small annual fee. This is something that Caving Wales / Ogofa Cymru (formerly known as Cambrian Caving Council) has recently introduced.

David Cooke

CSCC Treasurer's Report - November 2025

Proposed New Club

BathSpeleo - Founded in 2022, BCA club, approx. 30 members.

2025 Spending and Accounts Since Aug 2025

BCA claim received in full. Payments received for Keys. £188 paid for padlocks and keys to meet Cheddar/ Longleat Access Agreement.

2026 Predicted Spending

The BCA Treasurer has been working hard to ensure the BCA accounts balance going forward, so has been asking for predicted spends/forecasts for future years. We are not bound by this prediction it just helps with budgeting.

Based on input from the other CSCC officers, this is what I predict for 2026, to be reclaimed from the BCA in 2027.

Spending Category	A: 100%	B: 50%	C: 10%	Notes/Justification
	Confident Spend	Chance Spend	Chance Spend	
1. Admin	£200	£100	£100	Travel, web server
2. Training and Equipment	-	£250	£200	Ad-Hoc training, none planned
3. Anchors	£50	£150	£200	Resin, drill bits, etc
4. Routine C&A (<£750)	£200	£300	£225	Harridge Wood, general C&A
5. C&A Projects (>£750)	£2,000	£1,500	£1,500	Home Close/Stock Hill
Total	£2,540	£2,300	£2,275	

Tom Harrison

CSCC Equipment Officer's Report - November 2025

The Gladman's and Lolly Pot in Eastwater Cavern anchors have been installed. Gladman's only has one anchor on the main hang. With good rigging practice this can be rigged safely using the two anchors further back. The remains of the original spit is probably removable and it is the aim to do so in the future.

Anchors have been placed on Jet pitch in Charterhouse, with the original spit being removed and the placement reused. An anchor has already been added to the rope climb before the pitch. The original anchor is a through bolt unfortunately, so it has been left to form a double anchor. Thanks to Matty and Bex Reeves for assistance.

Wayne has submitted a request for anchors in Spider. I would recommend that this is approved without further checks as the submitter is Wayne. Through anchors are very difficult to remove, I intend to do some practice on the surface with Matty before attempting it underground.

Name of Cave: Spider Hole Area: Cheddar Gorge Approx Number of Anchors: 3

Purpose of Anchors: The three existing anchors at the head of Nut pitch are showing excessive corrosion and ideally should be replaced. They appear to be galvanised 8mm through-bolts.

Suggested positions for anchors: Ideally the existing anchors should be removed and the holes re-used for the new anchors. If this is not possible then the new anchors should be placed as close as possible to the existing ones.

Justification for Request: The existing anchors are positioned well but are aging badly.

Person Requesting the anchors: Wayne Starsmore (CSCC C&A Officer)

Date of Request: 27/10/2025

Note: All of the other anchors in the cave, which would be used for access rather than hauling, are Stainless Steel and appear sound.

Andrew Atkinson

Conservation and Access Report - November 2025

This report covers the period since the last meeting in August 2025.

Longleat

The Access Agreement was finally signed by all parties on the 26th September 2025. We have now started the work necessary to implement the agreement. The tasks achieved to date are:-

- All entitled clubs have been emailed and asked to nominate Wardens.

(All clubs have responded with the exception of the MNRC, ACG, Cerberus and Wessex.)

- New padlocks have been ordered, received and installed.

(A spare set of keys have been placed in the MCR store.)

- A range of online facilities have been created, including:-

1. A User Agreement / Permit system
2. A Trip Reporting system
3. A booking calendar

- A safety inspection trip was conducted to Spider Hole to ensure:-

1. All bolts appear secure
2. All walling and cementing is in good condition
3. There have been no rock falls or other significant movements



- The Reservoir Hole stile, over the fence in the Bristol Waterworks enclosure, was reconstructed (the old one having been removed when the fencing was replaced).
- A number of Warden Training sessions have been completed:-

1. Reservoir Hole - 5 wardens
2. Spider Hole - 6 wardens
3. Gough's Cave - 4 wardens

- More Warden Training sessions are planned over the coming weeks.
- Warden sign-off assessments have been scheduled.

(There should be at least 2 fully assessed and approved Wardens by the time of the CSCC meeting.)

- The first Digging Proposal has been submitted to Longleat, under the terms of the agreement.
- Compliance and Agreement Review Meetings have been scheduled with Longleat.
- The first recreational trips should take place very shortly.

The main outstanding actions are:-

1. Complete the Warden Training
2. Complete the Warden assessments
3. Construct an online Warden Register and share with Longleat
4. Trial-run the Access Procedure with some actual trips
5. Update the CSCC Access Guide to reflect the new agreement and procedures

Stock Hill Mine Cave



The Stock Hill Mine Cave digging team have confirmed they have completed their exploration of the cave and are happy for the CSCC to take over access. To this end, a standard CSCC padlock has been installed and the CSCC Access Guide has been updated to reflect the change. Those wishing to visit the cave may wish to wait for the description and survey to be published in the upcoming Mendip Underground 6.

Wookey Hole Cave



The electron ladder on the 4th rift climb, on the dry route to Wookey 24, has broken. It was in a poor condition with a lot of visible corrosion. It has been replaced by a new one kindly donated by the Wessex Cave Club.

Stainsby's Shaft



Several reports were received that the Stainsby's Shaft lid had been broken into. The gate was repaired immediately by the MCG and I inspected it a few days later. The repair is excellent and there is no further work required.

Velvet Bottom



A report was received of an insecure entrance to a mine shaft beside the footpath leading along Velvet Bottom. This was believed to be Timber Hole and inspection visit was conducted. Timber Hole was located; the lid was found to be in good condition and secured with the standard CSCC padlock. The footpath was followed all the way to Black Rock Gate and no other entrances, insecure or not, were found.

Miscellaneous

A few minor tasks have been completed. These included

- The GB padlock lock barrel was flushed and lubricated following a report by a group that they could not get the key to insert fully.
- A problem with the Longwood \ August padlock was reported to CCC Ltd, who have addressed the issue.
- The CSCC Access Guide entry for Priddy Green Sink has been updated to state the lid has the standard CSCC padlock.
- I have collected the "Grunter Phone" radio location equipment from Brian Prewer. If anyone wants to know how this equipment works or has a radio location project then please get in touch.

Future Priorities

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

1. Arrange and complete the training of Wardens for the Cheddar Caves
2. Finalise the access arrangements (on-line facilities) for Harridge Woods
3. Submit a funding request to BCA for:-
 - Modifications to the Stock Hill Mine Cave lid
 - A new lid for Home Close

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

Wayne Starsmore C&A Officer CSCC

Webmaster's Report - November 2025

The website seems to be running well on its new server. The new mailing list software still needs to be turned on which I'll do as soon as possible.

I've kept the front page up to date with the current news and event, linking through to the items the Comms Officer posts. The Newsletters page had slipped behind a bit but is now up to date as well.

The Equipment Officer has done some work on restructuring and adding more information to his pages. I encourage the other officers to review their sections.

David Cooke

BCA News - November 2025

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

BCA has been very busy recently. I attended a two-hour council meeting on 25th November. The following are some highlights (or lowlights, in one case) ...

A meeting between BCA's Qualifications Management Committee (QMC) and SUI recently uncovered a fraud by a man named Liam McCarthy, a member of the Ulster club, who is believed to have several other aliases. He has been convicted of fraud and previously imprisoned twice. The police are involved and he has been arrested. The latest fraud came to light in the context of forged CIC certificates. It is unclear as yet how much money has been lost through his activities and by whom. BCA will continue to work with SUI on this. This has been devastating for the Ulster club members and the original club has now been disbanded. Going forwards, QMC and SUI will be working on equivalence between awards and certificate checking.

On the subject of greater access to land rights, BCA chair Rostam Namaghi says: "I am afraid we should be quietly pessimistic for the time being – political events have caused the government to prioritise other issues and the surprising lack of stability given the majority they have means that any access bill is likely to be in the latter stage of any parliament. In the interim we should prepare both who we lobby and how we lobby – particularly looking at engaging the membership on this issue."

Derbyshire have offered to host the next hybrid BCA AGM. This is being held on the morning of Sunday 28th June. More details to follow nearer the time. Perhaps CSCC could consider hosting the AGM in 2027? This might provide a good hook to hang a social event on and a good way of showcasing what our region has to offer?

Treasurer Chris Bolton is making progress with the draft budget and hopes to present the full version to the January Council meeting. For now, he comments: "The deficit for 2025 looks smaller than expected as some C&A projects are dropping back to 2026." He also comments: "For good accounting practice, and to enable the cost of things like a batch of IC anchors to be spread over several years, I intend to include physical assets on the balance sheet in future. If anyone is aware of any BCA property, either held by BCA or others such as Regional Councils, please let me know."

Chris asked Council to vote on a motion regarding the collection of fees. He pointed out that our Constitution states "The National Council may by specific resolution authorise other suitable organisations to collect some or all of its subscriptions and or other income". JustGo have been collecting our fees and to formalise this Chris proposed the motion: To authorise JustGo to collect membership fees on behalf of BCA and BCRA. The motion was passed. I voted in favour. As an aside, I am informed by the UBSS Treasurer that the JustGo system makes the administration of membership very easy.

BCA secretary, Aidan Kuhlman has also been busy. His report contains the following information about BCA's increased visibility to the caving community: "Immediately after the last meeting we had Hidden Earth. The event went very well and from a BCA perspective we produced a stand for the event for the first time in a few years. Zac gathered from the BCA staff and some BCA officers some fact-file type information sheets on some of the BCA officers and what they do and I believe this is a good first step in the right direction. Katie also brought some of the older BCA banners. Before the event I struggled with a lack of creative direction of what form the stand should take but at Hidden Earth I gained a much better idea of what I would like it to look like going forwards. Zac, Chris, and I chatted a lot about what we should do for next year and we have made some plans for an improved stand in the future. Nevertheless, I think the BCA stand was well received and I believe that it was worthwhile. I also put together some rather unfashionable t-shirts for the BCA executive to wear at the event, and I believe that while a tad cringey they worked well to make us more identifiable to cavers and I certainly had more conversations with cavers who I had not met before about BCA work than last year. The efforts to increase the BCA's visibility to the lay-caver is ongoing and is an issue I intend to keep working on." Views differed on whether the t-shirts were unfashionable or not!

Aiden has also worked alongside Isaac Neal as Youth and Development Officer and CHECC regarding the potential problem of 'Organised Fun' the organisation advising various students' unions on health and safety in outdoor pursuits. A focus group for student clubs has been held by OF and BCA and CHECC are on stand-by in case their help is needed when any recommendations are made. BCA and CHECC have done excellent work to protect the interests of student clubs and through them the interests of the wider caving community.

Aiden has also spent a lot of time working to rationalise the Manual of Operations to support the various working groups.

The BCA Anchor Group is intending to work on the following areas, as convenor Pete Knight reported:

- Updating the BCA Anchor Policy.
- Central publication on the BCA website of as much historic and contemporary testing data as we can accrue.
- Creating a guidance document for conducting future test bed installations.
- How we will go about approving BCA anchors for use in non-karst rock types in areas such as North Wales or Cornwall.
- Creating a guidance document for the removal of old spits, expansion anchors, DMM Eco, PECO, IC and BP anchors in the field in future.
- Whether the AWG wishes to also include the placement of fixed aids like ladders, staples and pull-through chain setups in our terms of reference.

Cavers might have already seen the announcement that 13th September 2026 has been officially designated the International Day of Caves and Karst and BCA and BCRA are discussing how our community can come together to celebrate this and showcase our activities. If you have any ideas on this please let BCRA Publications and Information Officer Zac Woodford know.

Credit where credit's due: BCA are working hard to support cavers in a variety of ways and I believe that they deserve the full support of our community for their efforts on our behalf. It's a pleasure to act as a representative for CSCC and to liaise between our organisations.

Forthcoming Events

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

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

Proposed Future meeting Dates

Monday 02 Feb 2026 23:59 Notification to members of AGM, [This is the notification.](#)

Monday 9 Feb 2026 19:00 GM Zoom

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

