

**Conservation & Access Report
CSCC EGM (AGM) September 2020
Graham Price**

This report summarises the business dealt with since the last AGM however due to the very unusual situation we have been in, and continue to be in with Covid, and the resulting problems, some matters have not been progressed as much as would have been desirable..

The numbers below refer to item numbers on the agenda.

6.1 Maesbury Swallet

A response from Dinder Estates is awaited however the Trustees haven't held a meeting. Surface works are still to be completed.

6.2 Loxton Cavern

Some minor building work is still needed to finish stabilisation work underground. The surface needs clearing of debris and the assistance of someone with a large trailer would be appreciated. The right hand series (Catcotts Chamber etc) has been retaped. The left hand series could not be done due to running out of tape, a supply of which has now been sourced.

Not Loxton Cavern but **Loxton Cave** and **Loxton Quarry Cave**. Attempts to, contact the Clerk of the Parish Council to issue them with a new key to the caves had not been successful, however the reason for this was that he had sadly died and the new Clerk did not have our contact details and correspondence was not being passed on. This has since been rectified and a new key has been provided.

6.3 Ubley Warren

With the use of an extending ladder purchased for the task and some careful climbing, it has been possible to get close to the roof of the main chamber to investigate how to stabilise the boulders. Measurements were taken at this level and the chamber is too wide to span with anything that could possibly be taken underground. The only solution is to build a scaffold tower to access the roof safely before determining the work necessary. Additional funds have been approved for this purpose. In the meantime the cave remains closed.

6.4 Ubley Warren Reserve

The bat survey was put on hold due to the Covid situation but hopefully can be done this winter providing there are no further restrictions. A couple of the locks have been removed by persons unknown and someone has tried unsuccessfully to get into another entrance by partly cutting through the gate which is still functional for the time being. Continued break-ins and damage to the gates may cause problems with finalising the access agreement.

6.5 Cow Hole

Stabilisation work etc is progressing. Bolting is pending and dependant on Hon Sec's discussion with Equipment Officer and availability of bolts etc.

6.6 Elm Cave

Installation of the proposed gate by third parties is pending.

6.7 Heale Farm Cave

I have spoken to the landowner and reopening is pending easing of the Covid restrictions (his words).

6.8 Blackmoor Reserve

The proposed meeting with the ANOB Manager was cancelled but will be rearranged when possible.

6.9 Hobnail Hole (Thrupe Lane Swallet)

Due to an unstable boulder in Black Pot, Hobnail Hole was closed for a period. ATLAS carried out the necessary stabilisation work and the entrance is again accessible and fitted with the standard CSCC lock.

6.10 Manor Farm Swallet

The landowners insurance company required the shaft to be grilled. A meeting was held with the landowner to discuss his requirements. The matter was discussed at the July Council meeting and it was agreed that to fit a grill the walls would need reinforcing with an outer skin of block or stone work. Further discussions have been held with the landowner as to how this can be achieved and what his requirements are. This is under consideration and his feedback is awaited. A provisional estimate for a grill was obtained with some complications due to the contractor not being paid for a previous invoice. This has since been resolved. A temporary grill has been placed over the entrance pending permanent works. I have requested funding for the works via the BCA Conservation Officer who will seek C&A Committee approval in line with the BCA funding procedure.

6.11 CSCC Locks / keys

As reported previously most sites have been fitted with the new locks although I am awaiting confirmation from certain 'helpers' that sites they volunteered to do, have been done. There has been a setback to this process due to the Covid restrictions. A CSCC key with a distinctive tag was found on Priddy Green. I have twice emailed all clubs but no one has yet claimed it.. Keys were issued to member clubs that requested them.

One problem occurred when it was reported a club could not open a lock, however there was no problem with the lock and it transpired that they were either using the wrong key or a copy. Note that all keys for the new Abloy locks, which are widely and freely available, are stamped CSCC, and are guaranteed to work. Please do not use copies.

Although new gates are designed with consideration to protecting the locks, those that are in exposed situations or have been operated with muddy hands can sometimes be a problem. It is sometimes useful to have a suitable lubricant such as GT85 or specialised lock lubricant

available to help. The use of WD40 is a problem in that it is not a lubricant, but a water and oil displacing solvent. It can certainly free up a seized lock but will remove any lubricant already in the lock and leave it dry and susceptible to jamming.

Please report or return for replacement any problem locks.

Access Database

Cookie provided the facility for me to add sites as was requested. A great deal of information in the database was out of date but this has since been rectified. Updating the database is ongoing. Please notify me of any incorrect or missing information.

Stoke Lane / Brownes Hole Access

Somerset County Council were approached but were not very helpful about the pull-in which would appear to be part of the highway. If it can be confirmed that it is part of the highway the quarry owner has no right to stop people parking there. I have queried if he was given permission to place the large boulders there no response has been received. The hope is that if he is approached by SCC he won't be aware of our involvement to avoid raising the profile of the caves. I recently met with the local highways maintenance engineer and he said he would try and find out. The position of the land boundary on the ground has been looked at but is difficult to confirm. I have not received recent reports of any issues involving cavers but am aware of some walkers having had problems with his security guards.

Stoke Lane Slocker

I received a report via MNRC that someone from Stoke walking their dog in the valley was concerned that new holes had opened up near the entrance and they were concerned for the safety of their dog. He had contacted MNRC in the hope of finding who the owner was so he could make contact regarding this. This is something we would prefer to avoid so I visited site but could not see that there were any new holes nor anything that should be a problem. I let the person know.

Pressure Washers

At the suggestion of Pete Glanvil and further to his kind offer to donate proceeds from the his Reservoir Hole publication toward the cost, pressure washers have been purchased and will be made available for loan for conservation projects. Peli cases have been donated by Peli UK. The cases are being fitted out and guidance notes for use prepared and they will then be made available. To ensure their return I propose to ask for a deposit from borrowers.

Cave Fest

There were discussions with the organisers of Cave Fest and it was agreed that in future any profits will be split equally between CSCC (for conservation work) and Rescue (previously the sole beneficiaries). They have suggested that we might like to give a presentation on cave conservation during the weekend and I provisionally accepted this invitation.

Gate Thefts

Along with other steelwork the new gate that was to be installed at Compton Martin Ochre Mine, the old Hunters gate that was earmarked for YAH at Blakes Farm, and some specially made scaffold fittings made for Ubley Warren were stolen from the Cerberus hut and need to be replaced. The theft was reported to the police who were not helpful and seemed reluctant to pursue this despite any sales to scrapyards having to be recorded by law. I have highlighted the issue with the BCA Conservation Officer with a view to obtaining additional funds to cover the costs.

Manor Farm Barn (Swildon's Changing Barn)

The floor in the barn is in very poor condition and changing cavers keep putting their feet through it. Part of the barn is above the milking parlour and recently someone put their foot through collapsing the ceiling below. Obviously this is not good and could have resulted in major damage to the tanks. I met with Robin Maine and if it wasn't that he is incredibly caver friendly we could have had major problems. He is happy for the barn to continue in use providing the floor is replaced. A new floor was laid 20+ years ago by overlaying the original floor with standard chipboard flooring sheets. It is surprising how long it has lasted considering how wet it gets. The proposal is to replace the floor with water resistant chipboard at an approximate cost of £1000.

Although some individuals have volunteered to help I would welcome a single club/group who uses the barn regularly to come forward and volunteer to take this on.

As a temporary measure, following a discussion with Robin, I have put up warning signs asking cavers to take appropriate care.

I have put this forward to the BCA Conservation Officer and he will seek C&A Committee approval.

Cheddar Caves

Following reports of the closure of Cheddar Caves by Longleat Estates I have been asked by a number of cavers if this will have any impact on caver access in the Gorge. This includes digging in Goughs plus access to Long Hole etc where access had to be arranged with the show cave management. I have asked Longleat for some clarification on the matter and their Operations Director will be contacting me to discuss this.

Singing River Mine

The mine is under new ownership. I have tried to make contact with the new owner via a friend of his but with no response so far, however I am informed that they are happy with continued access to the mine and cavers have been visiting. I will confirm this as soon as I can make contact.

Mines at Shipham.

There are three mines (Daffodil Mine, Tin Can Alley, and DGW Mine) on land owned by Shipham Football Club. As the land is regularly visited by children they want the entrances

made safe and secured. I have had a site meeting with the Chairman of the football club. One entrance requires capping and gating , the second some fencing and a gate, and for the third some fencing will suffice. The FC is quite happy for access to be available via the CSCC locking system. A copy of the new Somerset Underground book was given to the club as a goodwill gesture and I would propose to do likewise and give copies to other landowners as appropriate. The estimated costs for two gates and the fencing is approximately £1800. I have put this forward to the BCA Conservation Officer and he will seek C&A Committee approval.

Graham Price
Conservation & Access Officer
September 2020