

CSCC Representatives Report on BCA Matters to the CSCC General Meeting, November 2020

What follows are simply highlights from a lot of BCA activity since our last meeting, mainly taken from the last Council meeting.

BCA Council Meeting, 4th November 2020

I attended the above meeting, held by Zoom. This lasted just over two hours. For those who would like to read the draft minutes in full, these are attached. The next meeting will be held on 2nd December 2020. The papers have not yet been circulated.

The results of the voting that followed the AGM were presented. Phil Rowsell as chair reported that: *“567 members voted, roughly 10% of our membership had voted. The Executive had been elected with a good majority.”* All constitutional amendments were passed. A revised constitution is in preparation to incorporate these changes and will be published on the BCA website. A full list of officers and council members can be found in the draft minutes.

Ari Cooper-Davis as IT convenor and the IT group have done a huge amount of work to deliver a digital AGM followed by online voting, whilst also bringing a new website online. Their achievements are impressive.

Treasurer’s Report

With regard to the budget for 2021, Howard Jones as treasurer reported: *“The biggest unknown for 2021 will be membership income and the affect of Covid19 on renewal membership. I have assumed no impact on income from this affect which is optimistic. However if this proves to be too optimistic the deficit will be larger and we will eat into our cash reserves. We could increase the membership annual fee for 2021 to compensate but I think that would be the wrong thing to do in the present climate. However that might be necessary for 2022, I will monitor during 2021.”*

Howard is also the Insurance manager. The insurance policy is up for renewal and although the insurers are now on notice of two potential claims, Howard does not expect this to cause significant problems. Due to the current cautious climate in the insurance world, it is unlikely that any reduction in cost can be negotiated. A large claim against the British Mountaineering Council hasn’t made things easier. It is not known how Brexit will affect insurance for BCA.

CroW Report re Judicial Review

David Rose gave a report on the Welsh Judicial Review case regarding CroW. In short, BCA lost the oral hearing which followed the initial refusal of leave to bring the review. An appeal has been lodged. The costs of this were limited to the court filing fee and were not high. This is a purely paper-based application and had to be filed with seven days of the judgment. David reported that the full written judgment was still awaited so the appeal was in effect simply a holding document which will be added to when the judgment is available. The timescale for the appeal is not known.

Howard Jones reported that: “... we approved £12,000 on the first batch of CRoW legal fees. Council have approved a budget of £60k for CRoW legal fees and if we lose the case (worst case scenario), the deficit for 2020 is likely to be in the order of £75k currently.”

Equipment and Techniques Officer’s Report

The following proposal was received from Mark Sims (E&T Convenor):

“The anchors currently being installed under the BCA anchor scheme are the Bolt Products (BP) GP8- 100-16A4 and the IC anchor. Currently IC anchors are only available to the CNCC. Nationally, stocks of BP anchors are relatively low (tens rather than hundreds per region), so a new batch of anchors will be needed sooner rather than later. It is now possible for BCA to purchase IC anchors from Lima Engineering, which would enable the use of either BP anchors or IC anchors by all regional councils. The most cost-effective way to purchase IC anchors is in batches of 650 anchors (the number obtainable from a full sheet of 8 mm steel). The approximate cost (depending on the exact price of steel) is £6 per anchor, giving an approximate cost of £3900 for a batch of 650 anchors. The E&T committee propose that BCA make a purchase of one batch of 650 IC anchors for use by all regional councils.”

As there was no known timescale for the manufacture and supply of these IC anchors to other regions, I asked if CNCC would be willing to make some of their stock available as needed to other regions. Andrew Hinde said he would raise this formally with CNCC but believed this was likely to be possible.

Training

The relationship between the Training Officer and the Qualifications Management Committee (QMC) has, historically, been a cause of both confusion and tension. Attempts were made to resolve this in the recent past but issues have surfaced again. To cut a very long story short, the Executive are looking into this in detail and will be consulting with all relevant parties with a view to bringing proposals to the next council meeting for the establishment of an oversight group.

The chair reported: “A higher oversight group needs to be established consisting of the Recreational caving training convenor, Commercial Caving instructor award scheme Working party convenor, the E&T group convenor and the Exec (or members of). This is to ensure all groups are liaising correctly, agreeing methods and uses of equipment that the BCA recommend and producing similar documentation.”

Detailed proposals are awaited. These will be discussed at the December council meeting.

CSCC Rep’s Comments

Since my report to the CSCC AGM, I have attended a two hour council meeting, which has required a minimum of an hour’s preparation. There has been considerable email traffic on the council list, much of which involved the training issues referred to above. I have not participated in this beyond obtaining a briefing on this from Alan Butcher. I turned to Butch on this as he has been closely involved with training at BCA level for many years and was called in to mediate in the discussions over the last couple of years that led to the current status quo. I’m very grateful to Butch for his help on this at very short notice before the last

council meeting. My preference is to wait for the recommendations from the Executive. I will liaise with Dave Keegan as CSCC Training Officer as soon as the papers on this are distributed.

This is a time of great change for BCA. The current Executive received a very healthy mandate from the electorate, which is extremely positive. Phil has made it perfectly clear that he will be, in his own words, an 'interfering' chair. He intends to be hands on at all levels. Having seen how Phil operates at first hand over several months, I think his approach is the right one. He has made it quite plain that BCA was in a state of crisis when he took over as chair and he is determined to lead it to a better place. I hope CSCC will continue to feel able to support Phil and the Executive in this aim. He has also made it clear that bullying and divisive behaviour have no place in BCA and will not be tolerated. I don't see this as an attempt to force anyone to 'toe the party line'. Debate and even dissent is healthy, but must be approached in a constructive manner and in a spirit of cooperation.

My experience CSCC rep on Council has continued to be positive and I do firmly believe that the BCA is moving steadily into better place.

After discussion with Russell Myers, BCA Secretary, we have formed an informal group to look at how BCA can help cavers with wellbeing in general, as cavers of all ages are suffering from social deprivation as a result of the covid pandemic. Caving is able to offer a lot of benefits, from healthy exercise to a sense of community, and this is something we would like to see promoted as well. We have had two initial zoom meetings to discuss this, the second of which included Lisa Crowe, the CHECC Welfare Officer, who has brought the student perspective to these discussions and we hope to find ways in which BCA can supporting student club welfare officers and others. This work is at a very early stage but we hope to keep up the impetus on this. If anyone has any interest or expertise in the area of wellbeing, please contact me.

As CSCC BCA rep, I have also participated in CSCC officers' meetings by Zoom.

Linda Wilson,

CSCC rep on BCA Council.

19 November 2021