

Conservation & Access Report - CSCC Meeting 14 Feb 2022

Apologies for absence but as it's Valentines Day, taking Chrissy out for a meal is more important.

Cheddar Access

No movement at the moment. Longleat are still waiting for us to provide some information which is being prepared by others and I have chased. Longleat were to consult their Solicitors on some matter and there has been no feedback on this as yet. Also it was arranged for them to speak to Howdens to assure themselves that our insurance was adequate, but as yet they haven't made this connection. They have told me that they have been rather preoccupied with getting commercial operation at Cheddar ready for reopening.

Singing River Mine

The requirements of the landowner have finally been agreed and they are satisfied with the insurance with the proviso that all visitors have full insurance cover. Keyholding clubs have all nominated someone to take responsibility for bookings, and in all cases this is the caving secretary. An administrative problem occurred following a well known caver telling the landowner that it was normal for cavers to pay a goodwill fee, when it had been previously agreed with him that there wouldn't be a charge. How to administer this and other arrangements on how the new system will work are being finalised and it is hoped to have everything up and running by the end of February. If anyone wants to see the draft details of the new arrangements please contact me. A copy of the new key will be made available to MCR. Measurements have been taken for the new gate and this will be organised as soon as possible.

Daffodil Valley Mines

Shipham FC will be transporting some rock down valley so some preliminary works can be done on the Daffodil Mine entrance ready for the gate to be fitted (when it's made!).

Ubley Warren Reserve

Work ongoing repairing gates / securing entrances. One more lock has been damaged.

Waterwheel Swallet

I received a report from that Waterwheel had been broken into. Apparently others had seen it earlier, but not bothered to report it. Immediate action was taken to secure the entrance due to it's high profile location. The gate taken away for repair and a statement issued on the situation:

"Waterwheel has recently been broken into and the gate vandalised. The gate has been removed for repair/replacement and the entrance has been secured with a non-removable grill. Everyone will appreciate that it is not possible to leave the entrance unsecured due to the caves high profile location on a popular nature reserve. Repairs to the gate will be carried out as soon as possible. Until the gate is replaced the cave is not available for trips.

If anyone has any information on the persons responsible or would like further information, please contact me."

Repairs were carried out on the gate but unfortunately could not be refitted. It was returned to the fabricators and the entire gate and frame is having to be reconstructed. This is being done at the moment and approval is needed for the expenditure. Although it is likely possible to reuse part of the old gate the existing galvanising has to be removed by sand blasting before working on it and then regalvanising. Whichever, the cheapest option will be pursued but nevertheless around £700 for the gate needs to be approved.

Manor Farm Swallet

The new grill / shaft cover and gate has been installed. A new lock has been fitted and the keys given to the landowner. A copy of the key has been made available to MCR. The new gate is a standard CSCC design which can be opened from the inside without a key. The key should now be returned to the farm after opening the cave and not at the end of the trip. The Access Guide has been updated.

An adjustable belay bar was incorporated into the frame and set at the lowest position. Initial feedback is that this may need raising which can be organised, but before this is done it would be useful to receive comments from more users. Please can everyone visiting the cave provide me with feedback, one way or the other. For safety, and to aid getting on/off rope or ladder some eye bolts are still to be fitted in the blockhouse.

Stoke Lane Slocker

The gate for the stream entrance was collected from the fabricators and fitted (forsaking a digging evening!). The other gate is not yet made. There are very high flows at the moment and the collapse that was taking the stream is now a lake and the water is overflowing. The fencing installed a while ago is secure.

Star Shaft

Persons unknown have broken into the mine despite the measures taken to keep it secure whilst the new gate is being made. The landowner has had the entrance welded shut and is not happy. It is uncertain at present if we will be able to regain access.

Loxton Caves

Persons unknown have broken into both Loxton Cave and Loxton Cavern. The lock was damaged on the main Loxton Cave gate and this has been replaced. At the top entrance they dug a hole to the side of the gate gaining direct entry into the shaft. The hole has been temporarily covered with a stone slab. At Loxton Cavern they have damaged the gate by cutting off the lock cover with an angle grinder so they could gain easy access to the lock to remove it. The gate is going to require major repair work but has been secured for the time being. Speculatively we need to budget up to £500 for the remedial works. It's difficult to tell but the break-ins may be relatively recent as the cut edges on the gate aren't showing obvious signs of rust.

Manor Farm (Swildons) Changing Barn

Robin has let me know that he has organised someone to do the roof repairs. I have volunteers organised to relay the floor as soon as this is done.

Closure Of Caves

I am extremely worried that the current problems we are suffering with break-ins is going to result in the total loss of access to a number of sites. I have spoken to various landowners and it is becoming clear that they are not happy with what is going on. This is involving me in an extraordinary amount of work and some very delicate negotiations.

There is nothing to report on other matters.

Graham Price

14/2/22