

Conservation & Access Report - CSCC Meeting 11th November 2024

Please find below the Conservation & Access Officer's Report. This covers the period since the last meeting in August 2024.

Longleat

The proposed access agreement, we put forward to cover the caves in Cheddar Gorge, has been accepted by the board of Longleat.

We are now in the process of writing up a formal definition of the agreement. This is quite a major exercise as it needs to cover Access Conditions and Procedures, the required Warden system, Conservation and Warden training plans for each cave, etc. We also need to implement an on-line "User Agreement" system and trip reporting process. I am hoping this work will all be completed by the end of November. We can then start training Wardens, with a view to having trips starting in January 2025.

The agreement covers recreational caving, caving diving and cave digging, initially for Reservoir Hole, Spider Hole and Gough's Cave. Hopefully we can expand this in the future to cover the other sites of interest in the Gorge.

Bethal Quarry



Contact has been made with the owner of Bethal Quarry. We discussed the recent anti-social behaviour and how access to the quarry could be better controlled.

Unfortunately the owner is not interested in entering into any form of access agreement. He is looking to sell or lease the quarry and doesn't want any agreement that could get in the way of that.

We discussed the options of gating the various entrances but he feels that the "local scrotes" will just attack them with angle grinders. He is planning to cast a concrete slab over the access shaft entrance (with air vents). He is also intending to repair the adit doors and installing CCTV to monitor them.

Given the situation, the prospect of getting an access agreement is remote. I will keep in contact with the owner just in case the situation changes.

Harridge Woods

The Harridge Wood Nature Reserve is owned and maintained by the Somerset Wildlife Trust (SWT). The reserve, on eastern Mendip, contains a number of caves and other sites of speleological interest. SWT approached CSCC to ask if we would be willing to take on responsibility for caver access. Subsequently, Liz (the Reserve Manager) and I made a tour of the woods and identified the main cave entrances. The two main caves (Harridge Wood Hole and EMMC) are gated and the metal work is in good condition.

SWT were looking for an access system similar to the Longwood / GB system. In essence this would involve an online permit system and an online trip reporting system. Due to Ash

dieback cavers should not enter the woods in high winds and always wear a helmet above ground. The agreement should initially be for 5 years and cost CSCC £25 per year. A formal agreement has been drafted and signed. Work has started on providing the online systems required. Once these are in place, the CSCC Access Guide will be updated and the padlocks changes to the standard CSCC ones.

Hunters Lodge Inn Sink



Following reports of issues with locking the lid on Hunter's Lodge Inn Sink, the slide bolt and catch were inspected.

The catch hole was reamed out and the slide bolt is now much easier to engage and disengage – there is now no need to stand on the lid to slide the bolt home!

Singing River Mine

The Singing River Mine access agreement has now been in place for 12 months and is running smoothly. During this time there have been 17 trips, involving some 100 cavers.

Wookey Hole Cave

The access agreement with Wookey has run without issue over the past three months. There have been 8 trips since the August CSCC meeting, involving some 48 cavers.

Pressure Washers

The CSCC Pressure Washers haven't been used since the summer. Please email canda@csc.org.uk if you would like to borrow them.

Future Priorities

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

- 1) Write the formal access agreement for the Caves of Cheddar Gorge
- 2) Arrange and complete the training of Wardens for the Cheddar Caves
- 3) Finalise the access arrangements (on-line facilities) for Harridge Woods
- 4) Discuss and agree the required Cow Hole entrance work with the landowner

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

Wayne Starsmore
C&A Officer
CSCC