

Chair's Report

Harridge Woods. I would like to thank Wayne our C&A Officer for all his work on the Harridge Woods Nature Reserve access agreement. The reserve is owned by Somerset Wildlife Trust (SWT). The license with SWT is ready to be voted on at this meeting. There will be a £25/year fee. The permit text, which is separate from the License also needs to be agreed.

Loxton Caves. I would also like to thank the Cerberus Spelaeological Society for coming to an agreement on the access to the Loxton caves. I have circulated a separate email on the subject. There will be a vote to accept the Cerberus' proposal. I would particularly like to thank the Cerberus Chair, Rick Gledhill, for the professional, pragmatic and courteous way this issue was handled.

Assistants. An ongoing issue of concern to all voluntary organisations is the recruitment of volunteers. The CSCC is in reasonable shape at the moment with all posts filled. There is some diversity on age and gender but there is scope for improvement. I am keen to bring on the next generation. Another consideration is continuity. Much knowledge of past events, agreements and actions is in people's heads, all too easily lost if that person moves on.

To tackle this I'm proposing that each officer is shadowed by an assistant. This has the additional advantage of sharing the high work load some roles have. How the work is shared out between officer and assistant would be up to them. I would give the assistant one specific task and that is to present the officer's report at meetings. This is to make sure they are engaged with the work.

This is just one idea which might or might not work. I'm open improvements or other ideas. The key thing is to tackle the issues of encouraging the next generation of volunteers, of continuity and of officer workload.

CSCC Event. CSCC used to hold an annual or bi-annual event to fly the flag and possibly raise some funds. It has taken various guises over the years. Some years the emphasis was on training, others on talks and others on digging. The evenings would be a BBQ and stomp with the obligatory bar. These were great fun. I'm proposing we resurrect the event next year with a date in May or early June.

One idea for the event has been suggest by our Training Officer called Race the Sun, variation on a treasure hunt. The idea would be for teams to visit as many caves as possible before sun down (will have to set an earlier time if in May).

Regional Council Funding. This one is rather technical but needs thinking about. Going way back to NCA times, and continuing with BCA, the Regional Councils (RC) were given a grant for their core expenses. Core expenses include day to day running costs, travel, C&A. It doesn't include training or bolting which RCs could apply to the relevant BCA committee for a share of their budget. The process is set out in the RC funding document (RCFD), see <https://british-caving.org.uk/about-bca/committees-groups/finance-committee/>

The key point is that the payment wasn't negotiable, BCA committed to pay what the RCs spent on core expenditure. A problem might arise if BCA ever became short of cash. The RCFD sets out a mechanism to deal with this, primarily by the RC notifying BCA of C&A projects before they are started. This allows a solution to be found ahead of time. BCA has

never been cash poor until now but it was anticipated the solution would involve careful scheduling of C&A projects across the regions.

The principle of core expenditure was muddied somewhat under the last BCA Treasurer, the current RCFD isn't entirely clear. The new BCA Treasurer has read the RCFD but seems to have missed the principle of core expenditure with a change to the procedures. In short the proposal put to the last BCA Council meeting was for the RCs to agree a budget with BCA for the year ahead. That seems to remove the core expenditure principle which puts the RCs in a significantly weaker position.

The question for CSCC is this an issue or will it become a non-issue with some clarification? I think the way forward is to convene the BCA Finance Committee to discuss the issue, something which hasn't happened so far. The Finance Committee is composed of the BCA and RCs Treasurers. They can review and update the RCFD and bring forward proposals as necessary.

David Cooke
November 2024

Treasurer's Report

A short report ahead of the next meeting.

We have no new prospective clubs since last meeting; this has been confirmed with the BCA Membership Administer in October.

Some small claims have been paid, totalling £60 for C&A work.

We have also been asked to report our expected expenses for this year. This is copied below for your information.

If your club is looking for Conservation and Access, Caver Training or other BCA funding then please contact your CSCC rep or a CSCC Officer.

Expenses for this year to date and expected expenses for the remainder of the year are as follows:

	Probability Band A 100%	Band B 50%	Band C 10%
Admin/Expenses (£)	0	50	100
Caver Training (£)	0	0	100
Routine C&A (£)	260	350	500
C&A Projects (£)	0	500	5000

*Please note that the large C&A projects amount under Band C is due to outstanding claims from the previous CSCC C&A Officer. These are for approved and completed works pre 2022.

Tom Harrison
Nov 2024

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

Equipment Officer's Report

The anchors between sumps 2 and 3 [Swildons Hole] have been replaced, there is a brief write up and photos. Thanks again to Pete Hall.

The loose anchor in Hunters Hole has been replaced. After the resin had been drilled out, the anchors still took 12kN and lots of hammering to get it out. (12kN is the max that can be read by the puller.) Thanks to Wayne Starsmore for help with this one.

There has been a request for the anchors on Window Pitch and Balcony Pitch [Mangle Hole] to be replaced. I'm unlikely to be able to do a trip down to look at the condition before the meeting. From memory and talking to others, they are through bolts, which are hard to remove and use the same hole. I've run a rescue practice there within the last 12 months and used the anchors, so it is unlikely that they are currently dangerous. That said they will be coming to end of life. One option that may well be worth looking at is replacing the hangers, possibly with stainless. Currently I do not know the implications for insurance if this route was chosen.

See https://csc.org.uk/wiki/equipment/mangle_hole

Andrew Atkinson
Nov 2024

Communications Officer's Report: Peter Burgess

I plan to change the newsletter schedule slightly from now on. Up to August this year, newsletters have been published in advance of council meetings, but I want to change this to soon after each meeting. This would mean that, as a minimum, the newsletter would contain reasonably up to date discussion points and decisions from the meetings, and any newsworthy material from officers' reports.

Many thanks to Cookie for stepping in back in August when I was unable to produce a newsletter.

Peter Burgess
CSCC Communications Officer
Nov 2024

Webmaster's Report

Moving the website away from the BCA server to Krystal, the new Internet provider, continues. In my last report I mentioned that I was evaluating alternatives to the mailing list software that we use has gone end of life and can no longer be used. I have tested and selected some software called Sympa. It does what is required and in many ways is an improvement on Mailman 2. It is not the easiest to setup so work is ongoing.

The new Harridge Woods access agreement requires a permit system similar to the one I wrote for the Charterhouse Caving Company. I have set it up. Once the wording of the permit and associated text has been agreed it will go live. It will be available at <https://hw-permits.csc.org.uk>.

David Cooke
November 2024