



Formations in Shatter Cave. Photo by Linda Wilson

It doesn't seem like a year since the last one, but here we are with just two weeks until the 2022 AGM. Notably, at there will be a contested vote for the election of the Conservation and Access Officer, arguably the most important two candidates standing; Graham Price, the incumbent C&A officer, and Wayne Starsmore of the Wessex Cave C election statements later in this newsletter.

Meanwhile Ed Waters has written a vision document for access (appended to this newsletter); this is clearly a hot southern cavers will be able to make a choice on such a fundamental issue, so please make sure your club is rep to have your say. Meeting details below:

2022 CSCC Annual General Meeting - Friday 13th May from 19:00

Online, via Zoom

[Click to join](#)

[or copy and paste link into your browser: <https://bristol-ac-uk.zoom.us/j/97572724416>]

The agenda for the meeting can be found on the CSCC website [HERE](#).

Access News

Compton Martin Ochre Mine



Compton Martin Ochre Mine entrance, awaiting new gate. Photo by Graham Price

Replacement of the gate on Compton Martin Ochre Mine has been pending for a long, long time. One was made stolen along with others, however it has now been necessary to give replacement very high priority following complaints that the open entrance that anyone can crawl into, presented a real danger to children who regularly play in the area.

Strangely, these complaints were received following a message in a similar vein being received from some cavers who had been referred to me by the landowner.

The mine is gated as a requirement of the landowner for safety reasons and to protect the bat population. The mine is closed and visits are restricted and when visiting care must be taken to avoid any disturbance. During January, the mine is closed and visits are restricted.

The main purpose of the item is to give advance warning a new gate has been made and will be fitted in the next few weeks without the key.

The villagers also have concerns about parking. There is very limited parking in an obvious area on the left in front of the end of the road. If no spaces are available you may have to park some distance away, taking care not to restrict access to properties.



Compton Martin, limited available parking, Photo by Graham Price

Please note that if you try to find the mine using the description in Mendip Underground you are likely to have major problems. The correct route to the mine is to take the footpath on the left-hand side just to the side of the last house at the end of the main road. It may appear to be taking you away from the combe but after a short distance a less defined path on the right can be found. When you reach a flat area before the brow of the hill is reached you can cross the fence to the right into the wooded combe and then follow the path a short distance ahead on the left.

Graham Price - Compton Martin

Fairy Cave Quarry

From May 1st 2022 the combination for the entrance gate to Fairy Cave Quarry will be changed. The new combination will be agreed by the major Mendip caving clubs and Fairy Cave Quarry Management Committee.

A reminder that the combination must not be passed on to non cavers/climbers since the quarry owners do not give access and doing so may risk future access to the quarry

Dave King - Fairy Cave Quarry

Cow Hole

Following another change of ownership, it has been possible to renegotiate access to Cow Hole and the cave is now accessible.

There is no requirement to call on the owner, however the following procedure must be followed.

The entrance is located in the field one removed from the road. Park neatly on the verge in Ubley Drove taking care not to block the gateways, leaving plenty of space for tractors with large trailers to manoeuvre.

Follow the track across the first field from the gate situated at ST 51534 57093, which is between Ubley Barn and is effectively part of the garden of Ubley Barn and it is essential that the gates at both ends are shut. There is a rigid field and no need to obtain permission to use it.

The cave is located at ST 51963 567643 in the second field.

The entrance is not very visible and a GPS is useful to locate it. If the field is planted with a grass crop for hay it is a route to the entrance and avoid excessive damage to the grass. If the field is in use for grazing and animals are present for one member of the party to remain on the surface to safeguard the entrance.

Proposals to aid in locating the entrance and securing the lid are under consideration.

WARNING. Please take note that the section from the bottom of the entrance shaft and the pitch into the cave is of questionable stability and appropriate care must be taken. There is limited space at the head of the pitch for anchors. The pitch is not suitable for SRT.

If anyone would like to volunteer to carry out some stabilisation work please get in contact.

Graham Price - Conservation

Waterwheel Swallet



Waterwheel Swallet gate replacement. Photo by Graham Price

The Waterwheel Swallet was broken into over the Christmas period and the cave had to be made secure and a temporary

Unfortunately, the irresponsible actions of the persons unknown who damaged the gate resulted in an extended closure. The original gate repaired failed and it was necessary to have a new one made.

The new gate has now been fitted and access restored. Access remains the same, the cave has a standard CSCO gate. **Graham Price, Conservation Officer**

Loxton Cave



Loxton Cave upper entrance works. Photo by Graham Price

The upper entrance to Loxton Cave has been completely rebuilt following the recent break-in where the culprits ended up leaving a dangerous open drop into the rift close to a footpath. As expected, the Parish Council who own the cave are not happy about this and it has involved some diplomacy to maintain access and the status quo.

Graham Price, Conservation Officer

Cave break-ins

Unfortunately, as reported in the last newsletter, both Waterwheel and Loxton have suffered from break-ins; but fortunately we have been able to retain access despite the irresponsible actions of the offenders who seem intent on causing problems involving considerable expense. There are a number of other sites which have also suffered. In some instances, it may not be possible to access due to our apparent failure, as the landowners see it, to keep the entrances secure. If anyone has any information about those responsible for these break-ins we would appreciate hearing from you.

Cave Access Information Plates

It seems little coincidence to me that the spate of break-in's and gate vandalism coincided with international travel and the use of the local countryside by tourists who may otherwise have travelled elsewhere.

To the uninitiated, what greater intrigue than finding a strange locked door leading into the hillside? Yet with no fear to gain access is it any surprise that some have resorted to vandalism to feed their curiosity?

If this is indeed the case, and not an aggrieved northern caver deliberately causing trouble, then a simple information plate is needed. By providing details of how to gain further information or legitimate access, we stand to significantly reduce the number of curious visitors. We also stand a chance of directing those adventurous individuals responsible towards a caving club where they could be put into discovering new caves, rather than damaging gates to readily accessible and well known sites.

At the last General Meeting, I offered to look into this and get quotes for stainless steel engraved plates that could be secured with a CSCC lock. There are circa 40 cave entrances currently fitted with a CSCC lock, so I would propose one plate for each of these, plus 10 un-named plates to be held as spares that could be marked up using a letter punch if required. The plates could be quickly and securely installed to a suitable surface with grab adhesive. The total cost for the plates and a suitable adhesive should be less than £500 all in; considerably less than the cost of one replacement. It would be money well spent.

Peter Hall

Election Statements

The following election statement is from the current C&A Officer, Graham Price, who is standing again for re-election.

I would be very pleased to continue in the role of C&A Officer for the coming year. I've done this job and been given the opportunity many years since the '70's. It's often been a lot of work but something I find very fulfilling. Caving has been my passion and this is one way I can put something back to something that has given me so much.

I spend on average at least two days a week on conservation and access matters. A lot of this is practical work with things as stabilising entrances (Loxton Cavern and Manor Farm Swallet are examples of this type of work) and repairing gates or grills at the landowners' request (for example recent repairs to the vandalised gate at Waterwheel Swallet and the floor in the barn in Priddy where cavers change to visit Swildon's). There is also a lot of work discussing access with landowners and implementing those arrangements (examples include the new access arrangements at Singing Rock and negotiations with Lingleat Estate over access to the caves in Cheddar Gorge). In addition, there are often copious emails and phone calls to deal with, and on reflection this probably hasn't been included in the average time mentioned.

This is a job where the old adage of 'stick your head above the parapet and someone will shoot at it' really does go on. Sometimes I reflect on this as being a compliment as to how much I actually do! Do nothing or the bare minimum is much less likely to get complained about. People will still complain, as they do, but it's much less likely to be directed at me. CSCC often comes in for criticism in the wider caving community for the number of gated caves in our region, but often a lack of understanding of local concerns, and unless we want to lose access to caves, we need to be respectful to landowners, often driven by worries about liability.

I have always done my best to report fully to CSCC meetings and if re-elected to the role will continue to do so. C

fully consulted about all work (unless matters are very pressing, and in those cases I have always reported back to the club). Not all club members and local cavers receive or read the information that is sent out (unless the club reps pass it on) or visit the website, where all my reports can be found.

What I find disappointing is that despite trying hard to act in everyone's best interest, do everything as transparently as possible, follow basic guidelines and principals, and give people the opportunity to comment, people still often complain they knew better but this has always been the case. Anyone doing this job needs to learn to live with this.

If adopted by CSCC, I believe the guidelines Ed Waters is proposing will be helpful to anyone doing the C&A job. The guidelines have been handled and bring in additional layers of 'protection' for the post holder by making the process more public.

So if I am re-elected as C&A Officer, I will continue to do my best for caves and cavers and put something back in the role I am passionate about.

The following election statement is from Wayne Starsmore who has been nominated for the role of C&A Officer

To those of you who don't know me, I have been a caver for 30+ years. I have served as the Wessex Caving Secretary and am also a member of Mendip Cave Rescue and the BEC. I am a regular digger (18 Acre, Mitchells, Spider, Tuskar) and a landowner (Cuckoo Cleeves).



Wayne Starsmore

I want to take on the C&A role as I believe I can improve the credibility, professionalism and transparency of the C landowners. Other than being a landowner myself, I have also spent many years as a company director and thus board-level negotiations, which will be particularly valuable when dealing with the larger landowners (such as Lon keeping cave access agreements as simple and standardised as possible. I feel this can be achieved by introducing ease of access whilst also trying to satisfy any landowner concerns and reservations.

I appreciate the C&A role does consume a lot of time and, being retired, I can commit to this.

In order to increase transparency and help reduce the workload, I would look to get more people actively involved Access projects. There are a great many cavers who are more than willing to volunteer their time to worthy project organisation, encouragement and promotion get people to participate (as demonstrated by ATLAS's project at Thripos). Additionally, I will also investigate the possibility of creating a post of C&A Assistant or even looking to split the C&A Conservation Officer and a separate Access Officer (this will ensure a more balanced priority between the two activities).

In recent years it seems access to caves in our region has become more restricted despite an ever-increasing amount of access projects! This trend must not be allowed to continue. Furthermore, Access issues have dominated the agenda and has severely curtailed any conservation work. If elected, I will do my utmost to change these trends.

Officers Reports

Chair's Report

It is CSCC AGM time of year again, it is amazing how quickly it comes around again. I would hope that members continued to evolve in a positive direction during the year, and that many of you are returning to the underground the COVID pandemic have eased. From the CSCC point of view it has been a mixed year, meetings have continued, much good work has been done, some things we have failed to achieve.

Our officers have all worked extremely hard during the year on your behalf. These are the guys who do all of the heavy lifting, all of our members appreciate the effort that they put in. Of course not everyone will agree with everything our officers do, please do not carp and complain unless you are prepared to stand up, get involved and stick your head above the parapet. It is up to the individual officers to provide details of their activities during this year, but each and every one of them gets their efforts.

Achievements for this year include establishment of the Communications Officer post, which I think has paid off handsomely. Members would agree that we are making positive progress in providing information to our members, although there is still more we can do to get information out in a more timely manner. General Meetings, all online, have been well attended and have been inclusive, fair and a pleasant environment. If you feel I am wrong, please feel free to let me know. I am very keen to hear from members and do everything possible to ensure that meetings are as welcoming as possible. With the lifting of COVID restrictions, the question of whether a return to physical meetings should be made, I have attached a draft strategy for the future for discussion at the AGM.

There are several things that haven't gone so well this year. Firstly we are still getting to grips with the "new" constitution in 2020. Although eighteen months may seem like a long time, this is only the second AGM run under the new rules. We are finding minor issues with the wording as we use the document in anger. It is very likely that some minor changes will be proposed in the coming year. At last year's AGM I took on an action to investigate the potential for CSCC to represent members south that are not members of member clubs. I am sorry to report that I was only able to organise one meeting of such no proposal has been worked up for the 2022 AGM. I hope the membership will allow some latitude on this subject and a proposal will be put forward at the 2023 AGM.

Access lies at the heart of what CSCC does, and much time is spent negotiating to open up new access and maintain existing access. Despite this, CSCC has been the subject of criticism with regards access from some quarters. I believe that many of these criticisms are a lack of understanding why certain access restrictions are in place, which in turn is due to CSCC not explaining our position clearly. As such I believe that CSCC needs to be more transparent with how we go about negotiating access and restrictions. As such I believe that CSCC will need to adopt a dedicated access policy in the near future. In order to do this I provided a paper giving my vision of what such a document may need to include, which I (in a personal capacity) hope will be taken into account in the spirit in which it was intended.

As previously stated, I will be standing as Chair again in 2022, and look forward to continuing in the role should that be the case.

Secretary's Report

No report received

Conservation & Access Officer's Report

This only sets out to summarise much of the conservation and access work done during the past year. A full report will be available prior to the AGM.

Work this past year has included:

Reopening and maintaining discussions with Longleat over access to the caves in Cheddar. There are still some issues with Longleat getting their Cheddar operation back up and running and some staff changes at Longleat things look positive in the coming months.

Negotiating access to Singing River mine and setting up an access procedure to comply with the landowner's requirements.

Repairing the vandalised gate on Waterwheel Swallet.

Negotiating access to and reopening Cow Hole.

Dealing with a dangerous collapse at Stoke Lane and organising replacement of the gates at the request of the Parish Council.

Replacement of stolen gate on the cave at Pondsmead, Oakhill and installation of the new gate on the open shaft at Loxton Cave and installation of the new gate on the open shaft at Loxton Cave to avoid permanent closure of caves.



Graham Price at the entrance to Pondsmead after the fitting of the new gate

Discussions with Loxton Parish Council and dealing with their concerns about the break-ins to the caves and rebuilding the gate on Loxton Cavern.

Completion of the rebuilding and stabilisation works in Loxton Cavern, and retaping and other conservation work in Loxton Cavern.

reintroduction of the access agreement which is currently underway.



Conservation tape protecting original miner's boots. Loxton Cave. Photo by Graham Price

Installation of a foundation, construction of a new wall, installation of a grill over the entrance shaft and replacing the old wall at the request of the landowner to enable compliance with his insurance policy. It should be noted that it has been agreed that the landowner will call at the farm to seek permission for access as the cave has never been on a CSCC padlock. This remains the case. It is clear that despite this information on the Access Guide, not all cavers have been doing this.



Rebuilt entrance to Manor Farm Swallet. Photo by Graham Price

Updating the CSCC Access Guide and adding missing sites of which there are still many to go. This is the first time it has been up to date. Also trying to encourage people to use the guide as all the information it contains is up to date (it).

Dealing with issues arising from the replacement gate not being fitted at Compton Martin Ochre Mine.

Starting the compilation of a database of landowners so future incumbents of the C&A role will not have many of them since taking on the job again.

Dealing with a number of break-ins and repair and installation of gates to deal with this and maintain access.

Dealing with many miscellaneous enquires about access; which can be numerous.

Liaising, where necessary, with BCA's C&A working group. This has been quiet over the past year but in the past, that group and will be so again when meetings are convened. Jenny Potts has taken that job, so I anticipate that it will recommence soon.

I really need to emphasise that this is not a complete list!

All this takes time, and a lot of it. Fortunately, this isn't an issue for me. Many things have to be acted on immediately and will not go away - they can only get worse. At a very conservative estimate I spend a minimum of two days a week often more such as this last week where it has been more like five days, give or take a few hours! For instance, the Singing River matter to date has probably involved well in excess of 80 hrs and there is still a lot more to do. Dealing with Cheddar access has probably taken a similar amount of time. I have a strong team supporting me, particularly

Treasurer's Report

Position vacant. No report received

Davie

Equipment Officer's Report

After many years, this year has seen the return of availability of resin anchors to regions other than CNCC. Batched resin can now be obtained. This meant that CSCC could get on with some of the work that had been planned. I had to CSCC, but not that urgently, when persons unknown took it on themselves to add in extra anchors to Rhino Rif. It has been written about that already, so suffice to say the anchors were not good, with one causing a slab of rock to fall. I believe it was not in use at the time.

A very experienced team had already been in and core drilled out the old spit route and placing an anchor in the hole. An excellent example of cave conservation at its best. Thanks to all that helped at short notice. It was really good to have everyone together and got on with what was needed, allowing us to do the whole route in a single (long) day, something that was not possible.

This used nearly all the supply of anchors and most of the glue. However, we had enough anchors and, slightly surplus, do Approach Passage in Swildons. CSCC has now received another batch and next on the list is the 35' in Eastw.

Also during the year the anchor placement part of the website has been updated. Everything had been in a single unwieldy, the plan is to split it up to make it easier to follow. Inevitably during the transition there are two systems, worse, however hopefully time will allow this to be fully moved over making it easier for everyone in the future.

Andrew Atkinson

Communications Officer's Report

After a year in the newly created role, I have now produced four newsletters, each ahead of the quarterly general meeting. To use social media to promote the CSCC and its work. News stories and information have been published on the Facebook page and more recently on the newly created CSCC board on UKCaving.com.

Through the CSCC Facebook account, I have "subscribed" to a number of other pages that may be of interest to the club. This effectively means that content published by these organisations will be visible when using the CSCC account, all the content on the CSCC page. This reposted content often gains a better response from our "followers" than CSCC original content.

I am pleased to report that, despite concerns raised by certain members, there have been no untoward comments since creating the CSCC account and sub-board. A small amount of constructive discussion has been generated.

If the analytics are anything to go by, it is disappointing how few club reps appear to forward the newsletter on to their clubs. That when the newsletter is forwarded on by a club rep, it is opened dozens of times, so it is clear that club members value the newsletter given the opportunity. A considerable amount of effort goes into producing the newsletter, so it would be nice if it was

audience.

On the topic of effort, I must thank all those who have supported me in this role, this includes everything from providing feedback and criticism where due. A particular mention goes to Linda Wilson, who has not only taught me to use the templates, but has also helped creating the templates, proof reading and also providing some excellent content over the course of the year.

Finally, I must admit that some items have taken longer than would be ideal to get online and there may have been some content that was not; this is, I suppose, the nature of a voluntary role, undertaken as time allows. While I try to get relevant content online and out to the membership as soon as possible, I make no apology for the fact that I have to juggle work, family and actually going caving. I am happy to continue in the role for a further year if the membership can be on the same basis as this last year; as time allows. If there is someone out there who is able and prepared to stand aside, but in the meantime, I hope my efforts are better than leaving the position vacant!

Peter Hall

Training Officer's Report



Results of the CSCC photography workshop in Swildon's Hole. Photo by Craig Holdstock

A successful few months for training, with us officially running our first training event! Mark Burkey ran a one day taking students through an introduction to cave photography before taking them underground to put their skills into practice. The event was covered by those attending and the CSCC, with participants contributing £10 each, and the CSCC contributing the rest.

positive, and if people are keen in something like this again then please let me know and we can put a session on

I'll be looking to run an SRT workshop in the coming months as well, if this is something that would interest you (e taking the opportunity to brush up on your SRT skills) then please let me know so I can judge demand signal.

With the elections, I am keen to run again for Training Officer, heavily caveated with the fact that I will have limited months of the next year. If anyone would like to take over Training Officer then I would be more than happy to support someone who would like to help me with the next 12 months then I would really appreciate that as well.

Davie

BCA Representative's Report



The following report is from CSCC's BCA Rep, Linda Wilson.

I attended the BCA Council meeting on 5th April. The following are some highlights of the matters discussed and

General

Jenny Potts has kindly agreed to act as convenor for the Conservation and Access Working Group, so we should front at national level again. Jenny has been involved with the group for years and is well placed to take this forward.

BCA, along with BCRA, wholeheartedly condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine. These statements were war cavers.

CRoW

Following the compromise agreement reached on the judicial review of the decision to exclude Stuart France from access reform in Wales, David Rose, on behalf of BCA, made a detailed case to the Welsh Government for the in

actives allowed under CroW. On 1st April, the Welsh Government responded to these representations. They resp point made to them but in essence, their reply is that they do not have the resources to look into this further and t do so. They avoided taking any decision as to whether CroW applied to caving or not and simply set out what the 'understanding' of the position. This is a subtle distinction, but an important one.

They stated: "The Welsh Ministers consider that there are a number of already identified practical obstacles which arrangements for cavers undesirable at this time, because of the complexity, cost, and resources it would take to overcome these obstacles (if indeed they could be overcome)."

One of these 'practical obstacles' is the fact that caves are not mapped on any of the 'conclusive' maps on which i based.

They commented: "Consequently, the Welsh Ministers have at this stage concluded that a significant work progra consider, develop and implement any potential reform of access arrangements for caving." and concluded: "... ha use of their finite resources, they do not intend to consider reform of access arrangements for caving in Wales at i

This response arrived just before the BCA Council meeting in early April, and with CroW Working Group Conven in Mexico, there was little Council could do to reflect on the response. Subsequently, Stuart France resigned from as he did not agree with the decision to reach a compromise agreement on the original action and feels that there success in any further action against the Welsh Government at this time. No proposal has yet been made to coun happens next.

The matter of the costs in the judicial review action remains undecided and so BCA does not know whether it will costs. To date, BCA has spent £80,000 on the action over the past two years. If any suggestion is made that BCA judicial review, I will need a strong steer from the membership on how to exercise the CSCC vote in council on an use of BCA funds. Please consider this carefully in advance of the meeting, as requested by Ed Waters in recent reproduced below:

Dear All,

In addition to the published agenda, I would like to ask all members to have a think about a significant issue pri most of you will be aware BCA has pursued a Judicial Review in an attempt to clarify whether access to caves under the Countryside Rights of Way Act (CROW). The result of this work has been somewhat ambiguous, and BCA will have to consider whether or not to pursue further legal action on this topic.

Such action does of course come at a significant price, to date tens of thousands of pounds have been spent, v from BCA funds, though it is believed that a proportion of this may be awarded as costs. The question I would I CSCC should direct our BCA Representative to vote if and when a proposal to authorise significant spending fc related to CROW. The key question being whether you believe that spending a significant proportion of BCA's i this divisive issue is worthwhile or not.

The reason for this request is that the subject of whether or not the CROW act does (or should) apply to caving divisive one, and in particular one where CSCC has often been perceived to be at loggerheads with the majorit community. As such I want to ensure that whatever line our BCA Representative takes in BCA Council is totally accurately reflects the wishes of the CSCC members.

If you have any questions on the above, please feel free to contact me.

Very many thanks,

Ed Waters, CSCC Chair

I absolutely endorse Ed's comment. I do not want to be open to any accusations of having voted in accordance with those of the CSCC.

Proposed reduction in council membership

The following proposal has been made by Josh White:

"Removal of 2 Individual and 2 group representatives

Over the last few AGMS council has struggled to fully fill these roles, and when they have the roles there is very little members.

I propose that we reduce the number of individual representatives to 2 and group representatives to 2, with one re-elected at each AGM with a term of two years.

If this proposal is accepted, the individual and group representative with the highest number of votes at this AGM

The relevant constitutional changes would be as follows:

6.2 The Association shall have a National Council comprised of the Officers of the Association, up to ~~four~~ two representatives of Group Members, up to ~~four~~ two representatives from the class of Individual Members.

Proposed: Josh White (14859)

Seconded: Howard Jones (18515)"

Concerns have been expressed by Jenny Potts about the removal, in particular of two of the four group representatives on reasonable grounds that clubs have an important role to play in BCA because of their work in collecting subscriptions. There are good arguments both for and against the proposal. In principle, I'm not against the reduction for three members and individual reps attended meetings at once, council would be very large and potentially unwieldy as the larger council is likely to get bogged down. 2) in practice, the roles have never been at full strength, so cutting the number will simplify things. One has never adequately managed to explain to me how these group and individual reps actually reflect any sort of constituency, simply putting forward their own views. There has never been any mechanism for consulting or representing a wider membership. In practice, this only ever seems to have been a means of electing up to eight more council members.

This is a matter that clubs and their members should consider to enable informed votes to be made on the proposal.

In the Constitution Working Group, I have made a suggestion that BCA could consider holding up a 'Club Forum' which could come together to discuss matters of concern/importance at national level. This would enable discussion between regions under a BCA umbrella. Perhaps such a forum could even elect its own group/club representatives on council to facilitate exchange of information and views and this would enable such reps to have a 'constituency' with which they have a direct mechanism. This could be held on Zoom at no cost to BCA. I must stress that this is only a very embryonic idea, based on thoughts from CSCC members. This suggestion is in no way intended to in any way supplant regional councils, as these are the best forum for dealing with access issues. But a national club 'forum' under the BCA umbrella could enable direct representations on such things as the idea (that periodically gets brought up in council) to scrap Club Individual Members and everyone join BCA as Direct Individual Members (DIMs).

Grants to young cavers attending the 18th International Congress of Speleology

Following Dave Cooke's suggestion that BCA should offer grants to young cavers attending the international congress,

White (Youth and Development Working Group Convenor) and Howard Jones (Treasurer) to develop this idea.

Instead of offering grants to individuals, it was decided to encourage group participation, on condition that at least group were 24 or younger, or in full time education. Two grants of £500 have been made to groups from Reading the University of Bristol Spelaeological Society. The committee considered that these applicants presented compe their applications. I'm really grateful to Dave Cooke for making this suggestion, and it was a pleasure to work with something of benefit to young cavers.

Webmaster's Report

No report received.

CSCC Diary

Monday 15 August 2022 19:00	General Meeting (Zoom)
Friday 11 November 2022 19:00	General Meeting (Zoom)
Wednesday 1 February 2023 23:59	Notification to members of upcoming AGM
Monday 13 February 2023 19:00	General Meeting (Zoom)
Wednesday 15 March 2023 23:59	Deadline for AGM nominations
Friday 17 March 2023 19:00	Deadline for AGM constitutional amendments
Saturday 1 April 2023 23:59	Notification to members of AGM nominations
Friday 13 May 2023 19:00	Annual General Meeting (Zoom)

A Vision for Underground Access in the South of En

The following has been written by Ed Waters from a personal perspective of over 35 years of caving in CSCC Chair. The paper is intended to spark discussion at a forthcoming CSCC General Meeting and d views of the wider CSCC at this time.

Introduction

The Southern Counties of England contain a breathtaking variety of underground features, ranging from natura and a variety of other man-made underground structures. These provide a valuable resource for all undergrou

based in the south or further afield. Balancing ease of access to these sites against various other competing or significant issues, and can be complex to solve.

The Council of Southern Caving Clubs (CSCC) is the British Caving Association's (BCA) Regional Body dealing with access, for the South of England. CSCC directly administers access to a number of caves and mines on behalf of many more which are controlled by one of a number of Access Controlling Bodies (ACB)[1].

By and large the CSCC and ACBs in the South of England have provided continuity of access to underground sites and maintaining good relations with landowners over extended periods of time. The flip side however is that there are sites with different access requirements, which can be difficult to comprehend to those new to caving in the south.

In recent years there has been much criticism levelled at the perceived level of difficulty in accessing certain sites compared to other regions in the UK. Much of this has been unfounded, but there is no smoke without fire, and the time has come to reassess whether access to underground sites in the South can be better managed to the advantage of underground cavers and landowners alike.

The Council of Southern Caving Clubs

The BCA does not involve itself with access[2], but devolves access issues to the regional bodies such as the CSCC. The CSCC negotiates access agreements and controls access to a number of sites, but the majority of sites with access controlled are administered by one of many ACBs. Many of these ACBs are caving clubs, some of which are voting members of the BCA. ACBs are organisations specifically created to control access to one or more underground sites. CSCC allows only voting members, with only one of these currently a member.

In addition to the above, CSCC carries out a great deal of work to maintain access to many cave sites. Such work includes maintaining gates, stabilizing entrances, remedial safety work and even fitting styles / fences. This work is not only for access, but also plays a major role in fostering good relations with landowners.

Access Negotiations

This section relates purely to access negotiations carried out by CSCC, like the BCA CSCC does not interfere with the activities of its members unless asked, as such CSCC will not normally get involved in negotiations carried out by other ACBs. CSCC engages with landowners of underground sites to agree access conditions. In many cases this results in formal agreements, typically with some conditions required for access.

Such negotiation is under the remit of the CSCC Conservation & Access (C&A) Officer, and at present the CSCC does not have a policy on how such negotiations are to be carried out.

Typically these negotiations currently take place between the C&A Officer and the landowner or their agent. Most are ad-hoc in nature, and result in the C&A Officer publishing access conditions on the CSCC website (<https://cscguide.csc.org.uk/>). More formal agreements, typically with large landowners, usually require significantly greater resources and result in formal written agreements[4].

The current situation places a great burden on the C&A Officer, and also results in a less than transparent process where good access conditions are achieved. It is suggested that some simple guidelines will both aid the C&A Officer and provide transparency in the negotiation and understanding of any access restrictions by the wider community. It is of course understood that the CSCC has its own specific challenges and will require a bespoke approach which will inevitably require tailoring of the guidelines.

The specific recommendations for access negotiations are as follows;

1. CSCC Will only negotiate access in the South of England (Excepting areas covered by the Devon & Cornwall Caving Council)[5].
2. That CSCC will only negotiate access in the following circumstances;
 - a. in cooperation with the landowner or their agent[6];

- b. the site is not covered by an agreement held by another ACB[7];
 - c. or where an ACB requests help from CSCC.
3. The aim should be to achieve the least restrictive set of conditions for access as possible. Note that this r landowner concerns but issues such as conservation. This should include modern methods of controlling booking etc. The aim to be to try to avoid additional travel to sign bits of paper or pick up keys.
 4. Negotiations should aim to make access as equitable as possible to any caver, this should include frank c topics such as any potential age limits and any access for professional cavers.
 5. That at least two CSCC Officers are involved in all formal meetings with landowners and agents. This prc should one officer become unavailable, but also ensures transparency in negotiation.
 6. Full and contemporaneous records are kept, on the Officers' area of the CSCC website, of all meetings b Landowners.
 7. Copies of formal access agreements should be kept on the CSCC website, again for transparency and cc
 8. CSCC communicates not only the nature of any access controls but provides an explanation of why those
 9. Any access agreement should only come into force after a vote at a CSCC General Meeting[8].

Although CSCC should not interfere with negotiations carried out by other Southern ACBs or the way these AC encourage more of them to become members of CSCC and to operate in a similar transparent manner wherev

CSCC Capital Access Projects

CSCC has a long history of carrying out significant projects to maintain access to a variety of cave and related carried out at the behest of landowners, and is a cornerstone of the generally excellent relationships that have landowner community over the decades. Again, organization of such work is done by the C&A Officer.

Such work has historically included provision of gates, stabilization of entrances, fencing, installation of styles a used as a changing room. Many of these projects are costly[9] and take up a large amount of volunteer time. It do all they reasonably can to continue such work as good relationships with landowners are paramount to all of the underground. However, it is suggested that the following guidelines should apply;

1. Such work should only ever be carried out at the request of or with formal permission of the landowner.
2. At sites with uncontrolled access[10], where CSCC controls access or at the request of the relevant ACB.
3. CSCC should only carry out such work where the landowner has agreed to a reasonable set of access cc CSCC should not invest funds or volunteer time on projects where access is denied. Alternatively, CSCC authorize work in cases requiring urgent work that cannot wait until the next General Meeting. In such cas work will be made at the next General Meeting.
4. A budget for the work should be agreed in advance, including the spit of funding between CSCC, Landow relevant). This should include consideration of whether BCA will fund the CSCC portion of the work.
5. That the level of investment required is considered commensurate with the amount of visitors expected at
6. That, wherever possible, such work should be well advertised ahead of being carried out in order that pot the chance to get involved.

Gates

Provision of locked gates on caves is one of the most emotive subjects in British caving, with the perception, by cavers are all too ready to gate and lock caves to keep everyone else out. The reality is that gates are essentia to provide public safety, conserve the cave or even to keep landowners insurers happy. That said, a gate and lc investment (see above) and leads to an ongoing and often expensive maintenance and repair commitment.

As such it is suggested that CSCC adopt a set of guidelines for the installation of gates and locks, and maintair including an explanation of why that gate is in place. This should be reviewed on a regular basis, or at least wh needs repair or replacement. The need for such arrangements should be kept under review. These guidelines \ fitted to a cave where access is controlled or administered by CSCC, but CSCC should encourage other ACBs approaches. The proposed guidelines would be;

1. CSCC should only fit a gate at the landowners request or with their permission.

2. CSCC should only fit gates on caves where access is controlled or administered by CSCC, or at the request of the landowner [13].
3. Gates should only be fitted where necessary. Reasons for fitting could include (but are not limited to), public safety, cave and landowner liability concerns.
4. The method of securing the gate should be commensurate with the purpose for which the gate has been fitted to ensure public safety a bolt rather than a key may be acceptable in some circumstances. Where a lock is used should be justified and explained.
5. The cost of any gate and lock should be commensurate with the expected level of caver traffic, perceived risk and any site specific concerns [14]. These factors should be considered when authorizing the budget for a gate.
6. CSCC should only fit gates to caves where there is either a formal or informal access agreement in place.
7. CSCC should not maintain gates or locks to caves where the landowner has withdrawn access, and this should be discussed during any access negotiation.
8. In the case of locked caves, keys should be readily available and not require cavers to make excessive requests for them.

By following these guidelines it is hoped that the wider caving community will be more accepting of gates where they are necessary.

Countryside Rights of Way Act 2005 (CROW)

Note: This section may be overtaken by events with regard to the recent result of the Judicial Review.

The implications of the CROW act on caving have been subject to an immense amount of debate for many years. The current situation is the ambiguity as to whether caving is an allowable activity under the terms of the act. In essence does the act allow one to descend a cave where the entrance lies on "Access Land" as described in the act. Historically the CSCC has believed that CROW does not allow caving, and that landowners still have a right to refuse to allow cavers to descend on their Land.

At the time of writing, the situation is still uncertain. However the Council of Northern Caving Clubs (CNCC) has stated that caving is allowed under CROW and has worked with a number of landowners to remove many restrictive agreements from caves across the North.

So where does this leave the CSCC as regards access to caves on Access Land in the South? It is suggested that the CSCC should raise the issue for access negotiations, and one where CSCC needs to be open and honest with landowners. Simply, we should state the ambiguity but also inform them of the potential pros and cons of the CROW Act.

More importantly is the issue of protecting vulnerable caves on Access Land if and when it becomes fully accepted as an allowable activity under CROW. If this is the case then it would be an offence to block access to any cave on Access Land. This could include provision of a locked gate. There are provisions in the act however to restrict access for public safety (Section 25) or conservation (Section 26). These could be used to allow access restrictions to caves that posed a potential danger to the public or the environment.

As such the following actions are suggested for the CSCC;

1. By the next General Meeting, create a list of caves on Access Land in the South which may require access negotiations, and discuss with the relevant landowners.
2. By the next AGM, develop draft Section 25 and Section 26 submissions for any of these caves for which access is restricted, administered by CSCC, and aid any landowner that requests help for any such cave under its control, or encourage them to do their own.
3. Store these draft submissions on the CSCC website ready for use at the appropriate time.

Southern Access Portal

Organising a caving trip in the South can be complex for those not familiar with the various systems employed by different landowners. For instance, a weekend on Mendip for a group of friends visiting four caves between them may involve obtaining keys and permits from four different bodies. In general those who cave regularly in the South tend to know the

but those outside this group can find it complex and intimidating.

The vision therefore would be for a single online portal that would allow any caver to organize their southern caving. It would allow booking of caves, including those where you can just turn up so you can try and avoid the crowds. Online and contact with any wardens would be through the portal and ideally allow all necessary keys to be provided.

The aim would not be for CSCC to take over the work of the other ACBs, these would still exist and would remain. The portal would simply provide a single method of contact for all. Membership of the portal would be entirely voluntary. All ACBs would see the benefits.

Such a system would require significant effort to set up, but is entirely possible as can be seen on the CNCC website (<https://booking.cncc.org.uk/>).

Summary

Cave access in the South has been the subject of much debate in recent years, and whilst much of the criticism has been significant room to improve the situation as well as providing the wider caving community with greater understanding. It is hoped that the above paper will be received in the spirit in which it is intended – i.e. to spark off more discussion and eventually progress with modernizing cave access in the South of England.

It is recognised that a rigid set of rules would never provide a workable solution to managing underground access. This paper deals with guidelines that will allow CSCC Officers sufficient latitude to deal with the individual issues. Having the guidelines does though mean that in cases where it is not possible to follow the guidelines that Officers can justify why, and that by doing so the wider community can understand why CSCC is taking a particular course of action.

You don't need to agree with anything in this paper, but please take the time to read it and put forward your views on the subjects. My sincere hope is that this will lead eventually to CSCC adopting a useful Access Policy.

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[1] These are a mixture of caving clubs and special organisations set up to control access to specific sites.

[2] Unless specifically asked to by a constituent member.

[3] It is intended to include an appendix listing the ACBs currently operating in the South of England in due course.

[4] At present it is believed that CSCC does not have any such formal agreements, but it is anticipated that one or more such agreements will come into force in the near future.

[5] Note that at present there is no defined boundary to the southern caving region.

[6] In cases where CSCC is made aware of access issues by a third party, then CSCC will make every effort to contact the relevant parties to access negotiation.

[7] In cases where CSCC is approached by a landowner for a site believed to be covered by another ACB, then CSCC will inform the landowner of contact between them and the landowner.

[8] Note that it is expected that the C&A Officer will keep the council abreast of progress on negotiations at General Meetings, if necessary.

[9] This cost is usually recoverable from the BCA Conservation and Access fund.

[10] Including those which require paying a goodwill fee to the landowner for access.

[11] The test of "reasonableness" being a vote by CSCC members at a General Meetings prior to formal adoption. As such the outcome of the vote should be a formality.

[12] For instance, CSCC should not generally fund work on active digs (this should be the responsibility of the diggers) but may consolidate access to a dig that has recently "gone".

[13] If the gate is requested by an ACB then the matter of how the gate is to be funded should be settled before any work is carried out. See Access Project Item No.4.

[14] Pen Park Hole provides a good example in that the amount of traffic is relatively small, but given the potential hazard of a collapse of the housing estate a secure gate is essential to maintain access to this very important site.

Draft CSCC Meeting Strategy

Prior to the COVID 19 Pandemic CSCC Meetings were held in person, for as long as anyone can remember at in Priddy. The imposition of various lockdown measures to control spread of the virus forced CSCC, like many to adopt remote online meetings to carry out it's business. To date the CSCC has held nine online general meetings and an AGM since the first in July 2020.

General Meetings

Initially there was significant scepticism that online meetings would be effective, but experience to date has shown to be effective, but that they offer a number of advantages over traditional face to face meetings in person. These include

- Removal of need to travel to meetings resulting in less time required by attendees and greater flexibility in attendance.
- Also related to travel is much easier attendance for those not living close to Mendip, noting that the CSCC covers the south not just the Mendip Hills.
- A more collegiate, less intimidating, atmosphere has been noted by a number of attendees.
- Ability to record the meeting to allow more accurate minutes to be taken.

Over the period of online General Meetings, the number of voting attendees has been just under 13 compared with last 20 years of around 8, there also appears to be greater attendance from observers which again indicates that online meetings are more accessible. Of course nothing is ever perfect, and there are downsides to online meetings. These include

- Difficulty in chairing the meeting, especially with large attendance. It can be difficult to spot those who wish to speak and ensure everyone gets their way.
- It can be difficult to read body language and other subtle non-verbal aspects of peoples contributions.
- It is difficult to build up the kind of "team spirit" that meeting face to face provides.
- Technical issues can limit attendance, whether technical knowledge to operate the online meeting platform or lack of connectivity.

Hybrid meetings have been suggested as a potential "best of both worlds" approach, and indeed such an approach has been used successfully at recent BCA AGMs. Experience shows that if such an approach is to be successful then considerable resources are required in the technical aspects if equitable involvement of both online and physical attendees is to be achieved. Hybrid meetings probably do not provide a desirable solution for CSCC General Meetings.

As such it is recommended that all CSCC General Meetings continue to be held online. To date these meetings have been held on the platform without any complaints from attendees. As such it is suggested that CSCC continue to use this platform until a good case for change is made. Given the length of CSCC meetings (typically c.2hrs) this requires use of a paid

At present CSCC relies on the generosity of others to provide access to their zoom accounts to hold meetings. To ensure a satisfactory performance, it does not seem fair that we impose upon others and more importantly does not allow all aspects of the meeting as this remains in control of the account holder. As such it is suggested that CSCC should have a Zoom subscription, or piggyback on BCA accounts.

Officer's Meetings

During the Pandemic it has not been possible for officers to have informal meetings either on site or, as more common in the past, in the bar! Such exchange of information between officers is vital for the smooth running of the CSCC, and as such informal meetings between the officers have been held. Typically one or two of these are held between General Meetings, and for urgent issues.

General feedback has been that these are extremely useful, and allow a consensus based approach to dealing with issues. Until date these meetings have been informal, but it is suggested that in the interests of transparency that brief notes of these meetings be recorded and made available on the CSCC Website. It is recognised that in some cases it may be necessary to withhold information (such as details of access negotiations) secret, but where such details are withheld it is suggested that some information is withheld at that time and why it is being withheld.

CSCC Workshops

Given that the formal mechanisms of the CSCC are moving online, this raises the spectre of a loss of *esprit de* community. As such it is considered desirable to hold at least some events with physical attendance. At a recent suggestion was made that some form of CSCC workshop might fill that role.

The suggestion is that once or twice a year that CSCC officers, club reps and interested observers could get to issues or visit specific sites. Outputs from these workshops could be then incorporated into CSCC business through Officer's Meetings. The main aim of these meetings though would be to foster team building and to get to know CSCC and perhaps encourage more people to get involved.

It is suggested that the concept of CSCC workshops be explored further at a coming General Meeting.

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[1] Currently Zoom limits meetings to 40 mins duration for free subscribers. Though this could be used for CSCC meetings it would flow of the meeting and potential confusion during those changes and is not considered a satisfactory solution.



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