



Minutes of BCA Council Meeting held on Saturday, 10 October 2015 at The Red Lion Inn, Alvechurch.

Present:

Nick Williams (NW)*	E&T Officer, Insurance Manager (and meeting Chair)
Damian Weare (DW)*	BCA Secretary
Nigel Ball (NB)*	BCA Training Officer
Andrew Hinde (AH)*	BCA Conservation & Access Officer
David Judson (DJu) *	BCA Legal & Insurance Officer
Rostam Namaghi (RN)	BCA Youth & Development
Robin Weare (RW)	BCA Newsletter Editor
Tim Allen (TA)	BCA CRoW Liaison Officer
Hellie Adams (HA)*	BCA Media-Liaison, Individual Member Rep. 2
Martell Baines (MB)*	CNCC Rep.
Jenny Potts (JP)*	DCA Rep.
James Begley (JB)*	CSCC Rep.
David Jean (DJe)*	DCUC Rep.
Stephan Nantynczuk (SN)*	ACI Rep.
Idris Williams (IW)*	ASCT Rep.
Steve Holding (SH)*	NAMHO Rep.
Boyd Potts (BP)*	Club Rep. 3
Bernie Woodley (BW)*	Individual Member Rep. 1
Matt Wire (MW) *	Individual Member Rep. 4
John Hine (JH)	observer

(* voting members)

The meeting commenced at 10:30am.

1. Chairman's Welcome

NW welcomed everyone to the meeting, taking the Chair in Andy Eavis's absence.

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from: Andy Eavis, Paul Ibberson, Dave Tyson (CCC), Ged Campion, Alan Finch (WPCST), Les Williams, Bob Mehew, David Cooke, Emma Porter (BCRC), Dave Brock (CDG), Faye Litherland and Bryan Schofield (CDG).

3. Applications for Club Membership

The Borwick Hall Caving Club, Durand Group and Greenlaws Mining Project have provided the correct paperwork and payment to become BCA Member Clubs.

[A discussion was held about whether we should be asking for additional information to be presented to Council to support applications. The feeling was that the key questions are part of GJ's operating protocol and there is no need to duplicate this.]

Proposal: *to accept the Borwick Hall Caving Club, Durand Group and Greenlaws Mining Project as a Member Club.*
Prop: JB, Sec: NB *agreed unanimously.*

4. Minutes of the last Council Meeting on 14 June 2015 (previously circulated)

JH: The meeting was actually held at the "Dean Field Studies Centre" rather than the "Dean Heritage Centre". John Hine is missing from the list of attendees, as an observer.

Proposal: *to accept the amended Minutes from 14 June 2015 as a true record*
Prop: HB, Sec: JH *agreed unanimously*

5. Matters Arising from the Minutes of the last Council Meeting

DW: We are no longer able to use My Big Meeting Room, so Andy Eavis has booked the Red Lion pub for the next 3 meetings.

Review of Action Log

Action 36 (Manual of Operations): Ongoing

Action 54 (Liaise with SUI): Remove - there has been no request relating to this since it appeared on the Log.

Action 83 (Produce Asset Register): Ongoing - nearly complete.

Action 116 (Weil's Disease Publication Update): HA: has received a quote of around t £1/card and this seemed excessive. NW: GJ could print at a cheaper cost, but it might be time consuming. JP: Different thicknesses of cards are available ... the previous ones were produced cheaply at a printer arranged via JP. HA to continue to investigate a cost-effective solution.

Action 144 (Liaise over UKCaving Forum): Done.

Action 150 (Liaise with Joel Corrigan): HA spoke to Joel at the BCA party weekend but this has not progressed further.

Action 151 (Investigate social media): Ongoing

Action 152 (Thank Richard Johnson): Complete

Action 153 (Paper Communication): See item 7 - secretary's report

Action 154 (Proposed Roadmap on Publications): Ongoing

Action 155 (Update Account Signatories): Ongoing

Action 156 (Regional Hub for Video Conferencing): See item 18 - IT report

Officers' Reports

6. Chairman (written report previously circulated)

First of all I have to start this with a sincere apology for not attending the meeting and with thanks to Nick Williams for agreeing to chair the meeting in my absence. This meeting will be held at the Red Lion, Alvechurch. We must thank Stephan for his hospitality over the last few years, providing his very comfortable offices for our meetings. It's a shame that he has ended his lease, but we now return to Alvechurch, which does however have its attractions.

The main thing in the British Caving Association at present is planning for Eurospeleo 2016. I am delighted to announce that we now have well over 500 registered participants putting us in line for well over 1,000 at the event itself. Many people are working very hard to bring the event together and there is, of course, a huge amount to do. Anybody who feels they would like to offer their services, will soon be able to register their interest via the website - that would be great. AUGUST 13-20 2016 promises to be a great caving event.

A great deal of work is going on in other areas as well. Picking out several, BCRA are consolidating their science programme, library archives etc and Ghar Parau is continuing to raise, organise and distribute money for caving expeditions.

The training committee under the leadership of Nigel Ball still covers an immense amount of work. I attended a training committee meeting on 19 September and was impressed by what I saw. The meeting had a very constructive atmosphere and a number of important points were discussed. One particularly relevant to me as Chairman of the BCA is that our training providers are excluded from certain caves on the basis that they are caving commercially. A way around this has to be found. It would also appear that new literature is required to update the existing training publications, and on the back of a good proposal from the training committee, BCA should consider some funding in this direction.

The clarification of how caving stands within the Right to Roam Act is ongoing. Currently, senior government officials are being requested to give their opinions on the interpretation of the ambiguously worded CROW Act.

The Equipment and Techniques Committee is continuing its anchor testing programme, which continues to evolve and improve yet further.

Finally, we really must find a replacement for Damian, who is standing down in June. If anybody has a potential names, we would be very pleased to hear them.

*I hope you all have a very good meeting in my absence. Please think of me struggling to find caves in the Forests of Mulu.
Chairman.*

Andy Eavis

The Chairman's Report was accepted without discussion.

7. Secretary (written report previously circulated)

Party Weekend: *This was an extremely successful event, thanks almost entirely to the brilliant work of the local organising team on behalf of BCRC and BCA. I cannot thank them, and particularly Paul Taylor, enough. An excellent report has appeared in Descent and various Rescue Team newsletters.*

Potential Disciplinary Action: *A request for further information has been sent to several individuals with a view to ascertaining whether or not they have acted against BCA's best interests. This is being handled according to BCA's disciplinary procedure and Council will understand that I cannot go into any further detail at this time.*

Newsletter: *the AGM delegated a decision on a final written newsletter to the Council Meeting that followed.*

Unfortunately I failed to remind the meeting of this and no discussion was held. Since it was clearly the will of the AGM that one be sent, I took the liberty of deciding on Council's behalf and a newsletter was posted out to arrive

towards the end of September, and rather helpfully just before the deadline for the cheapest 2016 tickets!

Replacement Secretary: Andy mentions it in his report, but on the basis that the more it is said, the more somebody might notice, I will repeat his call for a new Secretary. I tried to stand down when I came up for re-election 2 years ago, but reluctantly agreed to stand again. I will have done 8 years in June and am really struggling to balance life's demands. I need a break and will be stepping down, so please help us find someone else.

Community Amateur Sports Club (CASC) Changes: at the end of August I became aware of some changes to the rules affecting CASCs. To all intents and purposes CASC status gives clubs the majority of the benefits of being a charity without some of the burdens. Naturally there are some rules a club has to meet in order to gain and maintain the status and it seems that these were amended in legislation passed at the end of 2014 to take effect from 1 April 2015. There is a year's transition period (until 1 April 2016) during which time clubs can decide whether they can, or indeed wish, to comply with these new rules. If a club decides it cannot, or does not want to, then it can apply to be deregistered as a CASC 'with no financial penalty'. If not, then it will need to be able to prove compliance into the future.

To my knowledge at no point has anyone from HMRC (who deal with CASCs) written to a caving CASC or BCA relating to this change.

I have now e-mailed all BCA member clubs who are CASCs and made them aware of the changes and the possible implications. Predictably there are a number of unclear statements in HMRC's accompanying guidance and I have written to HMRC to request clarification on a number of points. I specifically asked for a response by this meeting but I am not surprised to report that I have not yet received one.

As a trustee of an affected club, I am happy to continue to liaise between the affected clubs.

Damian Weare

CASC Changes

JP: It may be worth affected Clubs which are considering deregistration and looking for some rate relief from their local Council emphasising the economic benefits we bring to the area.

The remainder of the Secretary's Report was accepted without discussion.

8. Treasurer (written report previously circulated)

To begin with, I must pass on my apologies for this meeting as a longstanding prior commitment means I am unable to attend. Since the AGM things have been relatively quiet, partly as a result of work requirements, but also due to the impact of the holiday season. The main focus has been on keeping on top of general day-to-day matters.

During the remainder of the year there will be a shift towards increasing the input of the Assistant Treasurer in line with the plans outlined at the AGM and building towards the preparation of the 2015 Accounts. Part of that process will involve bringing some overdue administrative tasks up to date, particularly the minutes of the Regional Caving Council funding process.

For now, my main input to the current Council meeting is the Budget proposal. To summarise this, the Association's general costs and income are broadly in line with the previous couple of years with the main exception being the demise of Speleology and the resultant effect on Publication costs. This brings into sharp focus the question of what Direct Individual Members actually get for their subscription and to my mind the only conclusion is that without Speleology there should be a corresponding reduction in the DIM fee. Similar issues have been touched upon in the past, but I believe that it is now time that this particular nettle is grasped and I propose a £10 reduction in the fee for DIM and CIM+ members to take them to £22.

This reduction in income has a reasonable correlation to the cost savings arising as a result of there being no need to fund a journal and thus has a neutral impact on the Budget. Any future change in either circumstance or arrangements would however have to be considered as arising. A more detailed summary of the Budget will be available for discussion at the meeting, but for now I intend to leave the proposal as noted.

Other than that, I have little else to report other than to note that prior to the meeting I will be discussing the above proposals with both the Assistant Treasurer and the meeting chairman, which I trust will allow for an informed decision on the day.

Paul Ibberson

RW: PI has produced a draft budget for 2016. It essentially mirrors the previous year but with small amendments here and there. In particular planned expenditure under the 'Association' heading is substantially lower than in 2014 because of the one-off cost of the CRoW ballot in that year. P&I is also lower because in 2014 it includes about £4.5k for Speleology, which has now been discontinued.

Subscription Rates for 2016

RW: Notes that PI is proposing a £10 reduction in the DIM rate to reflect the change to the services they receive.

NW: Speleology is now officially over, so we should reflect this.

MW: DIMs should not be subsidising CIMs.

SH: Doesn't disagree, but notes that this may have the unintended consequence of discouraging people for joining a

local club as a means to securing cheaper BCA membership.

MB: Notes that the term 'Universal Membership' has been used on occasions. Is this a move in that direction?

DW: Yes. There are a few things that need to be in place before this can be implemented. One of these is to reduce the cost of publications, as the main discernible difference between the existing two membership types. This has now happened. The other is to ensure the necessary background IT systems are in place to deal with the change. Considerable in-roads have also been made here, so we are now considerably nearer being able to implement it than we were six months ago.

NW: CIM membership was originally designed to cover only the insurance and associated administration with the intention that other BCA expenditure be levied via individual members and the club membership fee.

DW: This original principle has evolved over time so that now CIMs and DIMs contribute equally for all of BCA's services with the exception of publications and the time of the Membership Administrator.

RN: The existing price differential is a barrier to people seeking BCRA membership.

AH: There are a lot of DIMs in the room. Should they be voting here?

[After some discussion the meeting felt it was appropriate for DIMs to vote on this issue].

Proposal: that 2016 membership fees remain at 2015 levels for all categories except DIMs, whose rates will be reduced by £10.

Prop: PI, Sec: HA agreed unanimously

[Post-Meeting note: although not mentioned at the meeting, the absence of Speleology in 2016 will, of course, mean the optional £5 top-up for Clubs to receive it will also be removed.]

Employees' Pensions

NW: There are new obligations on all employers relating to employee pensions. In brief, we have no option but to set up an auto-enrolment scheme for our employees by the end of this year. They can then decide whether or not they wish to join. The regulations require that at least 2% of the employee's salary be paid into a pension fund, which rises to 8% by the end of 2018. The employer can pay all of it or can deduct up to half of it from the employee's salary. It is tempting to be generous to start with and to offer to pay the full amount, however the percentage contribution cannot be changed once it is set so this will represent a significant liability by 2019. This has been discussed by PI, RW and NW and they agree that the appropriate split be 50:50.

Prop: **that PI, NW and RW be delegated responsibility to set up a new pension fund for our employees.**

Prop: NW Sec: SH agreed unanimously

Action 157: PI, NW and RW set up new auto-enrolment pension fund for our employees.

The remainder of the Treasurer's Report was accepted without discussion.

9. Conservation & Access (written report previously circulated)

Drws Cefn: *I have been able to mediate at 2 meetings between CCC and PDCMG over the future access to Drws Cefn. Both sides have made commitments to work together more closely in the future. Progress towards an amicable agreement looks favourable if we can keep focused on the future possibilities and opportunities. All agreed that raking over the history at this point is counterproductive. The negotiators for both bodies will require trust and support from their membership to secure an outcome acceptable to all parties and in particular, the landowner.*

Cave Conservation Codes: *The final draft of the Cave Conservation Code and the Minimal Impact Caving Guidelines are included in Appendix 1. My sincere thanks go out to all the cavers who have corresponded with me on this matter. There are many "Caving Elders" beyond the BCA Council who have immense experience which is invaluable to Officers such as myself. They are an incredible resource which BCA and the RCCs should be grateful for and take full advantage of when their services are offered. You do not have to agree with them, but it does no harm to listen.*

The Codes have gone to Natural England where their content has been approved. It may be helpful to get approval from the other National Conservation Agencies where rules allow.

Assistance with graphic design is required and a call for suitable photos to form posters etc will follow.

C&A Committee: *It is hoped that a web based meeting of the C&A Committee can be organised at 3 or 4 hubs simultaneously (Mendip, Wales, Peak and Dales) to test out the new communications technology. This will be in November if all goes to plan.*

Proposal for England's First Cave National Nature Reserve: *At Hidden Earth I outlined a proposal that Scoska Cave, Littondale should be designated as an NNR. This is an idea which I am pitching to Natural England and the caving*

bodies simultaneously. So far NE has agreed to consider the proposal and has opened initial consultation with the landowner. The C&A committee will have an opportunity to discuss the matter at its next meeting. I believe that caves should be represented at the highest level of designations in order to be respected fully by the public and Statutory Conservation Bodies. Geological NNRs make up only 5 of the 224 NNR designations in England; none of these are caves.

Andrew Hinde

Drws Cefn

AH: Hopes that both parties in the Drws Cefn dispute understand AH's role and that he is not going to make any decisions about who is right and wrong. There is some hope that the matter is going to be brought to a sensible conclusion, mainly due to NRW's intervention in refusing to grant the application from the Management Committee and the landowner. As an outsider looking in, AH feels that if the two sides fail to come to an agreement at this point in time, then this will represent a huge failure of credibility of the institutions involved.

NW: Is BCA likely to end up needing to play some kind of judicial role in this in the future because, if so, we ought to think about how to prepare for this?

SH: As the person who originally suggested at the CCC AGM that there was a need for a third party to assist, and having no personal involvement in the issue, it seems that cavers' main priority should be to not totally disillusion our landowners. In this respect we need to remember that we may need to step in.

AH: Notes that he has limited tools at his disposal in this matter.

NW: Might it be that NRW end up making the ultimate decision?

AH: No. They are only really interested in the bat side of things.

TA: This has been developing for years. We should all be encouraging the parties to come to some agreement or another. In fact it would be good to see BCA's Chairman expressing and passing on this wish.

NW: Surely the only people entitled to act legally in this matter are the landowners.

RW: Essentially the people who dug Drws Cefn have taken over CCC and are pushing forward with this. They now seem to be operating outside Cambrian's constitution, but that is a matter for the Cambrian AGM rather than here. The landowner has said they do not want two entrances and people need to accept this.

AH: The impact of this goes much further than the two committees and both parties need to remember that.

HA: If, as we would all generally hope, we are going to improve access for cavers in general, it does not reflect very well on us if as cavers we cannot get ourselves in order on this one.

AH: So far the mediation process has avoided discussing evidence relating to the history of the situation. That cannot be changed and is unlikely to shed much light on the way out.

NW: Is there anything you need from BCA that will help move things forward?

AH: BCA would need to be formally invited to be involved anyway, so no.

BP: The less we interfere, the better. AH has been more successful so far than any others and any comments from BCA might upset this.

RN: Does Cambrian CC consider itself the national body in Wales and, therefore, is there any role at all for BCA here?

NW: CCC considers itself to be the national body in Wales and BCA's constitution prevents us from being involved in the affairs of two members unless specifically asked to do so by both sides.

TA: Was only trying to suggest BCA ask both sides to come to an agreement, rather than to become involved directly.

Conservation Codes & Guidance

AH: The draft documents are not in any way a finished product. The layout of the poster is, for example, just an untrained mock-up of an idea and AH is actively seeking someone with graphics experience to support him with the final designs.

Action 158: AH to liaise with HA and LW over his planned C&A documents.

Proposal for an Underground NNR

AH: Has spoken to various parties who are broadly supportive. The intention is to be able to use the NNR as a means to highlight caves to the public and also to help the Statutory Bodies understand the importance of caves.

DJu: Why Scoska? It is relatively insignificant to cavers.

AH: It has the best biological records of probably any cave with more than 50 species evidenced in the entrance section. It has archaeological interest, with most of the sediment being uninvestigated, as well as being fairly safe for public use and with a supportive landowner.

9a. CRoW Working Party (written report previously circulated)

The role of the CRoW Liaison Officer: At the last Council meeting the Conservation & Access Officer announced his withdrawal from any association with a BCA campaign for the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to apply to going underground due to a conflict of interest with his employers, Natural England. This is entirely understandable as any campaign would need to question the DEFRA/NE current interpretation which is applied to the Act.

At the end of last year the BCA had conducted a poll of its entire membership asking the question:

Should BCA, on your behalf, campaign for the Countryside and Rights of Way Act to apply to going underground?

The result was a clear majority in favour and the BCA would find it difficult to fulfil the expectations of its membership without some form of dedicated access officer. With the support of the C&A Officer I stepped forward and offered to take on this role. There was some debate before the new title of ‘CRoW Liaison Officer’ was decided upon and I was duly voted into the role with all agreed bar one against.

There was further debate whether the term ‘campaign’ could be used at all, even though it was the term used in the membership poll. Some members had suggested Section 4.6 of the Constitution prevented BCA from campaigning for any sort of change to the status quo. Section 4.6 states:

That the owners and tenants of property containing caves have the right to grant or withhold access.

This had already been discussed at the January Council meeting where the Secretary stated;

DW: If it is determined that the current law actually includes caving, then there is no problem with our current Constitution as the law of the land takes precedent over a Constitution anyway. The problem arises the moment we seek to want the law to be changed, as that will be campaigning against landowners having the ultimate say. Section 4.6 says that this is a guiding principle of the Organisation and one, therefore, that we should not work against. Therefore, the point at which we are seeking to change the law is the point at which we have to amend our Constitution.

It was suggested at the June Council meeting that I might have a conflict of interest myself, undertaking the role within these conditions. Having given it more thought since, I can see no conflict between my pre-role position and the BCA mandate. I have never sought to change the law (the CRoW Act), in favour of caving as I believe it already does apply to caving. Much of my previous efforts has been to clarify the DEFRA/NE position and to question whether it is the correct interpretation of the law. In doing this I, with others, have sought legal opinion from the eminent public barrister, Dinah Rose QC, whose opinion came out in favour of caving and with other BCA individuals researched, in depth, the history and passage of the Act through parliament.

Therefore, as the BCA poll question suggested, it is a matter of campaigning for the CRoW Act to apply to going underground as the law stands. This will include clarifying the existing law and questioning the current interpretation of that law by reference to the bullet points made on the BCA poll document in the event of a ‘yes’ vote. This will also require persuading the relevant authorities that their interpretation of the law is incorrect and that it should be reconsidered in line with parliament’s intention. If during the course of this work individuals, authorities or organisation conclude that changing the law is the only way forward then I would not campaign on this myself but gather information and report back to Council.

I would be pleased if Council could confirm that I may continue the role on this basis.

The current position: *It is worth stressing the current advice and interpretation of the law from DEFRA/NE. It is important to note that caving is NOT an activity which is excluded under the Act. The advice from Paul Johnson, the principal specialist in statutory access at Natural England, is supported by DEFRA senior executive, Richard Heburn and confirms that any member of the public, including cavers, may walk to any cave entrance across ‘access land’ without any sort of permission what so ever. They may also descend into the entrance for an indeterminate distance.*

In Mr Johnson’s view, “a cave on a hill that faces out into the open air” is covered by CROW. But, he goes on, “the question in each case would then be how far inside a cave of this type, if it were deep, a member of the public would have to go before the rights ceased to apply because use no longer amounted to open-air recreation”. In further correspondence Mr Johnson has suggested that this distance would be to the limit of daylight penetration.

The advice given by NE has been described as legally perverse by one MP. Research of Hansard, the official report of proceedings in both the House of Commons and the House of Lords, suggests that it does not reflect the intention of parliament. In Ms Rose’s view, to exclude caving from the scope of the Act simply because parts of caves have roofs is neither logical, nor in accordance with the wishes of Parliament when it passed the Act. She states:

The intention of the legislation is to permit access to the countryside, for the purposes of the recreations that may be carried out in such areas. “Open-air” in this context is best read in the sense of “outdoor” (i.e., not within a building). Excluding caving from the definition on the ground that caves are underground tunnels would lead to arbitrary distinctions. Some caves include shafts which are open to the sky. Caving as an activity is closely analogous to climbing, abseiling and canyoning, all of which are unquestionably covered by CROW.

Taken together there is every good reason that cavers, and the BCA as the representing body, should call into question the advice given by DEFRA/NE.

I would suggest, as a point of discussion for Council, that BCA should recommend that Access Controlling Bodies should honestly inform landowners of the current situation and this should include; current DEFRA/NE advice, the Dinah Rose opinion and the BCA poll outcome. As well as being honest this may be helpful as some access agreements are in place to control access across the land and not necessarily to the cave itself.

The way forward: *The BCA should develop a strategy on CRoW which will meet the expectations of its membership. This should make reference to the bullet points used in the poll following the yes vote. I would suggest the important objectives should be:*

- *Lobby MP's who have an interest in the outdoors. It is only through them and the Westminster processes that we can exert pressure on the civil servants of DEFRA/NE to change their advice.*
- *Gather support and inform organisations, authorities and landowners who have an interest in the outdoors and the caving regions affected.*
- *More generally present the social, economic and health benefits of caving as an outdoor recreational activity, emphasising the off-season value of caving to the rural economy.*
- *Promote a better understanding of caving to authorities where that is lacking and the benefits of improved access to the activity.*
- *Be polite, respectful and honest whilst keeping landowners informed of the current situation and highlighting the benefit of reduced liability under CRoW.*
- *Exploit the potential reputational risk to DEFRA/NE in maintaining their current advice.*
- *Continue to promote better cave conservation education by best practice, good management and not by restriction.*
- *Address the concerns some cavers have over landowner reaction and conservation.*

Ongoing work: *Much of the background research into the CRoW Act and its application to cavers has been completed by independent cavers and made publically available. In addition a powerful legal opinion has been obtained which together with the research is a great benefit to any BCA campaign.*

Is it safe to assume that the debate on the issue of CRoW has been had by cavers? There has been numerous informative articles in Descent and other sources of information freely available on line. A quick check of ukcaving shows that in the last ten years there have been 35 specific topics raised on CRoW. This has produced 4481 posts in reply and all together they have been viewed 235,510 times!

In recent months I have contacted a number of outdoor organisations and informed them of our position on CRoW with a view to gaining their support. I have been in contact with several access officers of the BMC including Cath Flitcroft their main access lobbyist. The BMC is the secretariat for the All Party Parliamentary Group on Mountaineering which is considering widening its remit to cover more of the outdoors. I have also contacted the CEO of the Outdoor Industries Association which is closely linked to the Sports and Recreational Alliance. These groups are both active in Westminster promoting outdoor issues and events. I have more to do here over the winter months.

Some of our politicians have shown a keen interest in recreational activities and the outdoors and I plan to make contact with them. My own MP here in the Dales, Julian Smith, used to be on the APPG for Mountaineering but resigned to be a whip for the government. I wrote to him and he made representations to the parliamentary under-secretary for DEFRA on my behalf. The reply he received from DEFRA was disappointing but not unexpected in trotting out a consistent position. I plan to visit my MP at surgery this winter to see what more he can do.

Other cavers have put me in touch with the senior Tory MP, David Davis. Mr Davis has agreed to champion our cause and make representations to the minister on our behalf. He has stated that he remembers well the passage of the Act through parliament and agrees with the opinion of Ms Rose.

On the position of Natural England and my correspondence with them he concluded:

The outcome of this was deeply unsatisfactory, indeed in my view worthy of an episode of "Yes Minister".

The full outcome of this is awaited and further correspondence is expected. Things are happening but the wheels of government turn very slowly and nobody should expect an immediate result. I will continue to lobby on behalf of BCA, involving members of the exec as necessary, and look forward to reporting at further Council meetings.

Tim Allen

TA: A lot of the report is background. TA's appointment is clearly quite delicate in parts of the caving world and TA would like to confirm the role.

SH: When we discussed this previously, TA has not been in the meetings. NAMHO members are sometimes concerned that we do not hear BCA mentioning that there is other legislation affecting mines. There would be more NAMHO clubs on board if it were confirmed that mines access would not be affected by any change to CRoW. In fact recent legislation on mines is very clear. It is likely that in the CRoW poll a substantial chunk of the vote against came from the mining-history community.

JH: NAMHO's Guidelines on the Use of Mines is available for anyone who is interested.

TA: This is a difficult area because a lot of natural caves contain sections of former mine workings.

Action 159: TA to speak to NAMHO about CRoW and mines access.

JB: Could you please clarify what you mean in the section about changes to the law and reporting back to Council first. What exactly does this mean?

TA: If negotiating and an Authority says that in their view they cannot help us as the law stands and we should seek to change it, then TA would report this back to Council but go no further. Any switch from campaigning for a change in interpretation to the existing law, to changing the law itself would need to come back to Council.

BCA recommending ACBs inform Landowners of the current interpretation of CRoW

TA: Suggests BCA recommend to its Access Controlling Bodies that they should inform landowners of the current advice, rather than leave them in the dark.

NW: Some specific wording to pass on, maybe at the renewal of ACBs in January, would be helpful.

TA: Landowners will be very aware that their land is Access Land and it may help them to understand that cavers do have the right to walk to the entrance. For some landowners this is the only item of concern to them and it may ease access.

NW: We should remember that this only applies to Access Land.

JB: Access for caving in the Dales seems to be improving substantially.

TA: CNCC has asked at Fountains Fell if the permit system can be removed and a new generation is happy for this.

AH: We have tried this through C&A and there were pertinent reasons given why CSCC were not prepared to discuss anything with landowners at that point.

NW: Maybe slightly different wording might be appropriate for different parts of the country?

Action 160: TA to produce some suggested wording for advice to ACBs and liaise with Glenn Jones for it to be passed to them at renewal in January.

The Way Forward

MB: BCA could try to gather some information on the social and economic benefits of caving as an activity. This may help in all sorts of areas, not just access. Eurospeleo 2016 will certainly be bringing plenty of hard currency into the Yorkshire Dales.

TA: Has been to see the YD National Park and they understand caving, but it seems that DEFRA understand it less. Ingleton is an example of several cafes and shops which survive thanks to cavers. Following some research, TA estimates that there are about 20,000 bed nights per annum in caving huts and their equivalents around the Dales. This probably equates to at least £6-700k per year for the local economy. If you then include day visits, the figure is likely to be well over £1m. Caving is often an activity that attracts people to the areas in the key low season, which is a vital time for local businesses to survive.

NW: This could also be of benefit in the CASC discussions with local councils.

HA: This is something lots of national bodies have information on and we do not. Maybe this is a social science project for someone that might even be eligible for BCRA support.

TA: NRW and NE are both very interested in the public health benefits. MPs are probably most interested in the financial benefits for their constituency.

Action 161: TA to produce some economic arguments for caving, including the professional side.

TA: There is quite a lot of work associated with this list of bullet points ... is it possible to bring a few others on board, possibly writing some letters on our behalf?

DW: Bringing other people on board to help is a good idea. However, there is a difficulty with them writing on BCA's behalf. This is something specifically limited to Officers and others with specific permission from Council. We could maybe publish a template letter for individuals to send to MPs etc.

JB: All these way-forward points are written by someone who thinks there are no risks associated with a change in policy. They do not seem to address the fact that there are others who are concerned.

TA: BMC are doing excellent work, both on their own and in their role as secretariat of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Mountaineering. Indeed they recently took 9 MPs for a walk on Kinder recently and used this as an opportunity to discuss access to the outdoors.

HA: Happy to work with TA and help sell caving better.

The remainder of the Conservation & Access Reports was accepted without discussion.

10. Equipment & Techniques (written report previously circulated)

The draft minutes of the last meeting on 5 March are now available on the BCA web site E&T meetings page.

Work on the replacement resin has now been published on the BCA web site E&T Anchor scheme page.

The statistical analysis of the North Wales anchor work has been completed and a paper for consideration by E&T is in preparation for its next meeting scheduled on 15 November.

A lecture was presented on this work at Hidden Earth.

Some reports have been made of loose anchors in both the Dales and Derbyshire. It is understood that consideration is being given to deal with them.

The UIAA has recently started some work on the life expectancy of resin used in resin anchor systems. Work has started to review the records held on over 20 years' worth of anchors placed under the NCA / BCA scheme to see if some useful information on resin life time can be extracted.

There has been little progress on rope testing, with a few outstanding samples cleared. Unfortunately owing to personal circumstances, the rope test rig was not present at Hidden Earth.

Nick Williams

NW: It is thought that the loose anchors we have had may be mostly related to the older resin we used. Even an anchor that is apparently loose requires a significant force to remove it and, therefore, previously we have not given a loose anchor as much attention as we now are.

Rope-Testing (written report previously circulated)

Nothing of significance to report. Owing to personal problems I was unable to take the rope test rig to Hidden Earth this year.

Bob Mehew

The remainder of the Equipment & Techniques reports was accepted without discussion.

11. Training (written report previously circulated)

As usual, things have been ticking over during the summer months, a time when things are normally fairly quiet. It is good to see that we still have registrations, assessments and revalidations still taking place when people are often on holiday or caving overseas on expeditions.

At the last Training Committee meeting (19/09/15) only two Regional Councils were able to attend, DCA and CCC. DCA reported that Cliff Hanger had taken place and is continuing to be a very successful event, especially as young children are involved. The CCC did not have anything to discuss. The CSCC Training Officer was intending to attend but due to horrendous traffic conditions, he was unable to get to the meeting. He did send a written report to Training Committee which was discussed.

A discussion took place about training grant applications from caving clubs and it was agreed that the Training Officer should make decisions about processing applications if a Training Committee meeting was not being held before the proposed training course.

The issue of access to caves in certain regions for running training and assessment courses was raised once again as an agenda item. Much discussion took place and it was pointed out by BCA's Chairman that commercial caving was viewed as a problem in certain areas of the U.K. With assistance from Training Committee he was prepared to negotiate for this. The CCC Training Officer stated that he had tried to negotiate with bodies in South Wales but he had found it very difficult to make any progress at all. A statement has been put together by Training Committee pointing out its views on access to caves to support caver training and the assessment of leaders.

We, BCA's Training Committee, believe that Trainer/Assessors, of any/all of the BCA Training and Assessment awards, should have access to any cave/mine that already offers access to any BCA member, in order to run the BCA Training and Assessment awards. If a trainer wants to run a course in a cave that requires a permit, as long as they fulfil the permit requirements they should be able to run the course there.

There has recently been a lot of talk via telephone, texts and forums about a programme on television showing a person going into Wilson's and Long Churn Cave with inappropriate clothing, not wearing a helmet and using a light that was held in the hand and not on a helmet. The main issue was that the weather conditions were apparently very poor with water levels seemingly rising dramatically in the cave at the point when the team entered. People have become trapped in this system many times and sadly, people have also drowned there. BCA has even produced a document to highlight a previous flood and how it affected a group in the cave. I am aware that a number of organizations have put formal complaints to the TV company and I feel that BCA should do the same. It is very important that this is done because failure to do so will shed a very poor light on BCA in the view of other NGBs, people who participate in outdoor pursuits, especially caving, and the general public.

The next Training Committee meeting is going to be held through Skype from a number of different locations. We will see how

that works out!

The following data from the LCML and CIC schemes is from my last report to the AGM in June to the end of September 2015.

Local Cave and Mine Leader

Registrations: 20

Level 1 assessments: 10

Level 2 assessments: 7

Level 1 revalidations: 13

Level 2 revalidations: 2

Core Skills reassessments:

Current award holders

Level 1: 0

Level 2: 0

Cave Instructor Certificate

Registrations: 6

Assessments: 3

Revalidations: 5

Current award holders: 83

Income/Expenditure for revalidation and CSR courses to September 2015

Local Cave and Mine Leader Scheme: £324.07

Cave Instructor Scheme: £935.00

Core skills Reassessment (CSR) £125.00

Nigel Ball

Bear Grylls

NB: Complaints have already been submitted to ITV by various parties. NB would like BCA to make a statement because the general image of caving portrayed by the programme was poor.

HA: We have to do something. Caving needs to be portrayed with a positive image, and yet this programme could not really be more damaging if it had tried. In any statement we should explain positive ways in which interested people can get involved in caving safely.

SN: This isn't the first time Bear Grylls has done something similar underground.

DW: Agrees we should be writing to the production company, but would like to be clear about the purpose of us writing so the letter is appropriately targeted. Are we trying to put the production company off similar portrayals in the future? Are we trying to make a general public point to the public and cavers that we are unhappy, or are we aiming to discourage other TV production companies from do something similar in the future? Personally feels there is little chance of us discouraging the current production company, but the other aims are worth pursuing.

AH: We should be looking for something for the wider caving community. This is probably now a dead story for the media outlets.

MW: We should make a positive statement on behalf of cavers, perhaps beginning "BCA has significant concern with the way in which caving was presented in this programme."

NW: We need a short, sharp message and it is probably best to begin with a positive statement such as "While we are pleased to see ...".

HA: Would like to see BCA's Long Churn document also sent to ITV.

RN: As a result of the programme's portrayal of caving, some parents may be put off allowing their children to try caving in a safe way. The statement should also address this.

MB: Should BCA also express concern to The Scout Association?

JB: Yes - Bear Grylls is their Chief Scout and is portraying the wrong image to Scouts.

IW: There is concern at this from within the Scout Movement.

DW: That would fit the desire to promote safe caving for newcomers.

Action 162: DW to produce a statement of dissatisfaction with Bear Grylls' recent portrayal of caving and disseminate as Executive see fit.

MW: BCA does not seem to be in a position to respond quickly to issues. Do we need to change the way we operate?

DW: Does not believe so. In this instance, DW actively chose to react slowly and wait for today's Council Meeting. However, if the need arises, BCA Executive is empowered to react instantly to something, needing only the agreement of any two of Executive.

MB: The time to come to a meeting is a good thing. A considered view is better.

Access to Caves for Professional Cavers

- DW: The access statement agreed by Training Committee is already true. The problem is that they do not fulfil the permit requirements of certain systems. Would like to remind the Training Committee that when Access-Controlling Bodies are issuing permits, they are doing so on behalf of the landowners, not BCA, or a Regional Council. It is probably also worth saying that BCA is bound by its constitutional Guiding Principle that landowners' wishes are paramount. There is nothing BCA can do if a landowner does not want certain groups of people on its land. BCA has already issued a statement going as far as it possibly can. It reminds Access Controlling Bodies to always seek access as widely as possible when negotiating agreements and also offers BCA's support in explaining the many different types of "commercial caving" to landowners.
- JH: The access agreement with the Forestry Commission in the Forest of Dean is specifically for non-commercial caving. This is what the Forestry Commission want.
- AH: The report does not mention the regions affected.
- DW: It will be certain systems in S. Wales and the Mendips.
- SN: Sometimes there are arguments over the term "commercial caving". There are many different types.
- NW: On the face of it, it may seem a cop-out to say that we are not involved, but it is a fact that we cannot instruct anyone to do anything. This is a matter which TC must address directly with the ACBs concerned.
- AH: PICA is a body that has been set up to speak on behalf of commercial cavers in one area. A united approach from an organisation such as PICA is likely to be of much more effective than individuals complaining to BCA or bothering landowners.
- NW: It is often necessary to be pro-active to achieve one's aims. PICA is an example of how that can provide the desired effect.
- RW: In the last 15 years the Cambrian Training Officer has never approached the OFD Management Committee to ask for access to be granted. In fact there is some support on the Management Committee for what the Training Committee are seeking, but without someone making the effort to argue the case, there is unlikely to be change. Certainly there is no real support from the current Cambrian Committee and had the Cambrian representative actually attended one of the Management Committee meetings, it would probably have helped.

The remainder of the Training Report was accepted without discussion.

12. Publications & Information *(written report previously circulated)*

I have little to report that is not covered in the sub headings below.

Les Williams

a. Webmaster *(written report circulated)*

The TryCaving.org.uk website has been moribund for some time now. I'm pleased to report that Chris Hunter (Kendal Caving Club) has offered to take on the role of webmaster. He is currently reviewing the site before deciding on the best course of action to take it forward.

The main addition to the BCA website in the last quarter has been BCA Online, the system that allows members to update their email address and contact preferences and to check the details BCA holds on them. The system is now fully live. Behind the scenes Glenn Jones and David Gibson furnish me with the CIM and DIM updates from the membership system and in return I send back email updates and address change requests. We have gone through several iterations of this loop and it is now becoming routine.

By supplying BCA with an email address, members can receive administrative email that is necessary to run BCA/BCRA, for example renewal notices. But to receive other more promotional material, such as the Newsletter, members must register with BCA Online and update their email preferences accordingly. This slightly frustrating way of working is as a result of the Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations 2003 (PECR); an act passed with the laudable but vain attempt to protect us from spam.

Of the 6022 member records, 3795 have email addresses (63%), 478 have opted in for the Newsletter (8%) but only 124 (2%) have registered on-line. It is early days yet but we must promote BCA Online registration at every opportunity.*

** most of these are DIMs who opted in when renewing.*

David Cooke

TA: Has looked at trycaving.co.uk a few times and it seems to be a bit of a dead duck. It is good to see the progress with it here. If BCA would like to keep trycaving going, then great, but alternatively UKCaving would be happy to help with promoting the various ideals.

JP: We have not been able to change incorrect information on the site for some time, so this is a welcome step forward.

NW: UKCaving has approached BCA to ask if we would be willing to support the site financially by advertising on it. We already have a section of the forum at no cost, but we have now been offered dedicated advertising space for

something in the order of £30 per month.

TA: Currently the site does not make any money, but does offer small donated prizes to encourage trip reports, conservation etc. In the event that the site does generate a profit in the future, then the intention is that it would be put into some kind of digging fund or such like, to be of general benefit to UK cavers.

NW: We could decide to investigate this further and report back later, particularly given that this has not been tabled in advance and our webmaster and P&I Officer are both absent from the meeting and might well have a strong views.

MB: Do we really wish to defer a decision just because two Officer did not turn up to a meeting?

MW: This is not really a web-services matter. The question is surely not do we want to support the site, but rather why do we want to advertise and what do we want to advertise?

TA: Bringing BCA closer to its membership is a good thing.

RW: Would envisage advertising a sign up to BCA online for the new month or so, then EuroSpeleo after Christmas, then maybe pushing the newly revamped trycaving site.

HA: Would like to see anything with an easy link to BCA's website. We have spent time developing it and we need to get people there.

MW: Would UkCaving envisage being able to help with putting up advertising etc?

TA: We are not very technologically savvy but Jane has a marketing background and may well be able to assist with key messages.

HA: Thinks we should do it for a year and review it. If at that point we decide we need to review our own performance in the way we are actually making use of our advertising, then that is fine.

IW: Suggest we should leave it to Executive to liaise between appropriate individuals.

Proposal: ***that the meeting approves the principle of BCA advertising on UKCaving and Executive liaise with appropriate parties and make it happen, subject to an annual budget of £360.***

Prop: DW Sec: BP agreed unanimously

Action 163: DW to liaise with UKCaving owners regarding their offer of advertising.

AH: Perhaps we could have an incentive for people to register for BCA Online and there could be a prize.

DW: Good idea. It is not just about getting people to give us their e-mail addresses, though, but actually to get them to go to BCA Online having done so and to agree to receiving newsletters.

b. Web Services (written report circulated)

In the last quarter there was one emergency maintenance outage of 1/2 hour and one server reboot brought on by a hacker attack. Otherwise everything else has been running smoothly.

I would like to welcome Matt Wire to the small team of system admins who keep the servers running and answer the various requests for help and support.

David Cooke

c. Newsletter (written report previously circulated)

An online newsletter appeared as planned in July and as directed by the last Council meeting a final printed newsletter was distributed in September. This newsletter included short updates on anchors and CRoW and encouraged recipients to sign up for BCA online and to buy tickets for Eurospeleo 2016.

I've started work on a newsletter for publication at the end of October. I've sent out requests for content and am comforted to have actually received some replies. As ever more will be needed.

Robin Weare

d. Speleology (written report previously circulated)

Shortly after the BCA AGM, BCRA Council met and formally decided to cease to publish Speleology in its present format. There are a number of loose ends to tie up, and it is possible that it might continue in an ad-hoc fashion, as an online item, or that one further paper issue might appear, although the latter plan is more a "desire" by certain members of BCRA Council than a tangible plan. Some salient points of the discussion were...

Trevor Faulkner pointed out that scientific organisations need a secondary publication for the less academic audience. The present publication is over-engineered for this purpose and why can't we/BCA produce something simpler? Andy Eavis said that this was easy and "all we needed was an editor", which was where the problem lay. We had advertised for one (in 2012) and there had been little response.

John Gunn said that he wanted to draw a line under Speleology for two reasons - firstly, the title is wrong and secondly, it was a magazine of a type we do not need. "What is the purpose of Speleology?"

I will be writing to the contributors to the magazine to explain the situation and to suggest what might happen to their contributions. It is obviously very regrettable that people have spent valuable time and effort preparing material, which has not seen the light of day.

There are a few non-member subscribers to Speleology – mostly international subscription agencies and institutions - and we will be writing to them too, in due course, to offer refunds on their subscription fees.

David Gibson

The remainder of the Publications & Information Reports were accepted without discussion.

13. Legal & Insurance

DJu: Nothing to report.

a. Insurance Manager

NW: We are now nearly 12 months down the line with Perkins Slade handling our Public-Liability policy. There will be a review meeting with them towards the end of November. Unfortunately we have not been able to generate the level of interest in their hut insurance that we had anticipated. This seems to be due largely to its cost. NW does not have anything to raise with them in respect to the actual terms of the PL Scheme. However, it would be good to be clear what land we are covering through our policy as NW fears there are some landowning ACBs that assume we are covering them, but they have not ever actually specifically informed us of it. Specifically, therefore, where there is a significant amount of land owned by mining history organisations, clubs or the like, we need to know about it. It is not that there is any question over things being insured, but rather that we need to be clear what we are insuring.

SH: Will you be liaising with NAMHO specifically over this? There is a change this year in the mining legislation. Shropshire Mining Trust manages Snailbeach on behalf of the Council. The legislation now requires the owner to name a mine operator who then appoints the mine managers. Does this have any relevance to insurance?

NW: Doesn't think so.

RW: Where are we with expedition insurance?

NW: It would be good to sort this out, but we are awaiting a volunteer to offer to help with it.

MW: Could you remind people of where to look for guidance on why clubs need insurance? This seems to have become an issue again for some.

NW: There is a document "Club insurance - why bother?" on the BCA website.

NW: *[declaring a personal interest]* NW is a trustee of a small nature reserve which contains an abandoned mine working. There is public access and we need to find public-liability insurance. By far the best offer is for us to join BCA but NW would like to ask if Council is happy with this given NW's personal interest.

DJu: Is there hope for underground access at some point in the future?

NW: Possibly, but only via another route.

SH: It seems to be fully appropriate.

[The meeting notes the personal interest, but is happy with NW's suggestion.]

The remainder of the Legal & Insurance Reports were accepted without discussion.

Other Reports

14. Youth & Development

RN: No report was submitted in advance because there is nothing concrete to report yet. However RN is currently in discussion with a few university clubs and CHECC about an issue which is unfolding. CHECC is also looking to restructure its training process, but there is nothing to formally report at this stage. Reports on both will follow if and when anything is firmed up.

15. Membership Administrator *(written report previously circulated)*

BCA Membership to 22nd October 2015

DIMs: 481 (caving), 47 (non-caving), 5 (CIM Plus), 6 (BCRA Honorary), (includes 279 BCRA members and 35 student members) (Total DIM's = 539)

CIMs: 4023 (caving), 918 (non-caving), 443 student / U18) (Total CIM's = 5384)

Clubs: 175

Associates: 5

Access Bodies: 9

New Clubs: *The following Group(s) have supplied the correct paperwork and payment in order to become BCA Group members: Borwick Hall Caving Club, Durand Group and Greenlaws Mining Project.*

Admin: *The on-going work throughout the year, to implement on-line services to our members, has identified a number of*

incorrect or duplicate membership numbers. These will be corrected as part of the 2016 renewal process. That same work has resulted in a regular number of update requests to amend/change/add email address or postal addresses each week.

Glenn Jones

[Council notes the considerable work that has gone into developing these online services and would like to thank David Gibson and Cookie for their efforts.]

The remainder of the Membership Administrator's Report was accepted without discussion.

16. 2016 Working Party

Work is progressing at a fast pace and there are over 500 delegates booked to date.

The FSE are promoting the event throughout Europe and bookings are coming in from all across the region.

Site details are still being finalised as they cannot be "set in stone" without a reasonable idea on numbers.

I am trying to remain flexible with marquees and the like so we can rescale them once we get a better idea on numbers.

I have been speaking with Craven Council on licensing and anticipate no problems with licensing. Craven Council are very positive about the whole event.

Sponsorship is still being pursued and we are awaiting an offer on supplying rope for the event.

DW: There are a few items that Council probably should be considering. Firstly there could well be significant costs associated with an enforced cancellation of 2016, particularly as we get nearer the event. In this respect the 2016 team is investigating insurance cover, but as the agreed underwriter of the event, Council may wish to put pressure on 2016 to take it out. Secondly there are potential concerns over VAT and whether or not EuroSpeleo 2016 might need to register with HMRC. It is crucial for BCA that the distinction between the two organisations is maintained at all times, or we might also find ourselves drawn into this. Again, 2016 is working on ensuring a clear distinction. Finally BCA has so far loaned 2016 £6k to help with early cash-flow, but 2016 now has over 500 bookings and can probably pay back this money. Is this something Council would wish?

NW: It seems appropriate to request a report at the next Council Meeting on the VAT situation.

Action 164: LW and DC to report to the January's Council Meeting on the VAT situation for EuroSpeleo 2016.

Action 165: PI and DC to liaise over the return of the £6k loan given to EuroSpeleo 2016.

SH: The EuroSpeleo 2016 website currently says nothing about the pre- and post-caving events. Lots of people are working hard in the background planning these events, so it would be nice to see them being advertised.

DW: Noted.

IW: Has previously asked LW about whether or not IW can arrange a Scout Camp at the event? The Scout Association is happy but requires that they be allocated to a separate camping area.

DW: In principle 2016 is happy to accept bookings from any young people accompanied by either their parents or someone with delegated parental responsibility. IW may, however, prefer to find his own field to camp a little further away from the main site.

The remainder of the 2016 Report was accepted without discussion.

17. Cave Registry

Nothing new to report for the last quarter.

David Cooke

18. IT Working Party

As instructed by the last meeting, I have set up a Webex (video conferencing) account for BCA. So far I'm very impressed by it. The account allows one meeting at a time for up to eight people at a cost of £216/yr inc vat. We can hold an unlimited number of meetings. If there is a need we can increase the number of people to 25 for £432/yr. There is a 20% saving if we commit to a year at a time. I have also bought a Logitech BCC950 conference cam (£170) and a Plantronics P620 speakerphone (£80) to setup a "hub" where more than one person can share a camera/location. Depending upon experience and subject to approval/budget I will buy more of these to equip other regional hubs as necessary. The saving in travel costs will easily cover the expense.

I'm currently in the process of organising training sessions for members of the E&T Committee so they can hold their next meeting as a video conference. The convenors of the other committees should contact me if they wish to do the same.

David Cooke

MW: Is surprised that we have wasted our money on WebEx when there are other similar free services available.

DW: DC did as he was asked by the June Council Meeting.

MW: Agreed, but does not believe we needed to spend the money we have done.

NW: WebEx does have some advantages over Skype. We will need to review whether these are worth the cost at the

end of the current subscription term.

BP: We appear to be using Skype too and can review both in time.

The remainder of the IT Report was accepted without further discussion.

19. International Representative

Just after the last AGM weekend on 13-14 June was the bureau meeting of International Union of Speleology in Postonja, Slovenia. The main agenda item of that meeting was the International Congress for 2017 in Sydney Australia. It would seem that plans are going very well for this event, but as we know from Eurospeleo 2016, there is an enormous amount of work to do. There is an experienced, dedicated team in Australia and New Zealand looking after the congress with pre- and post-excursions being planned, so please continue to put 23-29 July 2017 in your diaries, a great opportunity to have a wonderful caving experience on the other side of the earth.

It was also the 50th anniversary of the International Union of Speleology so there was quite a party in Postonja with most of the bureau members of UIS participating. The meeting in Postonja coincided with the annual Karst school and this was a series of caving lectures, many of which were extremely interesting. The Karst school happens every year, at about mid-June in Postonja and is an excellent meeting and well worth visiting by all speleologists, particularly ones who are considering getting more interested in science.

I haven't mentioned that the caves in Slovenia are also fantastic, arguably the best in Europe.

The next meeting of the International Union of Speleology will be at Eurospeleo in 2016 in England, so we look forward to that event very much.

Andy Eavis

a. FSE

Since the last council meeting there has been a FSE Bureau and General Assembly Meeting which took place on Saturday 30th May 2015 in Pertosa – Auletta in Italy at the Euro Speleo Forum hosted by the 22nd National Italian Congress. Martina Drskova delegate from Slovakia was unanimously elected to the position of General Secretary. This is the first woman to be appointed to the bureau certainly since I have been a member.

The GAM agreed a contribution of 1500 euros to the Eurospeleo 2016 event to be held in the UK next year.

In terms of membership fees approval has been given to 31 countries except Macedonia who didn't pay their fees. There are particular difficulties regarding Bulgaria membership of the FSE. A new fledgling organisation is trying to oust the existing national body. The FSE is attempting to get the two sides together to try and reach an agreement on representing Bulgaria at an FSE level.

The FSE was represented at the 50th Anniversary of the Karst Institute in Slovenia where the UIS held their bureau meeting. The FSE was invited to attend the UIS Bureau meeting and discussions took place to see how a regional body like the FSE could complement the work of the UIS. The UIS may well adopt the Euro Speleo project model used by the FSE to introduce their own speleo projects.

The FSE is working actively with the organisers of Eurospeleo 2016 to make this a resounding success. Henk Goutier vice delegate from the Netherlands will assist Ged Campion in the foreign liaison matters.

Timetable of EuroSpeleo events over next 3 years that involve the FSE.

European Congress 2016 will be in the Yorkshire Dales, UK (hosting the ES Forum).

ES Forum 2017 Dryanovo, Central North Bulgaria, northern slopes of the Balkan Mountain.

(The next UIS Congress will be in Sydney in 2017)

ES Forum 2018 will be in Salzkammergut, Upper-Austria.

Ged Campion

The International Reports were accepted without discussion.

20. Media-Liaison

HA: Has had a handful of phone calls which have been dealt with.

21. British Caving Library Report

Enquiries and visitors: *We have noted an increasing number of enquiries coming from abroad - BCL now has an international reputation - and we make increasing use of scans to answer enquiries, rather than posting photocopies. It appears that the total number of enquiries was slightly down in 2014 but the number of hits on the on-line catalogue is increasing, suggesting that cavers are now more confident in making use of this for themselves. The Library Facebook page now has around 600 followers and this continues to increase, in particular since the BCRA Facebook page went live. A full set of statistics will be provided for the BCA AGM in June.*

Problems with the Library PC: *The PC bought for the Library in 2008 has now ceased to function altogether and a replacement is being sourced (plus an upgraded OS for the PC donated to us last year). We intend to ensure that all PCs in the Library run compatible systems, both for our own use and for visitors. All our files are backed up on both hard drive and cloud*

storage so we are confident that nothing will be lost in the event of machine failure.

Increase in the size of the Library and the type of holdings: We are once again beginning to run short of shelf space, now having over 200 m of shelf length (up from the original 70 m of the BCRA Library at Matlock), plus cupboards, filing cabinets, map chests, etc. We are seeking second hand shelving, which we can put up for ourselves to provide the necessary increase. We continue to receive donations of publications and materials, which now include photos and surveys, which were not recorded at all in the former BCRA Library. We are also being given an increasing amount of archive material, which we catalogue and store separately. Some of this archive material has been digitised and is now accessible via the Library website, in addition to the very popular Audio Archive.

We continue to pass on duplicate material to other caving libraries round the country using “caver post” with the aim of encouraging others to stock as full a range of publications as possible.

Jenny Potts

NW: Does the Library have the funds to fund appropriate temporary storage of the John Beck/Doug Nash material?

JP: We have had a donation from someone who uses the BCRA archive site and is looking at using that to fund it. This will be discussed at the BCRA meeting tomorrow.

The Library Report was accepted without discussion.

22. Date, Time & Place of next meeting

The next Council Meeting will take place on Saturday 9 January 2016 at The Red Lion, Alvechurch.

23. Any Other Business

a) UK Cave and Mine Exploration:

NW: UK Cave and Mine Exploration applied to join BCA last year and attended a Council Meeting to support their application. Their membership was approved for caving activities but diving activity was excluded, pending discussion with our insurers and UK Cave and Mine Exploration providing evidence of their procedures. CDG is unhappy with UKCME being given equal status and feels it is responsible for cave diving. There is a dialogue going on between both parties and a meeting is being arranged between them and NW and AE. NW would be interested in feedback from the meeting and specifically whether it is happy for AE and NW to make a final decision on behalf of Council or whether it would like the matter to be returned to the full Council.

RW: If the request for membership is really relating to a desire to access certain underground sites, then in the Forest of Dean the Forestry Commission is only willing to grant access to CDG members, rather than BCA-approved diving groups.

MW: CDG does not appear to be an entirely inclusive organisation and, if they are to remain the sole representatives, they should be so.

HA: There have long been reports of divers finding it difficult to join CDG. We all have a choice within caving clubs and divers maybe ought to have a similar choice.

RN: There are different sections and only a small number of divers.

MB: Without a paper being presented to Council, we are not in a position to make any decisions.

NW: Agreed, it is broad principles NW is seeking.

AH: Is a member of CDG Northern Section. If the group thinks the way to access to underground sites is via insurance, then they may be mistaken. Certainly this is not the case in key sites in the Dales, where agreements exist specifically between CDG and landowners.

JB: They are not necessarily asking to be a Constituent Body but are asking to be another caving club but not part of CDG.

[The meeting concluded it would like AE and NW to return to Council with a paper, rather than make any decision themselves].

DW: This raises an issue that DW is aware we have never really considered. We have a number of Constituent Bodies who deal with certain specific aspects of caving on our behalf, such as diving, science, scouts, instructors. Should we have a process in place for deselecting a Constituent Body?

[The feeling of the meeting was that this could be dealt with on a case-by-case basis if the need arose.]

b) Secretary Role:

MW: It is clear that the secretary is vital to the role of the organisation and that we are struggling to find a replacement for DW. Is it time to consider appointing a paid administrative assistant to make the role more manageable?

DW: Believes we have already given the go-ahead for this in the past along with someone to assist the Treasurer. This would then leave Executive freer to deal with the more-demanding Executive roles, rather than administration.

AH: Could it be a Clerk to the Executive in a similar way as with Parish Councils?

JP: Can Council decide to appoint an Administrative Clerk?

DW: Yes.

IW: Would DW be willing to stand again if we did that?

DW: Before even considering it, it would be necessary to know they were reliable and the workload wouldn't fall back onto Executive.

NW: We can always advertise and interview and not appoint if we didn't feel we had a suitable candidate.

Action 166: AE, PI, DW and NW to advertise the paid post of Administrative Assistant to Executive.

e) CNCC

MB: CNCC has passed a proposal to create the post of DIM representative on CNCC's Committee. Quite a few members are DIMs and it was felt that they were not currently represented. CNCC is wondering if BCA would be willing to assist in appointing such a representative.

DW: Has been liaising with Matt Ewles over this issue and has made some suggestions, including the fact that the proposal agreed by CNCC might not actually achieve what it was hoped to achieve. Matt has gone away to work on it.

JP: DCA solved this a long time ago by allowing individual members to join DCA. Any club can automatically become a member at no cost and any individual can become a member with a reduction in the fee if they are a DIM. This has been very helpful and has brought useful cooperation.

SH: Clubs opt to become associated with a RCC and it is not necessarily linked to geography. You will need to think about allowing anyone from around the country to join.

TA: BCA has 4 representatives from its individual membership and 4 from its club representatives.

AH: Could BCA elect a DIM representative to send to CNCC?

DW: Yes, if that is what CNCC wants.

MB: CNCC had considered that any individual representative would need to be a DIM due to insurance.

NW: Any person acting as an officer / member of the CNCC Committee would be insured for their role in the CNCC irrespective of whether they were a DIM or a CIM or neither.

TA: CNCC might also consider a representative for youth, for divers etc.

BP: This is probably better done at a CNCC meeting and facilitated by BCA.

d) Pengelly News

DJ: Two of the Pengelly caves were broken into a few weeks ago. One is among the best decorated caves in Devon and was fortunately unharmed. The other had a straight-tusk elephant tooth stolen and there was some damage to sediments. Natural England (NE) were initially concerned about the bats, but they have been reassured that there is no problem as they have not yet begun hibernating. So far NE has been very helpful in assisting with resecuring the caves. The British Museum holds most of the original bones from the caves and holds them in storage. They have agreed to loan one of these for casts to be made and, therefore, for the missing bone to be replaced.

AH: Had not been informed of it prior to this meeting. Will always appreciate being made quickly aware of similar things affecting any Region in the future.

The meeting closed at 3.52pm.

Action Log (as at October 2015)

No.	Action by ...	Details of Action
36	DW	Put together a Manual of Operations
October 2011		
83	PI	Produce an Asset Register and liaise with NW/EP over the total replacement value of our insured equipment.
June 2014		
116	HB	HB to liaise with interested parties and Executive and arrange for a new Weil's disease card to be produced, as well as advertise it via social media. BM to review the existing website documentation and decide if it needs updating. Updated Mar 15: HB to investigate card printing and distribution.
March 2015		
150	HB, NB	To liaise with Joel Corrigan to find a way to support future events financially.
151	HB, DW, DC	To investigate using social media more effectively.
June 2015		
154	LW	To report to the October Council Meeting on a proposed roadmap for publications.
155	PI	To amend signatories on BCA's accounts.
October 2015		
157	PI, NW, RW	To set up new auto-enrolment pension fund for BCA's employees.
158	AH	To liaise with HA and LW over planned C&A documents.
159	TA	To speak to NAMHO about CRoW and mines access.
160	TA	To produce some suggested wording for advice to ACBs and liaise with Glenn Jones for it to be passed to ACBs at renewal in January.
161	TA	To produce some economic arguments for caving, including the professional side.
162	DW	To produce a statement of dissatisfaction with Bear Gryll's recent portrayal of caving and disseminate as Executive see fit.
163	DW	To liaise with UKCaving owners regarding their offer of advertising.
164	LW and DC	To report to the January Council Meeting on the VAT situation for EuroSpeleo 2016.
165	PI and DC	To liaise over the return of the £6k loan given to EuroSpeleo 2016.
166	AE, PI, DW & NW	To advertise the paid post of Administrative Assistant to Executive.

Appendices

Caving Code 4th Draft.

1 Cave with care and thought for the environment.

2 Disturb nothing whether living or geological.

3 Avoid touching formations.

4 Keep to marked routes and never cross conservation tapes.

5 Take nothing but photographs.

6 Do not pollute the cave, leave nothing behind.

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NATURAL
ENGLAND

Minimal Impact Caving Guidelines

6th Draft March 2015.

Introduction

Caving is a fascinating recreational activity which attracts the interest of a diverse range of people and groups, who all benefit immensely from the experience. However, some caves and some areas within them can be sensitive to human interference. By following the few simple guidelines set out in this booklet the cave environment can be conserved for future generations to enjoy

This code is divided into two sections, one relating to general cave visits and the other relating to the exploration of a newly discovered cave or section of cave.

General Cave Visits

1. Every caving trip has an impact. It is important to select a site to visit that is appropriate to the group and type of trip being undertaken. Certain caves are less susceptible to damage and more suitable for novices. Advice is available from the Regional Caving Council or local clubs.
2. Where a Cave Conservation Plan is in existence abide by the recommendations contained therein for the conservation of the cave.
3. The party size should be appropriate to the vulnerability of the cave. The more vulnerable the cave environment, the smaller the party size needs to be. Cave Conservation Plans may stipulate a minimum and/or maximum party size. Access Controls Bodies may also limit party size at some caves.
4. Cave as a team. Help each other through the cave and ensure that party members stay together. Stragglers may take the wrong route and enter vulnerable areas.

5. Cave at a sensible pace for the party. You will see and enjoy more, and there will be less chance of damage to the cave and to yourself. This especially applies when one is tired and exiting a cave.

6. Take care yourself and constantly watch when your party members are moving towards sensitive areas such as relict sediment deposits and speleothems e.g. stalagmites, stalactites and flowstone. Warn party members before they are likely to do any damage.

7. If there are novices on a trip, make sure that they are always close to an experienced caver, so that the experienced caver can help them when required e.g. in difficult sections

8. Keep tackle bags and packs as small as possible and transport them carefully.

9. Stay on marked or obvious paths. If no paths are marked or none is obvious take particular care. If in doubt, do not proceed further.

10. Learn to recognise sensitive cave deposits or features that may be damaged by walking or crawling on them such as cracked mud floors or flowstone floors.

11. If it appears necessary to walk or crawl on a sensitive floor do not proceed. If others appear to have walked over it, confirm that this is the route before proceeding and then only proceed with the utmost care having removed boots and other clothing as necessary. Remember that someone may have previously mistaken this for the route and further damage should be avoided.

12. Throughout a cave the established marked routes must be used. Single tracks should be followed and care taken to avoid the spreading of mud. Mud-throwing or modelling is unacceptable.

13. Restore any missing or damaged marker tapes or route markers. If not possible, report the problem to the appropriate Regional Caving Council as soon as possible. Also report any instances where tapes or markers appear to be ineffective.

14. Treat all cave wildlife with respect, watch out for them, and avoid disturbing them. Also avoid directly illuminating cave wildlife if possible. Bats are protected by law.

15. Ensure that all foreign matter is removed from caves. This includes human waste. If long trips are to be made into a cave, ensure that containers for the removal of liquid and solid waste are included on the trip inventory. The use of carbide is strongly discouraged as it causes soot deposition on the cave roof and speleothems.

16. If any damage or degradation is noticed report this to the appropriate Regional Caving Council as soon as possible.

17. CAVE WITH CARE.

New Cave or Extension Explorations

1. Modification of cave entrances and passages, including changing water levels in sumps or ducks and diversion of streams, should only be undertaken after all possible effects have been assessed and the appropriate permission obtained from the landowner. Any modifications must be the minimum required. The long term impact of any work and materials used must be considered. If the site is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest or a Scheduled Monument, a 'Consent' will also be required from the Statutory Conservation Body.

2. Use the cave survey to ensure that all alternative routes are examined prior to crossing sensitive or fragile areas. It may not be necessary to enter some areas as they can be by-passed.

3. Do not enter new cave or passage if you do not have the equipment required to undertake the minimum recommended activities of surveying, taping and photography.

4. Make a full photographic record before any other work is undertaken or visits made which are likely to result in any damage or deterioration. Copies of the photographs should be placed in a suitable library for safe keeping and submitted to the regional cave registry or caving council for record purposes.

5. Discuss taping and route marking within the party and ensure that all ideas are evaluated before marking is undertaken and before the sensitive area is crossed.

6. If a sensitive area must be crossed, reduce future damage by defining a distinct minimum practicable width of path using conservation tape.

7. Scientific investigation should begin as quickly as possible. Advice may be sought from the British Cave Research Association. The existing microbiology of the new cave, both fungi, bacteria, and a world of protozoa, will almost certainly be irreversibly contaminated on the first trip. If cave microbiologists are available then include them on initial explorations so that they may collect uncontaminated samples.

8. Bones or other archaeological material should not be moved at all unless under imminent threat. Collection should only be undertaken with permission from the relevant Statutory Conservation Body if the cave is a Designated Site. Photograph any find in situ if possible and contact the Regional Caving Council for advice. It is unlikely to hold up explorations beyond a few days whilst an archaeological record is compiled.

9. Collection of specimens, (including geological) which must be approved by the appropriate statutory authority, should be kept to the minimum required for study purposes only.

10. Camping in a cave should only be considered when intending to undertake a specific speleological or conservation objective. All human introduced wastes, including carbide, foodstuffs and excreta, must be removed from the cave and disposed of properly.

11. Caves must not be disfigured by unnecessary marking, including 'direction arrows'. Survey markers should be small and inconspicuous.

12. Make a plan right from the beginning to remove all redundant equipment upon completion of an exploratory dig. If the dig fails "to go" provision should be made to clear up before all interest is lost. Leave the dig in a safe and tidy condition. Seek help from other cavers if necessary.

13. Instigate the production of a Cave Conservation Plan.

14. CAVE WITH CARE.