



**WebEx hosted Meeting of the BCA Conservation and Access Committee,  
7.30pm, 6th. February 2018**

**MINUTES**

**Present:** Andrew Hinde [AH] Convenor / BCA Conservation & Access Officer  
**Constituent Body Representatives:**  
 Stuart France [SF] Cambrian C.C. Conservation Officer (by phone)  
 Les Williams [LW] CSCC Conservation & Access Officer  
 Tim Allen [TA] CNCC Access Officer / BCA CRoW Liaison Officer  
 Christine Wilson [CW] DCA Conservation Officer  
**Plus the following non-voting observers:**  
 Jenny Potts [JP] Recorder / DCA Hon. Sec.

**1. Convenor's Welcome:**

Andrew welcomed people to the WebEx meeting.

**2. Apologies for Absence:**

**2.1 Apologies received from:**

Wayne Sheldon (DCA Chairman), Chris Binding (ACI), John Hine (NAMHO), Bob Mehew, Kay Easton (CNCC Conservation Officer).

**3. Items for Any Other Business:**

None advertised in advance.

**4. Minutes of last C&A Meeting, 19 February 2016: (Previously circulated.)**

**4.1 That the Minutes be taken as read and that they be accepted as a correct record.**

Prop. T.Allen, Sec. C.Wilson. *Agreed nem con.*

**5. Matters arising from the Minutes of the last C&A Meeting.**

5.1 None

**6. BCA CRoW Policy Statement. (See appended papers, previously circulated.)**

6.1 SF said he did not recall receiving the draft policy statement though AH has sent it out to all on the C&A list - AH would check the list. AH read it out for clarity, noting there were 5 points.

6.2 SF noted that Cambrian were in agreement with points 1 to 5 as read. CW stated that she was in support of 1 - 5 as read but would like to put it before a DCA Council Meeting.

6.3 LW stated that he could not speak for CSCC as they had not seen the document and their next meeting is on 17 February. He, personally, was in favour but noted that some in CSCC did not accept that Section 26 could be used to protect caves.

6.4 TA stated that he did not have authority to accept the proposal on behalf of CNCC but it could be put to their next meeting.

6.5 *That those present accept the Policy.* Prop. T.Allen, Sec. L.Williams. *Agreed unanimously.*

**7. Regional Round Up of Difficult Case Work:**

**7.1 Cambrian C. C.**

- a. **Ogof Draenen.** SF noted the "Draenen saga", after 20 years, has now reached the stage of a propaganda war. SF claimed there was some "Fake News" being propagated. It had been stated incorrectly in Descent magazine, for example, that the present landowner had determined the single entrance policy in 1996, but he only acquired the land in late 1999, and that CCC was fully in support of closing additional entrances. SF said that Robin Weare, BCA Treasurer and member of BCA Executive, had asked him for consent to attend the meeting of interested parties (Cadw, NRW, National Park Authority, Local Authority, Police, PDCMG) as an observer for BCA but, when present began to put forward views, named an individual as a suspect, and appeared to be acting as a representative of BCA. It was noted that the issue had not been discussed at the January BCA Council Meeting and that therefore BCA, as a body, had expressed no views on it or any wish to become directly involved.

AH suggested that a recent YouTube video gave a good idea of conservation work done in Ogof Draenen. SF said that in his view no ground-breaking conservation work had been done so far it as it had amounted to replacement of old tape with new tape. Political capital had also been made of moving additional loose



boulders perched just above a dug-out passage section to join those boulders already in a non-dangerous position just below the drop.

- b. **Ogof Gofan.** This has been a sensitive site where the ultimate landowner (MoD) is pleased with the interim access scheme operation. Professional protected species and archaeological surveys in 2017 have been supported directly by CCC, and these form part of the landowner's safeguarding measures. No problems for caver access has arisen from these assessments.
- c. **Llygad Llchwyr.** The episode of stalactite smashing in this cave during 2016 has not happened again in 2017. A caver counter in the cave for over a year has recorded modest footfall and the timing patterns of these visitors point to amateur cave exploration only.

## 7.2 Council of Northern C. C.

- a. **Access agreements.** AH noted that TA had been working on some new agreements easing access in the North and this had been reported in the BCA Newsletter. Although CNCC had complied with the spirit of the original access agreement re. Penyghent Pot and Dale Head it had now become obsolete and unworkable so they had opted out and the landowner had not objected.
- b. **Booking systems.** CNCC has developed an on-line cave booking system which is currently being trialled with the Ingleborough estate. It will be available to all cavers and it is hoped that it will be adopted by other large caving estates.
- c. **Conservation work.** It was reported that a great deal of conservation work has been done in the area and money had been made available by NE. AH had introduced the owner of Fairy Holes to his cave with some success.

## 7.3 Council of Southern C.C.

- a. **Access agreements.** LW reported that the main task at present is dealing with Cheddar / Longleat Estates and CSCC were hoping to have new agreement in place by March Quarter Day. The landowner is now pushing for a legal agreement and also wants £10m insurance cover; he has been told BCA cover is currently £5m but could be increased.
- b. **Natural England.** Noted the local N.E. Officer for the Mendip area is due to retire shortly and CSCC hope that the replacement will be similarly friendly to cavers.

## 7.4 Derbyshire C. A.

- a. **Cave Conservation.** CW noted that there is a full Conservation Officer's report in the DCA October Council Meeting Minutes.
- b. **Holme Bank mines.** There is a problem with access to the Holme Chert mines complex because of a dispute between the two landowners of Holme Bank and Holme Hall mines.
- c. **DCA Underground Conservation Forum.** CW noted the continuing success of the UCF meetings, which promoted excellent relations with the National Trust. DCA also enjoyed excellent relations with N.E.
- d. **Conservation & Access work.** CW paid tribute to the great deal of work done by the DCA Projects Officer, who is working well with recreational cavers and professional cavers.

## 7.5 Devon & Cornwall U. C.

No report.

## 7.6 Others

No other reports received.

## 8. A.O.B.

- 8.1 **NE Problems with work in caves.** AH reported running into serious problems with NE re. doing work in and around caves. It appears caves are declared to be "statutory confined spaces" so NE are concerned about their liability. This is putting the future of the conservation work in serious jeopardy at present so CNCC may have to look for funding elsewhere. CW suggested that the local NE officer, Sean Taylor, in the Peak has similar concerns and gets round it by asking cavers to do the work and cavers do a risk assessment.
- 8.2 **Regional & Club Conservation.** AH noted that there is very little conservation contact on the regional and club websites so he is hoping to improve the content on the BCA website. He has asked Chris Binding to do a feature on taping in caves. TA suggested a link from websites to conservation code and conservation page from the "New to Caving website". CW suggested the link button could work really well but they must be set up properly if they are to be effective.
- 8.3 **WebEx issues.** AH suggested WebEx works better when members use earphones rather than open mike.

## 9. Date time & place of next meeting:

- 9.1 To be agreed when there is a need for one. In the mean time we should carry on with contacts between regional Conservation and Access Officers by email, etc.

The meeting concluded at 20:20 pm.

*J. Potts, Recorder*



**APPENDED TO THESE MINUTES AND FORMING PART OF THEM IS THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENT:**

Item 6 - BCA Policy Statement on the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CRoW)

**BCA policy statement on the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CRoW)**

1. The British Caving Association holds the opinion that the CRoW Act already permits access for recreational caving. (Note: this view has been verified by the legal opinion of Dinah Rose QC and supported by many external organisations and individuals as well as its own members).
2. The access principles of the CRoW Act are in accord with BCA's own principles of improving access to caves. The BCA encourages caving bodies who have control of access to caves on 'access land' to renegotiate access agreements to reflect the rights provided by the CRoW Act.
3. The conservation of caves is important. The BCA Conservation Code applies to all caves regardless of the land designation. The BCA agrees with the CRoW guiding principle of the least restrictive option to meet the conservation or safety need.
4. The BCA believe that any particular conservation concerns on CRoW 'access land' can be adequately dealt with by those means already set out in the legislation. The BCA recognise that many of the concerns raised prior to the introduction of the Act never materialised and access to caves should be no different.
5. The BCA will support cavers in their work to develop access to caves on CRoW access land.

Reference documents;

1. Dinah Rose opinion
2. Conservation Code and Guidelines
3. Educational strategy for conservation
4. Section 26 advice to ACBs