



BCA Annual General Meeting 11th June 2023 at 1030

Minutes

The meeting was held by Zoom

Agenda Contents:

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1		Welcome from the Chair
2		Apologies for absence and verification of quorum
3		Declaration of items to be covered under Any Other Business
4		Acceptance of minutes from the 2022 AGM
5		Action items and Proposals arising from the 2022 AGM
6		Reports
6.4		Accounts
7		Election of BCA Council Members for vacancies arising in 2023
8		Election Statements
9		Proposals

10		Any other business

Apologies for Absence

Mike Higgins, Rick and Pat Halliwell, John Swanson, Linda Wilson.

Attendance and verification of Quorum

Russell Myers, Allan Richardson, Graham Mullan, Tony Radmall, Bob Mehew, Ari Cooper-Davis, Andy Eavis, John Gunn, Jenny Potts, Andrew McLeod, Andrew Hinde, Ged Campion, Ian Wallace, Howard Jones, Chris Boardman.

The meeting was declared to be quorate.

Items for AOB

None.

Acceptance of Minutes from 2022 AGM

Proposed Jenny Potts
 Seconded Graham Mullan

All in favour, passed.

Action items and Proposals from 2022 AGM

All action items and proposals from the 2022 AGM have been carried out.

Chair’s Report to the 2023 AGM

Starting on a positive note, it is pleasing to record that membership continues to increase with around 6500 members comprising 5500 CIMs (Club Individual Members) and approximately 1000 DIMs (Direct Individual Members). An increase from 6202 at this point in 2022.

The core functions of the Association continue to function well including achievements in Youth and Development, Conservation and Access (with a new convenor), Training and Equipment, QMC, IT, Insurance and the British Caving Library (recognising the joint interests of BCA and BCRA in the Library). Our UIS and FSE representatives have kept us well briefed on matters in the international world of caving. The Regions appears to reflect similar levels of activity.

Other functions such as the Radon WG and CRoW have experienced a natural decline in activity reflecting the current needs in these areas. Having said that, a “watching brief” has been maintained by key individuals on CRoW and it is encouraging to record a rising interest in “access” generally amongst certain of our national politicians with a potential General Election on the horizon in 2024. Rather than steal the thunder from the working groups, I’ll leave them to flesh out the details of their activity within their individual reports.

Our ability to publicise the activities within BCA, has been severely hampered by the lack of a volunteer to undertake the Publications and Information Officer's role and our seeming inability to attract anyone into the post. We have had some help from a volunteer in this activity but on a limited basis for which I, on behalf of the Association, am very grateful for. It is not enough however and the full role would I feel, be rewarding for anyone interested in this work. Hopefully, a volunteer will come forward in time for the AGM.

Of even more pressing concern, is the Association's Treasurer's role as our current Treasurer, Howard Jones, is standing down after two terms of office over 5 years. To date, we have been unable to attract a volunteer to the position and approach the AGM with the headache of not having someone to undertake this vital role. However, the Executive Committee tabled a recommendation at the last Council Meeting, to separate the "booking keeping" day to day work from the Treasurer's overall role leaving the Treasurer to deal with strategic matters and make the position more attractive for a volunteer. It is proposed that the book keeper will be paid for this work.

There are and will be more vacancies arising by the AGM as current incumbents stand down. If these are not filled after the AGM, Council will have some hard decisions to make to consider paying for key roles with a knock-on effect to overall costs and a potential associated increase in subscriptions.

I hope it does not come to that but unfortunately, interesting volunteers in helping run organisations such as the BCA, appears from anecdotal evidence, to be a familiar problem in this changing world. I hope, by the AGM, that volunteers will have come forward to help us.

Finally, on behalf of the membership, I must express our thanks and gratitude to the following outgoing members who are standing down, for their work and commitment: Howard Jones Treasurer and Insurance Manager. My personal thanks to Howard for mentoring me through my initial period as Secretary and currently Chair, particularly when reigning me in with sound advice!

Ari Cooper-Davis IT WG convener, an unsung hero behind the scenes who keeps our IT functioning and me still oblivious as to how it all happens.

Josh White Youth and Development Officer and Group Representative who has done a sterling job in this key area judging by the feedback we have received – a hard act to follow but not entirely lost to us, as Josh has taken on the Insurance Manager's role.

Ged Campion FSE representative who stands down as current President but has secured a position within UIS as Adjunct Secretary and will maintain our interests within that organisation in a formal sense as Andy Eavis steps aside.

Andy Eavis UIS representative is standing down from that role but has a lifetime position as a past President to keep us informed of matters on the international scene.

In addition to the above, the following positions are also vacant:

Publications and Information Officer

Group/Club Representative

There are plenty of opportunities above for volunteers to make their mark; I hope you are inspired to step forward and volunteer to help.

Russell Myers

Chair

BCA

28th May 2023

No Comments on the report.

Secretaries Report

A year of the usual round of preparing the Agenda and Minutes for Council meetings, answering queries and forwarding them to the appropriate person within BCA and elsewhere. As a member of the Executive, I have taken part in numerous discussions and decision making, helping BCA to adapt to the changing needs and requirements of the organization.

Allan Richardson
Secretary
BCA

No comments on the report.

Treasurers Report

Current bank balances: as at 24/05/2023 was £221,000. Of which £88,000 is in medium term interest bearing accounts and £77,000 is in short term deposit accounts and £56,000 on overnight deposit.

Unusual spend since last Council:

£2,500 donation to Bendrigg Trust, £3,000 donation to Ghar Parau Foundation, £1,000 settlement of 2022 BCA/BCRA account, £440 artificial cave storage, £1,100 Y&D costs, CNCC regional claim 2022, £4,230 which included £1,766 for training expenses and £1,530 for C&A, the largest projects being White Scar and Wretched Rabbit

CSCC regional claim 2022, £5,188 the vast majority of which was for C&A projects, the largest being £3,200 at Manor Farm mine and cave.

CCC regional claim 2022, £530 of which £460 was for C&A work (DCUC regional claim received not yet paid at £174).

Note the regional claims are reviewed by BCA Finance Committee before payment.

Note any C&A project > £750 is approved in advance by BCA C&A committee

BCA Financial year end

The BCA accounts for the year ending 31/12/2022 were approved at the March 2023 BCA Council meeting, and are to be noted at this AGM. I subsequently thanked the independent reviewer and submitted the BCA tax return to HMRC. No tax was payable as I utilised losses brought forward plus charitable donations in the year

Forecast 2023

BCA Council March 2023 approved a budget for the year showing a deficit of £10k. They decided not to raise fees for 2024 to address this deficit. They then approved non budgeted expenditure of £2,500, hence the deficit will be higher than budget, all else being equal.

BCA Book Keeper

BCA Council have approved the creation of a staff role BCA Book keeper. This role will allow the BCA finance function to continue in the event of Council not having a volunteer treasurer and continues the move towards admin work being done by paid staff. The role is small and unattractive in itself; however an existing BCA staff member has agreed to be mentored by Howard Jones for the next 12 months before including the role in her other BCA duties. So following the AGM and with approval from BCA Council, Howard Jones (having retired as BCA Treasurer) will be paid book keeper on a nominal wage whilst mentoring the hopefully full time staff member. Any new BCA treasurer can therefore

concentrate on the Political, Executive and Council remit and not have to do the book keeping admin.

Howard Jones BCA Treasurer (2018 to 2023) 24052023

No comments on the report.

Russell Myers reiterated his thanks to Howard Jones for all his work.

Insurance Report

Nothing to report as no change. No changes to the insurance offering and no claims that would affect future rates.

No comments on the report.

Membership Report

No report submitted.

See details in the Chairs report, to be updated at the AGM.

At the meeting it was reported that there had been an increase of about 300 members over the past year.

Other Reports

Safeguarding officer report

Several queries have been answered during the course of the year.

It remains very important that clubs follow BCA safeguarding policy and guidelines which are on the website. Those guidelines include a responsibility to check that cave trips w experienced, etc. Clubs are subject to 'safer recruitment' guidelines from the government. Any adult for whom the following is true, needs to be vetted, which includes 2 references and a DBS check:

- Overnight supervision of young people
- Unsupervised access to young people
- Regular work (including voluntary) with young people, which means more than 3 times in a month, even if accompanied by parents or vetted adults

I suggest that BCA should include the above paragraph on the annual club membership form, to remind clubs of their responsibilities in this area.

BCA can arrange for DBS checks and BCA Council agreed to fund these checks. I have only carried out two DBS checks. I think some clubs have no youth caving. In those that do have youngsters caving, they are generally supervised by adults who have been vetted through another agency, eg local authority or Scouts.

Chris Boardman

BCA Safeguarding Officer.

No comments on the report.

FSE delegate report

Ged Campion (Delegate).

David Botcherby (Vice Delegate).

The FSE has 30 member countries in Europe and beyond.

The FSE last General Assembly Meeting (GAM) was held at the German National Conference in Breitscheid on the 20th May. This was also this year's Eurospeleo Forum. There were elections to existing posts and reconstituted bureau is as follows;

President, Jean-Claude Thies from Luxembourg.

Vice-President: Christiane Meyer from Switzerland.

Secretary General: Alena Gessert from Slovakia.

Vice-Secretary: Fidele Messina from Italy.

Treasurer: Henk Goutier from Netherlands.

Vice-Treasurer: Ernest Geyer from Austria.

President of the European Cave Protection Commission ECPC continues to be Jean-Claude Thies, Luxembourg.

President of the European Cave Rescue Commission ECRC continues to be Antoniya Vlaykova, Bulgaria.

Head of the European Children and Young Cavers working group ECYC newly appointed Christiane Meyer, Switzerland.

For any further information please use FSE email address contact@eurospeleo.eu.

The full list of contacts may be found here <https://www.eurospeleo.eu/contact/>

The legacy of the International Year of Caves and Karst (IYCK) is showing positive signs of continuing for some years to come. Over 1,800 events from the IYCK have so far been recorded, including, online webinars, photo exhibitions, videos and competitions with a significant number hosted in Europe.

The work of the bureau continues to be conducted by exchange of emails, regular update meetings held online which since November have included commission leads and the newsletter editor.

EuroSpeleo Projects (ESPs) sponsoring and supporting caving expeditions, events, and projects from member countries. As countries slowly recover from the effects of the pandemic a healthy number of applications are filtering through for projects. In addition to this considerable work continues to be invested in maintaining the system of equipment sponsorship of European projects. Although there were no applications from the UK last year, we have received two applications very recently from UK teams venturing to the Middle East and Austria.

The next GAM of the FSE will be held in Breitscheid, Germany 20th May 2023.

Ged Campion.

BCA delegate to FSE

Ged reported that he is looking for someone to take over from him at FSE.

No comments on the report.

UIS

I have just returned from an extended period away mostly without internet, so I am a little out of touch with the detail of what has been going on within the UIS. Ged has been following events in his capacity as adjunct Secretary of UIS. It is apparent that there is a lot of cooperative international caving going on around the world including cave science. There are many symposiums, and the International Year of Caves and Karst was a definite success with over 1,600 activities during the extended year, all can be viewed on the UIS website: <https://uis-speleo.org/> The Ukraine war continues to be a problem internationally including within speleology. The Russian cavers have so much to offer to caves and cave science including the deepest cave in the world, it is a great shame that the politics are as they are. Talking of Russia and Ukraine, I must acknowledge the very, very sad death of Alexander Klimchouk, it was a very sad shock to many of us including myself with his very untimely demise. He was a very important member of UIS some years ago and had continued to keep contacts and do a great deal behind the scenes for international caving. We will all miss him greatly, me in particular on a personal level. There are also closer ties between the International Union of Speleology and various international scientific bodies such as UNESCO and IUCN, which again is a step in the right direction toward getting cave science recognised as a very valuable scientific contribution. Things are now starting to develop towards the next International Congress of Speleology which will be in Brazil in 2025 between the dates of 20th to 27th July. There is a council meeting in Brazil this July, and I will almost certainly attend in my capacity as Honorary President of UIS. I will report back on that meeting when I return. Ged Campion however has now retired as President of the European Federation and as soon as he can find a replacement will retire as BCA representative to the European Federation. It therefore seems appropriate for me to retire gracefully as the UIS representative for the British Caving Association and simply continue my involvement in my official capacity as Honorary President. I am also one of the individual member representatives of BCA, so I will retain a council position and also on occasions report back on UIS matters in conjunction with Ged. I have been liaising with UIS on behalf of BCA for over 20 years and I thank the rest of BCA council for putting up with me over that period. I wish Ged all the best in his new position and really encourage somebody to come forward to represent Britain on the European Federation. It's a very interesting position. It can nowadays be conducted from home although travelling to occasional meetings is always a very enjoyable thing. Please don't forget my thoughts that the International Congress for 2029 will be in Europe and Great Britain should consider very seriously picking up the baton for this event. The last time we hosted it was in 1977 and it was a fantastic success, surely nowadays, with more members more caves and wonderful IT we should be in a very good position to host it again. I hope to be online on June 11th.

Andrew J Eavis

CRow Working Group Report

As noted in last year's report, the court case is done. It is worth emphasising, that we did persuade the Court of Appeal to state that there is an arguable case in law that CROW applies to caving. But it was clear that pursuing it would require a new 'situation'. So we considered that the focus should now move to political activity. Since then there have been three significant developments.

In July 2022, we learnt about the Judicial Review being taken against the Dartmoor National Park Authority (DNPA) over wild camping. We made contact with DNPA and shared some of our legal documents with them as back ground material on the topic of the meaning of open air recreation. The case was heard in December and the court's decision made headlines in January 2023 (effectively banning wild camping). The judgement did not focus on the CRoW Act but on the 1985 Dartmoor National Park Act which also uses the phrase open air recreation. Since then DNPA have been granted permission to appeal the judgement on the grounds that that phrase open air recreation was potentially too narrowly interpreted by the judge in the judicial review. We await developments.

In June 2022, Caroline Lucas, the Green MP for Brighton, was successful in gaining a slot in the process of presenting private members bills. Her Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (Amendment) Bill is now undergoing its second reading. It has to be admitted that there is next to zero chance of the bill progressing, let alone becoming law. The significance of the bill is that it has started a discussion within parliamentary circles on CRoW. Also Caroline Lucas gave a favourable response to our approach over amending the bill to clarify that CRoW did cover caving.

Caroline Lucas also opened a debate in parliament in mid May 2023 entitled Public Access to Nature. The significant feature of this debate was when the Labour Party's Shadow Minister for the Environment spoke to present their position, he mentioned the Glover Review and quoted "it feels wrong that many parts of our most beautiful places are off-limits to horse riders, water users, cavers, wild campers and so on" from it. He later made reference to a comment previously made by the Shadow Secretary of State for the Environment that "Labour will give the right to experience, the right to enjoy and the right to explore". So it would appear that the Labour Party would be receptive towards an argument that CRoW does cover caving.

I should add that it was mainly down to David Rose, that sufficient representations were made to the Glover Review for the topic to be recorded in the report of the review, and explicitly mentioned in the report's Proposal 16: Consider expanding open access rights in national landscapes. The Government responded by saying "We aim to review the open access maps to clarify rights and inform any further consideration of expanding open access rights". It is not clear as to what, if any, action is on going on this point.

As an aside, another aspect of getting CRoW to apply to caving is that it will bolster the protection of landowners against legal actions. A major provision of CRoW is to further reduce the liability owed by landowners to persons on access land. This would help to shore up the deficit which appeared in BCA's insurance policy cover towards landowners when cover was reduced by the insurer last year by requiring the caving party to contain BCA members. Previously, the policy covered everyone who descended a cave.

It is also worth clarifying that the authority to amend the CRoW Act as it applies in Wales was devolved to the Welsh Assembly. So a change to the English version of the CRoW Act will not apply in Wales. The Welsh Government have made it plain that they view considering whether CRoW applies to caving as being of low priority. There is reason to think that this is a view is based upon the opinions of their civil servants. So the potential for political developments in Wales would seem to be low.

Looking forward, as part of moving into political activity, BCA needs to get its voice heard in various quarters. One way of doing this is being members of 'conglomerate' bodies. It would appear that BCA Council decided to give up membership of the Sport & Recreation Alliance last year. This body's remit is to provide a voice of the sport and recreation sector to Government, policy makers and the media. So it should provide a useful amplifier to BCA's voice and also inform BCA

of developments, obtain advice and making effective representations at a national level. There is also the Wildlife and Countryside Link which claims to be a “joint voice of the environment sector”. It has 71 members amongst which are British Canoeing, BMC & Ramblers. Both have membership fees which would have to be paid if it is thought worth joining them. In addition, direct links with other bodies need to be fostered which will also incur expenses for meetings and travel.

Lastly, the existence of the CRoW Working Group appears to be in question, given the absence of the group in BCA Council's minutes since last April. A new lead for the group is needed, I have drafted this report at the prompting of other members of the Working Group. But following a major operation early this year, I admit to not having the energy to help actively push forward work on getting CRoW to apply to caving.

Bob Mehew

No comments on the report.

IT Report

I continue in the role of Acting IT Group Convenor, having given notice in September 2021 that I will step down as soon as my replacement can be found. Many thanks to the amazing IT Group volunteers for their continued efforts. IT work, particularly system administration, is not often glamorous, but it's very important!

Infrastructure

The BCA continues to maintain 1 virtual private server (VPS), on which we host our own sites and select other sites from caving organisations that we choose to support for the betterment of British caving, free of charge. There are 33 accounts on this VPS.

We also host some business critical services in the Cloud using Amazon Web Services.

Services

I would like to draw attention to the services that the IT Group maintains, as they are sometimes underutilised. The services maintained by the IT Group include:

- The Zoom licence booking system.
- The cloud shared working environment.
- The email and mailing list systems.
 - Our email server reputation has been greatly improved this year, resulting in far fewer emails sent by the BCA being flagged as spam.
 - Our AWS SES account that we use for emailing the membership has exceptional low bounce and complaint ratios.
- The various BCA managed websites such as british-caving.org.uk and newtocaving.com.
- The membership system.

Maintenance

Maintenance of our services takes up the bulk of the IT Group's time. This is generally routine maintenance, such as keeping software up-to-date. Occasionally we get something more exciting, like dealing with compromised accounts on our VPS sending out spam emails, or helping organisations migrate to and from the BCA server.

Projects

There haven't been many IT Group led projects this year, which is no bad thing as the maintenance is the time consuming work.

Get involved!

We're always looking for keen volunteers to join (or even manage?) the IT Group. It's an incredible opportunity to gain hands on experience with tools that you often wouldn't be able to afford to buy yourself, or be allowed to fiddle with at your place of work. I feel very lucky to have been allowed to learn most of my web development and system administration in this role, as I now do it as a full time job.

Registered Office: The Old Methodist Chapel, Great Hucklow, BUXTON Derbyshire SK17 8RG - 01298 873810 - www.british-caving.org.uk

No comments on the report

British Caving Library Report

The Library is finally back to working as normal in 2023, after the remaining effects of Covid restrictions left us partway through 2022. The attached bar charts show the progress in enquiries and visits and also the varying division between enquiries which simply request a scan of an item, as opposed to those which require us to carry out some research for the enquirer. It is encouraging that so many of those we assist make a monetary donation to the Library, including substantial amounts from overseas.

This year we have already, or will soon, host meetings of BCA Trainer Assessor groups, BCRA and DCA Council Meetings and a Conservation & Access Event run by a local club with visiting speakers. We also hosted a BCRA Field Meeting last summer. We are able to manage these meetings face-to-face and online as well, allowing people to participate via our online systems. Visitors wanting to do their own research are once again a regular feature, though much of our work in dealing with enquiries is dealt with online and by sending scans of material.

The BSA/Simpson archive material, currently on permanent loan from the Library to the British Geological Survey at Keyworth, is not yet accessible to enquirers online via BCRA - the Memorandum of Understanding between BCRA and BGS is having to be re-written before this can happen. Other archive surveys and maps from this era are now being catalogued by our two volunteers and will be stored at Glutton Bridge for the time being.

When the British Caving Library was set up in 2008 there existed only a printed catalogue of books and journals dated 2003, created by the then BCRA Librarian, and no surveys had been catalogued. A recent check found that altogether we have catalogued around 20,800 single printed items (Books and Journals) since our online catalogue first went live in 2009. More recently we have begun to catalogue modern surveys and maps, thanks to our Library Assistant and volunteers, and these will

gradually be incorporated into the online bibliography/catalogue. We have dealt with around 2,200 of these so far (including the complete collection of John Beck's 1000 Peak District Surveys). We have also worked our way through a further 500+ archive surveys, with many hundreds, if not thousands, more still to deal with.

We are also now receiving a steady stream of archive material of all kinds and are making as much as possible of this accessible online, either through the Library website or by using separate cloud storage. We are looking into the best way to safeguard the more fragile items owned by the Library and are aware that this may come at some cost.

Our online presence is due to two volunteers who have worked with us since 2009: the Online Bibliography/catalogue, the BCRA Online Archives (photographic material) and the Audio Archive. All this information can be accessed via the Library website: caving-library.org.uk.

We now have a large collection of duplicate material, the result of donations to the Library, and we continue to seek a good home for these with other caving Libraries or individual caver collectors.

Jenny Potts, BCRA Library Co-ordinator
24-5-23

Acceptance of the reports

Proposer Andrew Hinde
Secunder Tony Radmall

All in favour, reports accepted.

Accounts

Accounts approved by Council in March 2023, to be noted by the AGM

Account details are in the separate file "BCA Accounts 2022 for AGM"

It was noted by all present at the AGM that the Accounts had been received and all were in favour.

The new Treasurer is to be asked to find a scrutineer for next years accounts.

Elections

Vacant posts open to nominations from the floor

BCA currently functions with assistance from three paid part-time staff which is most appreciated but largely operates with the goodwill of volunteers. In the event that we do not recruit to some of the current vacancies, it is likely we shall need to consider more paid staff for some of those positions with an attendant increase in costs which will end up being passed on to the membership and a corresponding increase in subscriptions. The following positions will be vacant at the time of the AGM on Sunday 11th June 2023 at 10.30 am and open to nominations from the floor.

Treasurer (voting)

A member of the BCA Executive Committee along with the Chair and Secretary with overall responsibility for the BCA finances and with support from the Finance Committee.

Note As this is a voting position on Council, nominations will be forwarded to an electronic vote of the membership for approval.

No nominations, post vacant.

Publications and information Officer (non-voting)

Assists BCA with publicity, engagement with its members and developing a media strategy with support from a Working Group.

Note As this is a non-voting position on Council, nominations will be considered by the BCA Council for approval at the Council Meeting on 27th June

No nominations, post vacant.

Youth and Development Officer (non-voting)

This position is focused on providing support to young people and associated organisations developing their experience and caving skills with support from a Working Group.

Note As this is a non-voting position on Council, nominations will be considered by the BCA Council for approval at the Council Meeting on 27th June

We have a volunteer, Council to approve at the 27th June meeting.

IT manager (non-voting)

Managing the BCA IT systems with support from a Working Group.

Note As this is a non-voting position on Council, nominations will be considered by the BCA Council for approval at the Council Meeting on 27th June

No nominations, Ari Cooper-Davis to continue.

Group/Club Representative (voting)

An individual position to represent the interests of Clubs and other groups on the BCA Council.

Note As this is a voting position on Council, nominations will be forwarded to an electronic vote of the membership for approval.

No nominations.

Individual Representative (voting)

Nigel's term of office as individual rep was incorrectly recorded as 22-24 when it should have been 21-23 which means he is up for re-election.

No nominations.

Election Statements

None received

Proposals

None received

AOB

None received

Date and Time of 2024 AGM

After some discussion re dates and timings, it was decided that the date is to be considered by Council. As the meeting will be held by Zoom, it would preferably be held in the evening.

Russell Myers proposed that we take the AGM date and time decision to Council.

Proposer Russell Myers

Seconded Allan Richardson

One against, Ian Wallace, rest in favour, motion passed.