

BCA Annual Report

2025



Welcome to the first British Caving Association Annual Report!

Editor - Katie Eavis

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<https://british-caving.org.uk/>

This reports aims to showcase all the various aspects of UK cave and mine exploration that BCA, and all its constituent parts, were involved in during 2025. All those that make up the BCA council have been asked to contribute – the executive officers, regional caving councils, constituent bodies, working groups and the additional council-appointed positions. Additionally the BCA employees and member groups have been asked to contribute if they wish. There are also guest features including reports from a caver who started caving in 2025, and a new caving club who joined BCA in 2025, amongst others.

So read on to find out which member of the executive was rescued in 2025, which regional caving council rewards cavers for re-discovering mine passage, which university club is literally StUCC and decide for yourself if BCA needs to do more to develop sock wrestling skills amongst the student caving clubs.....

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All current members already have an account - your username is usually set to the email address you use for BCA membership. Click 'forgot password' to set a new password.

Once logged in click 'Shop' in the top bar to select and order a printed report.

Any problems logging in or ordering please contact:

admin@british-caving.org.uk

Front Cover

Joel Foyster in The Chocolate River, Redhouse Swallet. Discovered on the 23rd March 2025 by Matt Jones, John Bennetts, Dan Sandford and Tim Nichols. Photo: Tiffany Cooksley



Get Involved

British Caving relies on the time and dedication of hundreds of volunteers but more are always needed! Hopefully this report will highlight the diverse aspects of UK cave and mine exploration - there is something for everyone, whether you prefer technical challenges such as bolting, are interested in cave conservation or would like to get involved in cave rescue.

Most of the reports include an email address to contact if you would like to get involved.

In the rare cases there isn't an email address please contact Katie (admin@british-caving.org.uk) and she can put you in touch with the relevant person.

Feature in this report next year

BCA will hopefully be producing an annual report each year going forward. If you have anything you would like to contribute this can be sent to Katie:

admin@british-caving.org.uk

In particular we would love to include a photo feature of new cave and rediscovered mine found in 2026 in Britain by our members – so please send in photos of your finds!

Thank you

Thanks to Rob Eavis for his help with the design of this report and thank you to everyone who contributed - we literally wouldn't have an annual report without you all!

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Out on Rock

John Proctor, Chair

www.outonrock.uk

I felt privileged to be asked to write about Out On Rock for the BCA annual report. I couldn't decide whether to write a sober and uplifting account of our club's successful first two years or an offbeat account of some of our more eventful trips featuring inflatable boats and an irate landowner. None of the trusted members I consulted could help me make my mind up so I've gone for the sober and uplifting account. If you want to know about the inflatable boat trips and the irate landowner ask one of us at the bar at Hidden Earth instead.

So how did Out On Rock begin? In autumn 2023 it became clear that there was a need and a demand for a caving and climbing club aimed at the LGBTQIA community + allies based in the north of England. Why combine climbing and caving? On a pragmatic level it happened due to climbers and cavers being in the same friendship group, but it has undoubtedly been the best approach. It has helped get the club quorate when it was first getting started, and brought people in with different attitudes and ways of thinking.

Our first club event was an indoor bouldering event at Blochous bouldering wall in Manchester in January 2024, shortly followed by our first caving event at Brunt Scar near Ribbleshead and our first outdoor climbing event (winter climbing in Glencoe). We soon settled down to a pattern of regular weekend trips (9 in 2024 and 13 in 2025), with day trips and ad-hoc evening trips organised via our WhatsApp community. The day and evening trips are an important part of our ethos of being welcoming to new members and helping them find a way in to our community. It takes quite a self-confident person to sign up to spend an entire weekend away with people they don't know so the day and evening trips play a key role in welcoming new and prospective members.



Sam Devey in Lancaster Hole
Photo: Marcus Cross

By December 2024 we were ready to affiliate to the BCA and BMC, and soon had 20 paid-up members. At present the club is growing slowly, which is probably the best outcome as we are keen to keep the club relatively informal.

To help me write this article I asked members to send me a few sentences about their best experiences with the club. I couldn't find a way to string these together without sounding like a salesman but a few highlights from member's experiences, and my experiences, stand out.

Coniston May 2024: 10 people signed up for a weekend in the copper mines valley, the first club trip that was really busy and made it clear to all of us that this club was needed. Most people had an epic day out on Dow Crag on Saturday and on Sunday the group was divided between those who preferred a trip down the copper mines and those who preferred to



swim across Coniston water. But perhaps the highlight of the trip was viewing the northern lights on Saturday evening from a venue mercifully devoid of light pollution.

Cairngorms February 2026: Let's leave aside the return journey on Sunday evening when the police diverted us off the motorway onto a single-track road and we found ourselves stuck between an articulated lorry that couldn't get round a corner and an articulated lorry that couldn't reverse and speak about the ice climbing under blue skies and once-in-a-decade skiing conditions, followed by a great meal together back at the hut.

Agen Allwedd March 2026: This was the longest time underground our club had ever spent. Four of us ventured to the courtesan, and although we failed to actually find it, we made it to all the other pretties in that region of the cave. Despite the arduousness of doing Southern stream, in both directions with bags, no one moaned or complained and everyone enjoyed the trip. I could not be prouder of our members and how far we have come as a club. I hope we will continue to have many adventures like this (writes the caving meets organiser).

Personally I appreciate the opportunity that our club provides to make our community visible to the wider world. We have not experienced any hostility, and it has been great to talk at Hidden Earth (for instance) to people who are understandably curious – why is an LGBTQIA club required? We shouldn't be afraid to have these conversations. At Kendal pride I remember us talking to an elderly climber who appeared to have been taken to the event by his wife and was thrilled to find there were people there who he could talk to about climbing!

You can follow the club on Instagram and get in touch via the enquiry form at outonrock.co.uk, we look forward to hearing from you!



BCA Executive Officers' and Employees' Reports

The British Caving Association council is led by three executive officers, the Chair, the Secretary and the Treasurer. The Treasurer's report includes the reports from the Finance and Incorporation Working Groups, as well as the 2025 Accounts.

Their reports can be found on pages 6 to 13.

The British Caving Association has three part-time employees, all of whom are cavers! On pages 14 and 15 they introduce themselves, describe their roles within BCA, and highlight some of their projects in 2025.



Rostam Namaghi

Chair - since June 2024

chair@british-caving.org.uk

I'm minded to start this report with my rescue in Dowbergill in October 2025. I became separated from my party and they got lost, then very cold and then stuck. We had to sit and wait for rescue. UWFRA, amongst many, many, other teams were called out to help and the weather became incredibly challenging. I have never been so relieved to see so many people, so many friends, literally come to my rescue. It's why I volunteer for caving and want to give back to the community, for all it has given and continues to give to me. Though, of course, I am the bureaucrat rather than one of the many dashing heroes, and this report takes you from Providence to the purposeful pencil pushing.

Over this past year the Association has been changing. We have managed to get the budget back in control, we have become more professional with how we communicate and our administration, and perhaps, most importantly, we have brought back the sense of proactive change that has been missing these past few years. Even the creation of this report is a notable step forward as we have struggled over many years to produce just newsletters. The past few decades have seen an end to many caving publications, there are many more mediums to publish through and though our population is stable/slightly growing, we don't have as many writers and editors. Delegating some of these tasks to professional administration staff not only make sure they are done well and on time - the membership service is excellent, we receive great feedback about this - but it also helps our volunteers pursue the change they got involved with to make in the first place. It's a sustainable way of introducing quiet professionalism to what we do.

That said one of the things I love about our community is our close knit nature, spend thriftiness and unabashed amateurism. Our nature to explore those furthest reaches, to adapt and innovate, and to do it on a shoe string budget is a core cultural value and it is one that is still at the heart of the BCA. With the potential regulatory threat of 'Organised Fun' - please do read Isaac's report in detail - it was remarked that caving is very well organised. Our clubs talk to us and our volunteers listen, we were ahead of the game compared to larger bodies like the BMC and our consistent anti-certificate and qualification tone for student caving set the narrative. It bears through on the report and I think it reflects well on Youth and Development, CHECC and the BCA as a whole.

It's those values we need to not lose as we look at incorporation. Incorporation is something we need to do - we have previously lost access to things like stripe because services can't determine what we are, there are



Rostam and UWFRA team member Richard Hudson, after the Dowbergill rescue in 2025

worries about liability and it is unfair to demand that lies on the shoulders of our volunteers. It also opens the door to owning assets in the future. These changes will help longer term success. One of the aims for '25-26 was to start this process and owing to time restraints and 'fire fighting' a careful and considered approach starting at our upcoming AGM is where this has come to. It looks like some changes will have to be made and full discussion with the community is central to that.

In any other year the spectacular finds that continue to be made in the Forest of Dean with the recognition of FoDCCAG as a regional council would headline this report.¹ I am very pleased that Caving Wales and FoDCCAG were able to come to agreements very amicably, and that the community of cavers from the Forest have a distinct voice within the BCA. There is a young generation of cavers as well as the old heads who have finally cracked the secrets, and I think it highlights an area often overlooked due to a lack of a central hub. I really look forward to helping and engaging with FoDCCAG

¹ The Forest of Dean CCAG were officially recognised by BCA as a Regional Caving Council at the January 2026 Council meeting, although much of the groundwork was done in 2025. The 2026 BCA annual report should contain a report from FoDCCAG themselves.



Marta Cooksley-Czajka in The White Forest, Redhouse Swallet. Discovered on the 6th April 2025 by Daniel Jackson, Richard Newhouse, Alex Knight, Falkland Anderson, Dan Sandford and Tim Nichols
Photo: Tiffany Cooksley

and other cavers to help develop the community there and give it the attention it really deserves.

A lot of my time was taken up with matters in Northern Ireland. The most grave matter was fraud discovered during a joint meeting of the BCA and Speleological Union of Ireland (SUI) when discussing award equivalence. A BCA member was found to be using a fake name, a fake certificate and was the treasurer of a BCA club, as well as being in receipt of several different grants on behalf of the club and caving, including the BCRA. He was immediately suspended and the matter handed over to the police. He was detained and is awaiting trial. My thanks must go out to Richard Hill and George Plant for uncovering the deception and raising the alarm.

Northern Ireland produced another issue and much of the executive time has been spent clarifying the use of qualifications (CIC, LCMLAs) and whether they apply in Northern Ireland. Sport Northern Ireland have long recognised the SUI as the National Governing Body (NGB) for the whole island of Ireland, the BCA is only recognised as the National Governing Body in England and Scotland - with Caving Wales the recognised NGB in Wales. As we don't receive funding from Sport England/Sport Scotland/Sport Wales the onus on us to comply with various

regulations (such as coaching) has been minimal. The SUI are in a very different situation and are very generously funded. As a result there is a different requirement from their qualifications which need more focus on coaching than what is required from the qualifications from BCA. There is a recognition of prior learning scheme from the SUI which results in an additional assessment be made regarding coaching so that BCA qualifications can be recognised by the SUI.

The situation that forced the question 'are BCA awards valid in Northern Ireland?' is due to the fact that the University sector requires any instructor to be in compliance with the NGB (for their own insurance to be valid). We do not place any restriction on the awards - they are of an excellent standard and should a person/organisation be happy with them their use is not restricted in Northern Ireland, i.e. they are just as valid. There are constitutional implications to this however. Our constitution states in clause 2.3 'In this Constitution, the national interests of the Association are those covering the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, together with the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man.' Further complications arise as the SUI are a member club of BCA and so as a result the autonomy clause (2.1) and non-interference clause (9.1) also apply. We have had lengthy discussions with the SUI and in time a joint statement clarifying the situation will be made. I will point out we will continue to advocate for the caves and cavers of Northern Ireland as per 2.3, and that includes the SUI. Division of the caving community in Ireland would not be in the interests of caving - there are roughly as many cavers in Ireland as there are in Derbyshire.

The most major silent successes can be found in Chris Bolton and Aidan Kuhlman's reports - their negotiation on the insurance deal widened coverage, reduced cost and clarified essential issues. I cannot stress how much work both of them have put in this year, and they have repaired so much of what has been neglected over the past 3 or 4 years. We are 'turning the oil tanker of finances' around and are in a much better state regarding our insurance and IT systems. Again read their reports for a much more detailed breakdown but these actions, as well as those around Organised Fun, have safeguarded Caving for the near and medium term.

I am incredibly proud of the work achieved this year, many elements I couldn't fit into this article. If you are inspired by any of this then do please get in touch as we are always looking for more volunteers.

Aidan Kuhlmann

Secretary - since June 2024

secretary@british-caving.org.uk



Increasing professionalism and good governance has been the driving direction behind my work at the BCA. It is the many bureaucratic, but essential, tasks which have largely occupied my time, alongside some much larger projects. However, my report is affected by a phenomenon that many club secretaries will understand in that unlike many of my fellow BCA officers, I have few individual or unique projects to mention here, but rather most of my time has been spent maintaining the everyday functioning of the organisation or assisting other BCA volunteers to push forward their own initiatives better detailed within their own specific reports.

Professionalism

In terms of increasing professionalism and improving our governance I have put large amounts of effort into slowly updating items such as: the website, National Council and Working Group minutes structures, bringing a more uniform look to BCA documents; updating important documents such as the Manual of Operations and making it more accessible on the website, changing fonts used within the organisation to be more inclusive, improving the advertising and publication of our work – we now more regularly engage via JustGo, on UKCaving, BuddlePit, and use our own website and our events calendar; updating risk assessments and Health and Safety policies, and many more items. All of this, of course, is alongside the day-to-day jobs of a secretary.

A key shift we have made within the organisation has been to better utilise the fantastic resource that are our staff. Previously, there were several laborious but essential jobs carried out by volunteer BCA Officers which drained their energies, preventing our officers from making the improvements for the caving community they want to. These jobs, alongside other essential and regular work are now carried out by our staff members, meaning that jobs which should get done now get done reliably and on time. This has been significant in terms of minuting meetings across the organisation and day-to-day communications.

As part of my work I am trying to decrease the size of the Secretary's job – it is currently a very time consuming job and it is an ambition of mine to be able to eventually leave the role in a place where a working caver with a family to look after could feasibly take on the role. This workload, I believe has been a major barrier to the BCA's success in the past. It is my hope that through our efforts to professionalise the organisation this can be achieved. One way this may be done is as part of the process of incorporation.

Incorporation

Incorporating the BCA into a Company Limited by Guarantee will provide a few key benefits: a distinct legal identity allowing the BCA to explore opportunities in the future, separation of liability from office holders, and the opportunity to reorganise the BCA in a way which better serves cavers (and mine explorers) and to share the load of running the organisation. Currently, the BCA is financially one of the smallest adventure pursuit national governing bodies and it is due to the dedication of the many volunteers in our sport that we have a vastly disproportionate impact. But if we don't look after our volunteers then we will struggle and it has become apparent that the work of the Executive, if we want to achieve what we do, is too great for just three volunteers.

Transparency

A key point I made when I made my bid to get elected was about increased transparency. I believe that the improvements we have and are continuing to make in terms of publication of information, its accessibility, our visibility (the BCA Executive attends many major caving events), and our increased communication with you, the membership, are starting to address this issue, but I recognise that the BCA still has a long way to go. It is our hope that the return of a regular BCA publication – this BCA Annual – put together by our staff member Katie

Eavis, meaning it will, despite any changes in volunteers, continue as a record of the BCA and the state of British subterranean exploration.

Successes

A few key areas which I have been involved which I must mention are:

- The renegotiation of the insurance contract with Chris Bolton and Katie Eavis. We have managed to negotiate to improve the deal we have both in terms of cost and service provided. Specific details of these changes will be published when it is suitable.
- The combating of the potentially damaging Organised Fun report commissioned by the NUS Outdoor Pursuits Safety program. Isaac Neale, Rostam Namaghi, Tom Phillips, and I (among many others) spent lots of time liaising with the authors of the report, their advisors, and the unions, and of course the student caving clubs. We were able to successfully use forums such as CHECC to coordinate the message from the caving community and represented our sport as one of the best organised and supported amongst those assessed.
- The SUI and Northern Ireland governance

question detailed in Rostam's Chair Report has occupied large portions of my time as we work within the BCA to coordinate the message between the volunteers at our Qualifications Management Committee (the professional awards side of the BCA) and the political and governance message from the Executive. I am happy that we have come to a sensible and fair resolution – more details to follow.

Finally, I think the most major successes we have had has been among our many Working Groups (WGs). The Working Groups that make up a significant portion of BCA activity and I often find myself drawn into different parts of their activity. Sometimes it's through simple things such as facilitating online meetings and maintaining mailing lists to being an active participant in the group's business. Chris, Rostam, and I have between us been involved in every working group and I am happy to report that most have returned to operation, two new working groups have been established – the National Access and the Anchor Working groups – and there are some impactful projects in the pipelines.



Chris Bolton

Treasurer - since March 2024

treasurer@british-caving.org.uk

Chris's report also contains reports from the Finance and Incorporation Working Groups, and the 2025 Accounts

The financial role of BCA

The British Caving Association (BCA) is the overarching organisation for caving and underground sporting activity in the UK. One of the principal objectives at its formation was obtaining public liability insurance for caving activities that would cover all its constituent members. This is significantly better value than each body arranging its own insurance, both from the benefits of scale and by avoiding members of more than one body being insured more than once.



BCA therefore collects membership fees from individuals and clubs, arranges insurance, makes grants to constituent bodies and also funds its own activities for the general benefit of caving in the UK. It has three part time staff, equivalent to approximately 1.2 full time posts. An annual budget for both grants and internal activity is agreed by the National Council, on which the constituent bodies are represented. Grants to the Regional Caving Councils are not fixed, although budget estimates are required, and are paid in arrears based on actual expenditure. The PL insurance premium, covering all constituent bodies and members, is currently just over half the BCA's income.

The British Cave Research Association (BCRA) is closely linked to BCA and requires all its members to be members of BCA. The British Caving Library is managed by BCRA, and receives substantial grant from BCA (currently £12,000) which pays for the rent of the Library premises. One of BCA's part time staff spends about half their time on work for the Library, for which BCRA reimburses BCA, while a similar amount of work is done by BCA's other staff members and funded by BCA.

The Ghar Parau Foundation supports UK cavers on caving expeditions abroad, and receives a grant from BCA, currently £3000.

BCA manages a qualification scheme for professional cave and mine instructors and leaders. The Qualifications Management Committee (QMC) is an integral part

of BCA but is managed semi-independently and aims to break even financially. The Training Administrator is a member of BCA's part time staff.

One of the main staff roles is membership administration, on behalf of both BCA and BCRA. Other work includes some bookkeeping, management of the BCA's artificial cave which is used by youth groups, insurance management and administrative support such as producing minutes of meetings.

Administration of both membership and QMC records is supported by a contract with JustGo. This provides professional management of database records and credit card payments, both of which are increasingly complex from both an IT and a legal perspective. The saving of staff time as result of using JustGo reduces the cost significantly and, while it is difficult to make an exact comparison, it is perhaps not quite cost neutral but is worthwhile for the improvements in security and member experience.

Recent financial history

To understand the financial position of BCA in 2025 it is necessary go back a few years. In about 2015, BCA had surplus funds. Membership fees were reduced and good uses for the funds were sought, there being no point in letting inflation erode them. This set the reserves on a downward path, as intended. As a result of higher than intended costs of the legal action regarding CRoW access rights, however, and the COVID-19 pandemic, the downward movement accelerated.

BCA's objective has for many years been to retain an Insurance Reserve, equal to at least one annual premium, and a General Reserve, equal to one year's turnover less one insurance premium. The total reserve is therefore one year's turnover. This is a sound intention, but because turnover is nearly all membership fees, it creates a difficulty if reserves become too low. Increasing the membership fees brings in more funds to increase the reserve, but it increases the target reserve by the same amount. A shortfall in the reserve can only be made up

if the membership fee does not increase, that is, in the second year after an increase, and provided it is not increased again.

From June 2023 until June 2024 there was no elected Treasurer, as the previous incumbent reached the end of his term and no candidate came forward. The previous Treasurer remained in a bookkeeping role, but was no longer in an authoritative position to give strategic guidance to the National Council. The Association had a deficit of £4,004 in 2023 and several significant increases in expenditure were expected in 2024. A decision should have been taken in 2023 to increase membership fees for 2024 but the opportunity was missed. As a result, the budget for 2024 was for a deficit of £27,555, which would leave reserves at the end of 2024 below the target level.

I was elected as Treasurer in June 2024 and was asked to decide whether an increase in membership fees was necessary. A relatively brief study of the accounts showed that it was overdue. An increase was agreed by the Council and was intended, along with tighter budget controls for 2025, to bring income and expenditure more closely into balance. The purpose of the budget controls was to enable best use of the limited funds, giving licence to spend up to the budget but to minimise the risk of running with reserves below the target. I appreciate that some of the Working Group Conveners found my budget rules complicated and I thank them for their patience in trying to follow them! Expenditure in 2024 was not as high as had been anticipated and the annual accounts recorded a deficit of £20,773, leaving reserves with a margin over the target of less than £2,000. Since the RCC grant claims are retrospective, this deficit included accruals for their estimated claims, which turned out to be high. Together with an underestimate of bank interest owing, this required a prior year correction in the 2025 accounts of £5964, reducing the effective deficit to £14,809 and, even better, giving additional funds for 2026 to cover some new initiatives (including this annual report).

Financial outcome for 2025

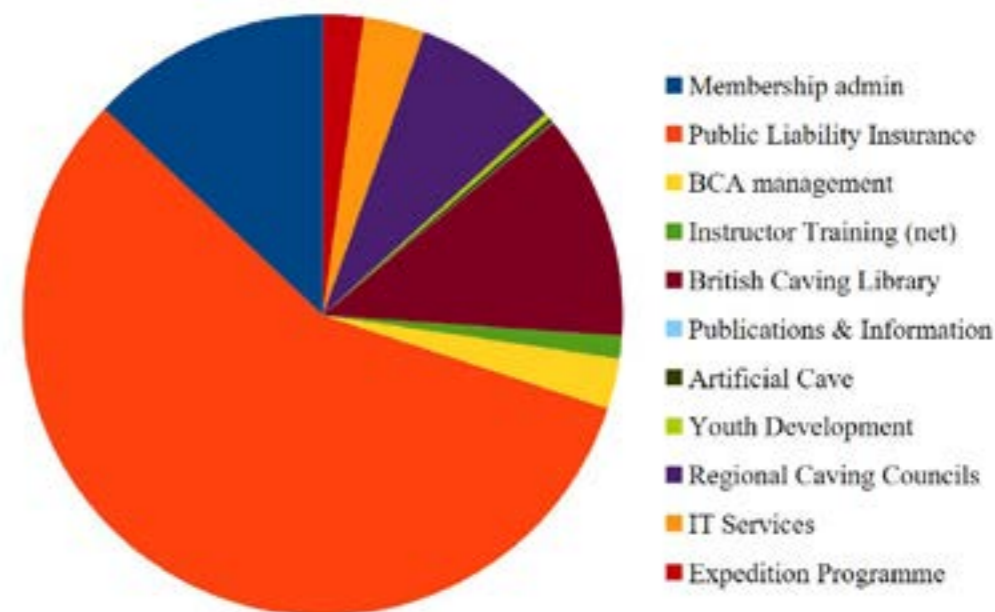
The annual accounts for 2025 are now complete and there is a surplus for the year of £2524 compared with a budgeted deficit of £5,930. The trend in both 2024 and 2025 has been that final expenditure has been lower than was budgeted for. This is thought to be for two reasons. Firstly, a recognition that funds were tight would have inhibited more ambitious spending. Secondly, new officers in number of key roles were settling in and not starting new initiatives. We don't expect this trend will continue, and in fact we hope it won't. It's been useful in helping recover our financial position, but the purpose of BCA is not to accumulate money, it's to get things done for cavers.

As I gained a better understanding of the BCA's finances, and the 'momentum' effect of tying the target reserves to income, it became clear that just balancing the books for one year wasn't going to provide a stable financial position to move forward. Inflation was still ongoing and just meeting the target reserve wouldn't leave any margin. The Council reluctantly decided that we should increase membership fees for 2026 by a sufficient amount that we would then only need occasional increases, probably linked to inflation. That would be applied every two or three years, rather than annually, to minimise changes in club membership rates.

The accounts are included at the end of this report.

Business risk

During 2025 I initiated a formal assessment of the risks to BCA, with support from other Council members. This identified the three most significant risks as a cyber attack, a large insurance claim with a resulting increase in premium, and a loss of key people (either volunteers or staff). Cyber and insurance are covered in more detail later.



We're thinking of ways we can get people to shadow each other's roles. It would be great to have some more volunteers in the BCA team. In particular, my term as Treasurer finishes next year and I don't plan to stand again. It would be ideal to have an Assistant Treasurer who might take over the role in 2027.

As part of the assessment, we also reviewed the need for two separate reserve funds, one for insurance and the other for other unexpected items, totalling 100% of turnover (which in BCA's case is effectively income). It seems unlikely that both would be required and, noting that many businesses aim to keep a reserve of 50% of turnover, we settled on 75% as adequate, but minimising the annual loss incurred by holding funds when interest rates are less than inflation.

The combination of a reduced target for reserves and the outcome of the 2025 accounts mean that BCA reserves are now above the target. Income for 2025 was £15,7805, 75% of which is £118,354, while total assets are £152,246.

The business risk assessment also noted a significant issue with BCA's status as an unincorporated Association. There are two aspects to this. The first is that in the unlikely event that BCA was unable to pay its debts, either the membership in general or Council members might be liable. The second is that many of the organisations we deal with, such as government and banks, require proof that we're a genuine organisation. They expect official company registration as evidence and it can take many hours of emails to convince them that we are a valid organisation but are not a limited company. We are the only UK governing body of sport that isn't some kind of corporate organisation. Most are a Company Limited by Guarantee. This is what BCA will be moving to, but it will require some constitutional changes that we're working on.

IT systems

We have not had a volunteer for the role of IT Co-ordinator, which is filled by with Simon Mullens, a BCA member, on a self employed part time basis (and at a much lower rate than a professional IT service). Simon has re-organised BCA's IT and we have taken the decision to separate it from BCRA's, moving away from direct server management to commercially hosted services. This was facilitated by the use of JustGo for membership databases. One reason why a cyber attack was a major risk was that the Insurer had declined to cover the risk as the security aspects of the previous IT systems did not meet their expectations.

BCA's internal IT systems are now based around Google Workspace. This provides email, file storage and shared drives for Working Groups. Surprisingly, Google do not back up the file storage and this has now been implemented on a small stand alone server, with daily automatic backups which cannot be overwritten in the short term. This provides protection against ransomware.

The BCA website is now hosted on a server provided by Krystal, on which BCA has a 'reseller' package. This enables us to allocate server space to RCCs and constituent bodies. They have complete control of their space, within the environment provided by Krystal, and can run a website and/or email as necessary. This has allowed us the re-instate the cyber insurance for BCA itself.

Insurance

BCA's Insurance Officer stood down from the formal role at the 2025 AGM, although remains available to give advice. The routine management of insurance queries was passed to Katie as our main administrative staff member, supported by the Treasurer and Secretary. Katie was well on with the renewal negotiations with our broker, Howden, when we received an unsolicited approach from another broker suggesting that they could offer a better deal. We gave Howden the opportunity to compete with this and were able to negotiate payment for their services as a flat fee, rather than commission, at a significant saving. Remaining with Howden enabled various historical agreements on the extent of cover to remain in effect. So far as we can tell, not all of these are reflected in the wording of the policy. We also took the opportunity to clarify our understanding of the contents insurance, which applies only to specific contents kept in named locations. It became apparent that this could be extended to contents held by RCCs, and we have been collecting information on these and adding them to the policy. This may increase the premium but is more cost effective than the RCCs insuring them separately, for which they would claim the cost from BCA.

BCA Staff

With the role of Treasurer, I also inherited the management of BCA's part time staff. They are all cavers, all well motivated and understand their jobs, so this requires very little work, which I see as more support than management. For many years, staff payroll services have been provide by Nick William's company, for which BCA has been most grateful. This arrangement finished in 2025 and we have now engaged a commercial payroll bureau. While payroll is normally straightforward, there are complexities which, if not respected, can lead to great difficulties with HMRC, and the alternative of running the payroll ourselves was too risky.

Plans for 2026

The main activities I have for 2026 are progression of the plans for incorporation, submission of the Corporation Tax return (we don't pay anything but need to prove that) and to continue facilitating the use of BCA members' money to benefit caving.

BRITISH CAVING ASSOCIATION INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2025

| | 2025 | 2024 |
|---|-------------------|-----------------|
| | £ | £ |
| INCOME | | |
| Membership fees | 132,962 | 113,856 |
| Other income | 5,693 | 6,082 |
| Conservation & Access | 0 | 0 |
| Training Services | 18,610 | 21,015 |
| Publications & Information | 0 | 0 |
| Equipment & Techniques | 0 | 0 |
| Artificial Cave | 540 | (not itemised) |
| Meetings & Conferences | 0 | 0 |
| Web Services | 0 | 0 |
| Expedition Programme | 0 | 0 |
| International | 0 | 0 |
| TOTAL INCOME | 157,804.68 | 140,953 |
| EXPENDITURE | | |
| Membership administration | 17,529 | 23,043 |
| Public Liability Insurance | 78,020 | 75,703 |
| BCA management | 3,720 | 3,702 |
| Conservation & Access | 0 | 0 |
| Instructor Training Services | 20,276 | 21,181 |
| Publications & Information | 67 | 0 |
| Caver Training | 0 | 454 |
| Artificial Cave | 359 | 205 |
| Training and Equipment | 0 | 0 |
| Youth Development | 456 | 1,383 |
| Radon Expenditure | 0 | 0 |
| IT Services | 4,508 | 4,453 |
| Regional Caving Councils | 10,709 | 16,598 |
| International | 0 | 0 |
| TOTAL EXPENDITURE | 135,644 | 146,723 |
| CHARITABLE DONATIONS | | |
| British Cave Research Association for British Caving Library | 16,636 | 12,000 |
| Ghar Parau Foundation for Expedition Programme | 3,000 | 3,004 |
| SURPLUS/ (Loss) FOR THE YEAR | 2,524 | (20,773) |
| SURPLUS/ (loss) FOR THE YEAR AFTER TAX | 2,524 | (20,773) |
| BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2025 | | |
| | 2025 | 2024 |
| | £ | £ |
| FIXED ASSETS | | |
| IT equipment | 449 | |
| CURRENT ASSETS | | |
| Stocks | 0 | 0 |
| Debtors and Prepayments | 2,268 | 14,569 |
| Balances at Bank and cash in hand | 231,270 | 189,925 |
| | 233,987 | 204,494 |
| LESS: CURRENT LIABILITIES | | |
| Creditors and Accruals payable within one year | 81,741 | 60,737 |
| NET ASSETS | 152,246 | 143,757 |
| REPRESENTED BY : | | |
| Balance brought forward | 63,757 | 84,808 |
| Surplus/(loss) for year | 2,524 | (20,773) |
| Prior year corrections | 5964 | (277) |
| | 72,246 | 63,757 |
| less transfer to Reserve | 38,300 | 0 |
| | 33,946 | 63,757 |
| Reserve | 118,300 | 80,000 |
| TOTAL | 152,246 | 143,757 |

Mary Wilde

Training Administrator and British Caving Library Librarian

trainadmin@british-caving.org.uk

I was born in Essex and for some unknown reason I grew up wanting to go caving. My first real trip was down Gaping Ghyll on my 16th birthday whilst on holiday in Yorkshire. There was a winch meet on and I went down for 50p. When selecting a college I chose Matlock because it had a caving club. From 1974 though to the 90s I caved regularly with my husband Bosh - firstly with the college club and later with TSG. In 1987 I organised a club trip to the Berger and spent some time in the BCRA/BCA library which was then housed at Country Office Matlock in a deep dark dungeon. My husband was chairman of TSG for a time but passed away in 1998. I continued caving on and off until I took VR from my IT job and went back to Uni in 2004 to do a degree in Archaeology and then a Masters in Material Culture. On



leaving Uni I took my pensions early but needed a job to top up my failing finances. I spotted an advert for someone to work for the BCA as training administrator for the LCMLA and CIC schemes and started that in 2008. I'm still doing it! In 2009 I also became the librarian for the British Caving Library and returned to the deep dark dungeon at County Offices to move all the library holdings to our new location at Glutton Bridge Derbyshire. The LCMLA and CIC schemes utilised several old databases which were offline and did not talk to each other. I quickly realised that we needed something far better. When COVID arrived and having gained the financial 'OK' we used some of that time to bring in our current online system.

I enjoy my two jobs which together are only part time and I could have retired in 2023 but I decided to stay on. I like the interaction with the caving community and once in a while still venture underground.

Katie Eavis

Membership Administrator plus various other roles within BCA

membership@british-caving.org.uk

I started caving in 2004, in my first year at Sheffield University, signing up for a trip with SUSS at the freshers fair. My first trip was down Giants hole and I was hooked. I loved the sense of adventure, and exploring the unknown around the next corner, also the social side of caving where teamwork is so valuable but without being competitive. Also, surface or underground, anything that involves being wet and muddy generally makes me strangely happy. Over 20 years later I am married to

a caver, we take our children caving, I work for a caving organisation, still cave regularly, I am on the team for Derbyshire Cave Rescue and on the committee for the Eldon Pothole club. Caving is clearly a big part of my life!

Originally I started doing a few minor admin jobs for the BCA, but in 2021 my role within BCA grew as I took over membership administration. Since then the role has continued to expand in various ways and I am

now involved in dealing with the BCA insurance, writing minutes for council and working groups, looking after the BCA artificial cave, helping at the British Caving Library and creating social media posts. As of this year I also collate and edit this BCA Annual report!

Additionally I help administrate BCRA membership, as it is very closely linked to BCA membership, and help

Dottie Wilde

Official British Caving Library Dog

My name is Dottie. I am the official caving library dog and specialise in bone cave archaeology. I can advise of trips down Dog Hole, Treat Cliff and Barkisland Caves.



with BCRA publications sales and mailing.

I enjoy working for the BCA for lots of reasons. I am keen to promote caving and make it easy for cavers to join and stay engaged with BCA. I like the variety of work, and that BCA gives me some freedom to expand my role and activities when I spot opportunities to engage better with our members. Also I like dealing with cavers – there is a good community within the UK caving scene, and it is nice to be part of it.

In 2025 my biggest project for BCA was running the renewals through our new online membership system (read more about this in my membership report). I suspect this time next year I'll be telling you my biggest project of 2026 was getting the first BCA Annual Report up and running!

Karen Lydon

Library Assistant

karen.lydon.bcl@british-caving.org.uk

I started caving at the age of 35 and I've always wished I'd started sooner, but I was much too involved with horses when I was younger. It all began with a work colleague who had taken up kayaking and caving with a couple of friends who were outdoor instructors. My brother, Keith Slatcher, and I joined them. After a few years of exploring largely horizontal caves, mostly in South Wales, we decided to join a caving club and the Orpheus Caving Club in Derbyshire was the closest with accommodation available. I met my husband-to-be, Paul Lydon, and moved to Derbyshire a few months later, just over 21 years ago.

I initially worked for BCA in 2007, taking over from Pat Ramsden as BCA Training Administrator, the role that Mary subsequently took on in 2009. I was also Minutes Secretary to BCRA for about three years from 2000.

I've been involved with other caving organisations in Derbyshire, i.e. Orpheus Caving Club as Secretary for two years and currently Meets Secretary. I've always had connections with DCA since I moved here, as OCC Rep for the Lathkill catchment, Acting Access Officer some years ago and I'm now Access Officer and also Membership

Secretary. I've been a member of DCRO since 2005, spent over 10 years as Assistant Secretary and I've been an active member of the team for all that time, although I'm now part of the Surface Support team only. I'm still caving actively, although nowhere near as much as I was pre-COVID. I now spend more time cycling!

I joined the team at the British Caving Library in December 2021 and I worked one day every other week from then until December 2026 when I retired from my other job. My first project was to catalogue all the modern surveys (1946 to date) that hadn't already been listed. Having exhausted the supply of surveys I then turned my attention to the numerous uncatalogued boxes and listed these with a broad description of the contents of each box - none of these have been touched since. Then in October 2024 we were presented with two van loads of books, journals and other caving ephemera, a huge collection from Patsy Mellor's husband, Donald. Eighteen months on and we have removed all duplicate publications, most of which went to Hidden Earth 2025. This enabled us to share the documents and we received some generous donations. This project is ongoing and there is plenty still to do, including cataloguing information



that Don Mellor collected regarding the Northern Cavern & Fell Club and their activities in the 1930s and a large collection of photographs that were taken by Ernest Clarkson, a former NCFC member. More recently, Kristian Brook, passed over a collection of over 400 surveys from his father, Dave Brook, some of which I understand are originals drawn by Dave himself.

If anyone has a few hours to spare on a Wednesday and enjoys making lists, please do come and join us, there's plenty to be getting on with and it's a great place to work!

My first year as a caver

Nessa Balogh

I started caving at the beginning of 2025 with forest school camps, organised by Flow Stone and Ian Peachy. In preparation, I made sure to cut my nails, wore only synthetic and wool clothes (Cotton Kills!) and brought my (sparkly) wellies -as the handbook advised. I neglected, however, to bring gloves (I didn't have any)

After a night at the Shepton, I woke to a room of lumpy, still sleeping bags and condensation on the attic windows, an aspect of caving huts that I find romantic and wholesome (so long as I'm not woken to pots, banged to the rhythm of maniacal laughter).

My first cave was Goatchurch and I came out in absolute awe! I thought the ancient shells were amazing, and the old, worn formations were beautiful (little did I know). I was eager to get back underground and jumped at the offer of a 'two cave day'. After an upper Swildon's that evening, (more awe) I had concluded that caving couldn't just be a sporadic event in my life; I had to do more.

More: this academic year, I've been on lots of weekends away with CUCCC (Cardiff University Caving and Canyoning Club), and on weekday trips with Bath Speleo. I explored other Mendip caves, ziplined through North Wales Quarries, practiced my SRT in West English Quarries, and a leader training workshop in OFD in South Wales, all with the company of wild but competent (and sometimes a little pyromaniacal) cavers.

As an anaemic, I haven't been getting off lightly: I counted 150 bruises, large and small after big CHECC in November (though some of them may be attributed to intoxication).



*Nessa, enjoying Goatchurch Cavern
Photo: Steve Randall*

Whilst at CHECC, I enjoyed very loud music (courtesy of Ben Marks auditory problems) wacky costumes, good food, and games (run by Mysti Ommer). I won the first women's sock wrestling tournament though this will not surprise anyone from forest school, as it's a game we play there from the age of six. I found my competitors woefully under prepared and strongly promote more extensive sock wrestling training in the caving population (especially if it involves anyone being willing to go against me, I'm really struggling for opponents!)

In case you are wondering, the prize for sock wrestling champions is a giant black cummerbund with socks incrested on it (well worth the 15 years I've been training) plus an Inglesport voucher, that I used to buy rope and karabiners for SRT. You'd think that with all those bruises I'd have invested in a good pair of knee-pads but I actually find the trick that Judi taught me of chopping up a bit of old roll mat and taping it to your legs provides more coverage at a much lower cost - the cost being having the mick taken out of you, and them ripped off by big Tom Phillips

I'd say the highlight of my year was the trip to Shuttleworth pot, lead by Alex. Walking along the grey moors from the Red Rose hut to descend deep underground for my first SRT trip was unforgettable. It would have been regardless of the incredible decoration and mud formations we saw, which made me drag my feet walking back to the pitch. As I surfaced, I felt my usual and expected sensation of being an astronaut, landing back on earth and appreciating all the rain, wind, rotting leaves or sheep poo on the land. Waiting for my friends at the entrance at sunset, I also felt especially incredible; I'd done something I didn't know or really believe I could do.

I'm onto my second pair of sparkly wellies now (the old ones started to leak) but I still generally refuse to wear gloves (though I have learned from rope burn that it's occasionally advisable) I've made many friends, pushed myself, and found great peace in waking up on an alpine bunk full of weird people in different coloured sleeping bags.



*SRT practice in a local quarry
Photo: Steve Randall*



Regional Caving Council Reports

In 2025 the BCA consisted of five regional caving councils¹:

- Council for the Northern Caving Community**
- Council of Southern Caving Clubs**
- Derbyshire Caving Association**
- Devon and Cornwall Underground Council**
- Ogofa Cymru/ Caving Wales**

The Regional Caving Councils are designated bodies that represent caving interests at a local level. RCC's deal with various aspects of caving within a region, such as implementing conservation works, negotiating and managing access to caves, organising regional training initiatives, overseeing regional anchor installation, amongst various other functions. They also provide regional representation, giving local cavers a voice through the RCC's vote on BCA council. They are predominantly funded by the BCA.

Reports from some of these can be found on pages 18 to 23.



¹ At the January 2026 BCA Council meeting the formation of a 6th regional caving council was approved - Forest of Dean Cave Conservation and Access Group. Whilst a lot of the groundwork for this occurred in 2025 the actual approval was in 2026 - so there will be more from FoDCCAG in the 2026 BCA report.

Council for the Northern Caving Community



Matt Ewles, Secretary and PR & Comms Coordinator

secretary@cncc.org.uk
<https://cncc.org.uk>

The CNCC's program of training workshops is now five years old! We run these workshops at an affordable day-rate which is generously subsidised through BCA funding, and our trainers working at a discounted rate. The program has expanded massively and 2025 saw us host 66 separate workshops including new-to-caving events, SRT for all abilities, geology walks, rigging, rescue, pull-through skills, first aid, leadership and more. These are always well-subscribed, and cavers are travelling from all over the UK to participate. We're really proud to be able to support people into caving, to improve their skills and hopefully for them to participate more in their local caving community. You can see a full list of upcoming workshops on our website (sign up to our mailing list for advanced notice of new dates).

We were delighted to receive support from SpanSet UK and the gift of rope to support our workshops, and use of their excellent facilities. We are also thankful to the Yorkshire Subterranean Society for gifting us storage space in their hut for our equipment.

Conservation remains a cornerstone of CNCC's activities and has benefited this year from a match-funding partnership with the Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust in addition to BCA funding. Projects benefiting from this funding have included fencing around Pasture Gill Pot, Sweetwater Hole and Long Churn, and repairs to the caver path across the lower section of the path towards Ireby Fell Caverns.



CNCC undertaking fencing work around Pasture Gill Pot. Photo: John Helm



CNCC receiving a donation of rope from SpanSet UK. Photo: Ian Patrick

We've seen a few access challenges in our region lately, specifically the ongoing refusal of access to the caves around High Birkwith Farm including Old Ing, Birkwith Cave, Dismal Hill and Browgill Cave. We have exhausted all options to address this situation. We are keen to remind cavers that access to Calf Holes (a popular novice trip) remains problem-free with no advanced permission needed, and the friendly residents of nearby Low Birkwith Farm allow parking for cavers in their farmyard for a modest fee. Full details are on our website.

Elsewhere, the caves of Littondale have provided a few recent challenges which we are currently working on, with a new landowner now applying restrictions to access to Scoska Cave and Brown Scar Cave. Our website is always kept fully up to date.

The CNCC website hosts a comprehensive selection of rigging topos and route descriptions, and in the last year we have been pleased to add topos for the newly anchored High Hull Pot, Bye George Pot, Illusion Pot, Wizard's Chasm, North End Pot, Marble Steps Marble Cake Hole route and Excalibur Pot. We've also significantly

updated several of our most popular topos including Alum Pot and Lost Johns' Cave following anchor audits and replacements. Our anchoring team really do CNCC proud! We've been pleased to add route descriptions for High Hull Pot, Illusion Pot, Scoska Cave, Sleets Gill Cave, Hammer Pot, Devis Hole and Danby Level Caverns. We urge cavers to always download the most recent version of our documents before each trip and to check our website for any warnings for your cave before heading underground.

This last year has seen CNCC embark on the next step of our mission to increase our engagement and representation. These changes started more than a decade ago when we vowed to ensure all new access agreements would be available to individuals as well as clubs. We then created a dedicated role to represent non-club cavers, and more recently we changed our name to



Keen novices on a CNCC supported RRCP New-to-caving event. Photo: Gwen Tawny



The CNCC's trainers at a recent moderation day. Photo: Ian Patrick

Council for the Northern Caving Community to reflect our support for a much wider community. The final hurdle has been our democratic structure which provided little opportunity for involvement from non-club groups or organisations. A team are currently working to address this, and we hope to be implementing some fairly major changes in the coming year.

We will be at Hidden Earth this year, with a bigger and better stall than ever before, so please come and say hello to our team. Tell us what more we should be doing for northern caving.



For many years, CaveMaps.org has been the go-to place for online cave surveys in our region, and we are honoured to have been asked to adopt this. Our web administrator is working several hours a week rebuilding this site and transferring existing content, while preserving the familiar CaveMaps name and overall design. We will be launching this later in the year and are very excited indeed!

Council of Southern Caving Clubs

Linda Wilson and Joshitha Shivkumar, CSCC Representatives on the BCA Council



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<https://www.csc.org.uk/wiki/>

Whilst I'm tempted to fall back on the good old CSCC annual report template from long ago, the words "another quiet year" would, in fact, be far from the truth.

As with most regional councils, the bulk of our work revolves around conservation and access matters and C&A Officer Wayne Starsmore has had a particularly busy year. The highlight was the long-awaited agreement with the Longleat Estate to restore access to three significant caves in the Cheddar Gorge, namely Gough's Cave, Reservoir Hole and Spider Hole. Negotiations have been ongoing over several years, but 2025 finally saw the access agreement signed, leader training took place and trips re-started. CSCC is grateful to Wayne for all his hard work on this and other matters.

In other news, the access agreements for Singing River Mine and Wookey Hole are working well, with regular trips into both caves. A new agreement with Somerset Wildlife Trust for cave sites in Harridge Woods on eastern Mendip is now in place and is awaiting finalisation of an online booking and permit system similar to the one in use for the CCC Ltd caves before going live. A standard CSCC padlock has been installed on Stockhill Mine Shaft, which is now proving to be a popular destination. All changes to access have been updated on the CSCC website.

For anyone wishing to cave in the southern region, up to date information can be found on our access guide <https://access-guide.csc.org.uk/>. In addition, our website is at <https://csc.org.uk/wiki/>. The welcome page now includes a link to the Priddy Rainfall Gauge in the weather section. This can be useful to give an idea of how wet a trip might be. The page provides links to give the water levels at the Cheddar and Wookey risings. The weather section has a link to the Met Office forecast. This will also show any weather warnings that might be in place for the CSCC area.

On the conservation front, the CSCC pressure washers have seen use by the Wealden Cave and Mine Society (WCMS) in cleaning an area of stal floor in the one of the old stone quarries in Surrey. Chalk arrows placed in Goatchurch Cavern have been cleaned, and a loose boulder in Lionel's Hole was swiftly dealt with. Another loose boulder problem at the top of the climb into the Barmaid's Bedroom, in Hunter's Lodge Inn Sink has been cemented securely in place. In Thrupe Lane Swallet, work was carried out to stabilise the boulder in Butt's Chamber. Seven volunteers transported 100kg of sand, 25kg of cement and 50kg of Postcrete down through Hobnail Hole, along with various tools and mixing trays.

A change of landowner at Lower Pitts Farm has fortunately not resulted in any access problems. The new owner has been approached and has confirmed they are happy to continue with the existing access arrangements for White Pit, Sand Pit and White Rabbit. Access to Templeton remains unchanged.



Washing a stal floor in Bedlam's Bank Stone Quarry. Photo: Lesley Egglestone



Washing off graffiti in Bedlam's Bank Stone Quarry. Photo: Peter Burgess

The Cave Diving Group have started work on refurbishing the platforms in Lloyd Hall, in Gough's Cave, with the intention of commencing diving operations in the summer. Work has also started repairing the conservation tape in Reservoir Hole. Grand Gallery has been completed, along with the first section of the Frozen Deep. The bolts leading up to High Country have been inspected. They aren't in the best condition and haven't been placed to facilitate SRT. The CSCC's Equipment Officers will look at what can be done.

Unfortunately, not everything has been sweetness and light during the year. Wayne has had to deal with the usual instances of anti-social behaviour by persons unknown, including regular removal of the hinge pins on the gate on Stainsby Shaft in Velvet Bottom and theft of money from the 'goodwill bucket' in Sludge Pit, which naturally did not engender goodwill on the part of an increasingly exasperated landowner. As a result, the padlock has been changed and the Cheddar Cave Club are now emptying the bucket on a regular basis in the hope that goodwill can be restored. Persons unknown were also active on eastern Mendip when, a few days after a rescue in Stoke Lane Slocker, they rolled a large boulder into the entrance, almost completely blocking it. The boulder was removed by reducing it to manageable chunks using plug and feathers and stacking it neatly under the adjacent cliff face. Whilst there, the main sink was cleared of much flood debris.

Our Equipment Officers Andrew Atkinson and Matty Dredge have been kept busy with a steady stream of bolting matters. They have dealt with the fourth pitch in Rhino Rift, the Devil's Elbow climb in GB Cave, the Gladman's and Lolly Pot pitches in Eastwater (which proved a tad troublesome) and Jet Pitch in Charterhouse Cave. A request for anchors in Spider Hole has been approved. Other anchors are awaiting approval and there is further work in the pipeline in various caves including Thrupe Lane Swallet, GB Cave and Eastwater. Andrew and Matty have also worked on developing techniques and equipment for the complete extraction of expansion bolts, with the intention of fitting resin anchors in their place. An inoffensive boulder at a Mendip quarry has

been the subject of their affections on several overground practice sessions.

On the organisational front, CSCC has continued to hold regular meetings by Zoom. These have been well-attended and have allowed representatives of clubs from outside the Mendip area to attend more easily. A suggestion made by our Chair, David Cooke of introducing 'officer shadowing/deputy' roles to assist in widening participation in key roles and helping to future-proof organisational capabilities. Our E&T Officer Andrew Atkinson was pleased to welcome Matty Dredge to the role. Matty had worked with Andrew on various projects and is now trained in bolting techniques. Linda Wilson as BCA representative was equally pleased to introduce Joshitha Shivkumar who has worked with her on the CSCC BCA Rep role. Joshitha has regularly attended BCA meetings and has been able to maintain continuity when Linda was unable to attend. CSCC hopes to increase the shadowing/deputy roles to other core members of the officer team. Our Communications Officer Peter Burgess has produced regular newsletters to keep our members informed about what's happening across the region and on the social side of things, CSCC held a successful event at Priddy Village Hall with a bar and barbeque.

CSCC members unanimously supported the formation of a new regional council, namely the Forest of Dean Conservation and Cave Access Group (FoDCCAG). Whilst the Bristol district will remain part of CSCC, South Gloucestershire is available to fall within FoDCCAG's remit if they so wish. CSCC wishes FoDCCAG well and looks forward to future cooperation between the regions, as going forward, the two regions will no doubt have many clubs in common.

CSCC Officers for 2025 were David Cooke (Chair and Webmaster), Frank Tully (Secretary), Tom Harrison (Treasurer), Wayne Starsmore (Conservation & Access), Andrew Atkinson (Equipment & Techniques), Matty Dredge (Deputy E&T), Linda Wilson (BCA Rep), Joshitha Shivkumar (Deputy BCA Rep), Peter Burgess (Communications Officer). The role of Training Officer was now vacant.



A helictite in Wookey Hole, before and after cleaning. Photo: Chris George

Derbyshire Caving Association

Mike Higgins, Vice-chair



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<https://thedca.org.uk/>

2025 was not a particularly active period for DCA, due to the Project Officer and Training Officer posts having been vacant for most of the year. However, the appointment of an Equipment Officer and an Assistant Equipment Officer towards the end of the year enabled Pete Knight to step back into his preferred role as Project Officer and 2026 will see a number of outstanding jobs completed. At the same time a Training Co-ordinator was appointed and DCA training will be moving forward again once the projected online booking system has been finalized.

Last year projects included - working with new landowners at Masson Quarry to re-establish Masson Cavern as a caving and group venue; organising the repair of gates at Ashford Black Marble Mine and purchasing a new padlock system for Holme Bank Chert Mine. In the next 6 months PICA will be organising volunteers - both trained drystone wallers and cavers - in an exciting project to reconstruct packwall at Ashford Black Marble Mine. Not only will this mean that access can be maintained for activity providers'

A number of relatively minor projects were completed, however. The rear access gate to Devonshire Cavern was repaired, the shaft lids at Knotlow Mine were repaired and the gate to Redhurst Swallet was repaired. Repairs and improvements (incorporating a captive bolt to prevent accidental loss) were also carried out to Derbyshire Key mechanisms at Mandale Mine, Wharf Mine, Owl Hole and Lathkill Dale marble mine. A new bolt was fitted to the gate at Hoo Valley Mine.



The BCA heavy duty anchor puller in action at Horseshoe Quarry
Photo: Pete Knight

Early in the year, the testing of new resins was completed on the test bed in Horseshoe Quarry with the extraction of the anchors using the BCA anchor puller. Subsequently the BCA test rig has been placed in DCA's equipment store. New anchors were installed in the top entrance to Streaks Pot and at the Eyam Dale Shaft entrance to Carlswark Cavern. Deviation anchors have now been installed in Eyam Dale House Cave and the non-DCA anchors in Chain Passage at Knotlow Mine have been replaced with BP bolts. Rebolting of Deep Space pitch in Hungerhill Swallet was completed.

The Peak Instructed Caving Affiliation (PICA) is a constituent organisation of Derbyshire Caving Association that represents caving and mining activity providers in the Peak District and surrounding areas. PICA works closely with DCA, Peak District Mines Historical Society and conservation groups to help preserve and develop access to the region's mining venues. This runs alongside their core role of ensuring mine venues used by activity providers are inspected structurally and radon levels are monitored.

visiting the lowest level of the mine, it is also an excellent opportunity for the caving and mining instructors, who will be helping the dry stone wallers, to develop their knowledge of these historic skills.

PICA's remit is:

- To disseminate safety and conservation information about the caves and mines that can be used for LCMLA and CIC led trips in our region.
- To be a discussion forum for professional users of the underground environment.
- To periodically organise the measuring of radon levels within the cave and mine sites of our region and provide this information to our members.
- To facilitate the inspection of a number of local disused mines and maintain a rolling programme of safety inspections and to provide details of approved 'blue routes' within those venues.
- To liaise with the DCA about anchor installation for use by instructed groups and LCMLA training.

Within House Farm at Bradwell has been put on the market following the death of the owner and this may impact on future access to Moorfurlong Mine. The Access Officer has contacted the Agent and will be in touch with the new owners once the property is sold.

A clean-up operation at Suicide Cave saw a quantity of rubbish taken out and the new DCA cordless pressure washer was put to good use in the removal of graffiti. Rubbish has also been removed from Great Masson. Several clean-ups have taken place at Wapping Mine and quite a bit of graffiti cleaned off the rocks adjacent to the entrance using the pressure washer. The SSSI Cave Monitoring form draw took place again this year and the lucky winner was presented with a £50 Starless River Voucher at the Derbyshire Explorers Forum held on 1st February. Meetings of the Underground Conservation Forum, face-to-face and online, took place in March and October.

The Peak District Cave Exploration Prize was reviewed and the format revised to include an additional category "Most mine re-discovered via a previously unknown or blocked entrance". The prizes for the 2024 competition were presented at the Derbyshire Explorers Forum.

DCA Council considered in November a report on the proposed monitoring of Radon levels in Peak District caves and mines, first discussed in 2024, and agreed in principle to proceed with this, with a detailed report on the programme to be submitted to the 2026 AGM in March.



Descent

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<https://www.descentmagazine.co.uk/>



I'm sure most British cavers would agree that the last few years have been major ones as far as cave exploration goes and that of course was reflected in Descent in 2025.

Descent 302 set the bar high spectacular finds in Draughting Hole-Missed Pot, the North Pennines system that had just exceeded 8km in length and contains possibly the most impressive formations found in a British maze cave. In the same issue we had news of the Marble River, another great find in the Forest of Dean's Redhouse Lane Swallet, as well as the first of a two-part article about Aka Hole, a fine new pothole in the Yorkshire Dales. We always enjoy reporting on the exotic too and Descent 302 included expedition accounts from Thailand and Gunung Buda in Borneo, plus a look back at a trip to Papua New Guinea in the 1970s.

Descent 303 featured more great finds from Missed Pot, this time by somebody on his first proper caving trip. Also Aka Hole's connection to the Three Counties system, which has created wonderful through trip options. Following on from an article in 298 about the successful return of Greater Horseshoe bats to South East England after 100 years, this issue had news of Lesser Horseshoe bats expanding their range, with the first record in Derbyshire for 100 years. Feature articles on big finds in Mulu and Meghalaya, accompanied by stunning photographs, gave an exotic flair; and as well as a summary of every cave rescue from 2024, there was a report of a novel training

exercise for rescue teams in the form of a cave maze.

Cave mazes continued in Descent 304 as James Carlisle set a puzzle so hard we received more emails telling us there must have been a mistake than we did correct answers. Exploration continued, with the incredible White Forest in Redhouse Lane Swallet. Also reports of major discoveries in Yat Grotto in the Forest of Dean, Lamb Trap in the Yorkshire Dales and Ogof New Park on the Gower Peninsula. There was an ambitious attempt to crawl the length of a marathon in Ogof y Daren Cilau, some caving songs from the distant past, and an account from a caver who returned to a Surrey cave 65 years after he had been involved in its exploration.

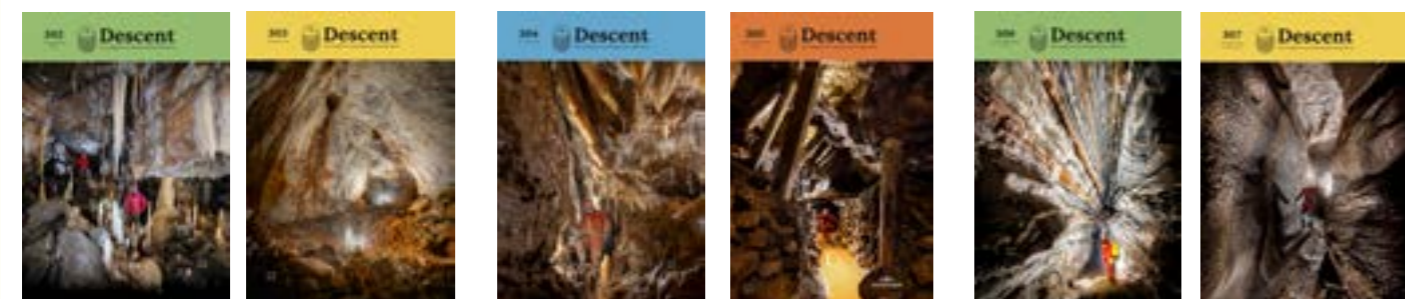
Descent 305 included articles about an expedition to the rarely visited Garo Hills in India as well as a culturally rich trip to Laos. We had a tale of cavers being involved in restoration work at the Tower of London, the trials and tribulations of putting together a highly detailed survey of Pwll Dwfn, and poetry about Weathercote Cave, Yorkshire's hidden gem. Peter Glanvill looked back on his caving activities from half a lifetime ago. We also had news of a northern discovery that has been more than a century in the making – New Level Mine Cave – and a look at the demographics of cavers.

The Forest of Dean is clearly no longer a minor caving area, and Descent 306 featured three on the place. Redhouse Lane Swallet has

probably been the most important UK find of the decade and the summer's work in there was summed up, alongside articles on surveying Slaughter Stream Cave and connecting that cave to Kiln Piece Hole. There was also an article by the maker of the film The Lost Boys of Carbis Bay, which would go on to win Best Adventure and Exploration Film at the Kendal Mountain Festival. Exotic climes were represented with more on Laos, plus a report on the 19th International Congress of Speleology, held in Brazil. The issue finished with a history of water tracing in the Yorkshire Dales and a tale of a highly unusual animal rescue after a Fulmar was found in Ireland's Coolagh River Cave.

We finished the year with Descent 307 which included our annual Christmas crossword. We had reports of an incredible find in Meghalaya, an expedition to a Greek island that was practically unknown to the speleological world and holiday caving in Madeira. Big UK discoveries just keep on coming with features on finds in Mendip's Vurley Swallet and Fairy Holes in the North Pennines. We also celebrated Hidden Earth and alternative spaces in caving, with Speleosisters+.

With so much going on in the caving world, this has been a great time to be Descent editor. I always enjoy the variety of articles I'm able to work with and I'd like to thank everyone who has supported, and continues to support, our publication. I have no doubt there will be all sorts of exciting features in the future.



BCA Constituent Body Reports

The BCA consists of eight constituent bodies:

- Association of Caving Instructors
- British Cave Rescue Council
- British Cave Research Association
- Cave Diving Group
- Council of Higher Education Caving Clubs
- National Association of Mining History Groups
- National Scout Caving Team
- William Pengelly Cave Studies Trust

Constituent bodies are recognised by BCA as organisations that have a national co-ordinating role in a specific aspect of cave or mine exploration. Each has a vote on BCA council.

Reports from some of these can be found on pages 26 to 35



British Cave Rescue Council



Emma Porter, Secretary

secretary@caverescue.org.uk
<https://www.caverescue.org.uk/>

The objectives of the British Cave Rescue Council (BCRC) are to relieve suffering and distress amongst persons and animals endangered by accidents or natural hazards by co-ordinating and providing support for member underground search and rescue organisations and individuals representing the Council in the British Isles and abroad.

BCRC acts as the co-ordinating and representative body for its sixteen volunteer member teams who provide underground search and rescue services throughout the UK and Ireland. It's officers represent the interests of member teams and their services with numerous relevant national and international organisations.

BCRC is a member of United Kingdom Search and Rescue (UKSAR) – the Government sponsored forum for all bona fide national bodies, statutory or voluntary, that are involved in search and rescue. During 2025, BCRC's relationship with Mountain Rescue England and Wales was formalised with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding that sets out more clearly the areas of mutual interest, cooperation and associated responsibilities.

During the year 2025, the Council's officers have continued to successfully maintain relations with, make representations to and work with a wide variety of organisations in the interests of the underground search and rescue teams and their service as a whole. These include United Kingdom Search and Rescue, National Police Chiefs Council, Mountain Rescue England and Wales, Association of Lowland Search and Rescue, The Rescue Benevolent Fund, British Caving Association and the European Cave Rescue Association.

This year, BCRC has been represented at a number of All-Party Parliamentary Group Volunteer Search and Rescue meetings in London and has been successful with a campaign for Vehicle Excise Duty exemption for emergency vehicles operated by search and rescue teams and also made important progress obtaining medical gases from ambulance services. BCRC was also represented at Hidden Earth (British Cave Research Association's annual caving conference) in Llangollen, the Emergency Services Show at Birmingham's NEC, and the European Cave Rescue Association's conference in Poland.



*Gloucestershire Cave Rescue Group cave rescue practice in Bix Head Stone Mine, Forest of Dean.
Photo: Emma Porter*

BCRC brings together its member teams to share ideas, training and best practice from equipment inspections to well-being. It also administers a national "peer review" scheme through which teams help each other to assess and improve their capabilities and ability to meet operational needs. The Council also assists teams

by advising on and co-ordinating grant applications and occasionally it organises and funds or part funds national equipment design projects and purchases.

In June, BCRC's biennial national cave rescue conference, Rescon, was hosted by the Cave Rescue Organisation, as part of their 90th birthday celebration, in Settle. This was well attended by BCRC teams with a range of workshops including communications, stretcher hauling, stretcher handling, dam building, rope-rub and drop testing, as well as presentations from the Mining Remediation Authority and the Mines Rescue Service.

In the calendar year 2025, BCRC member teams were mobilised 38 times for underground searches and rescues with a total of 5570 hours spent on callouts (and these figures do not include resulting equipment maintenance and re-equipping of rescue vehicles). Many more hours were expended on training, equipment maintenance, preparation and inspections, fundraising, and the administration and management of each team. There has been a real focus on joint collaboration and interoperability with emergency services and other search and rescue teams, and an increasing area of work for many teams is in surface search and rescue operations where their specialist skills were required.

Everybody involved with BCRC from national trustees and officers to the nine hundred plus members of its sixteen member teams is an unpaid volunteer. All current BCRC trustees and officers also serve as active volunteers on a member team. If any member of British Caving Association wishes to get involved in cave rescue, then you should contact your local team, or the BCRC Secretary.



*A multi-team cave rescue training day, hosted by Mendip CRO
Photo: Emma Porter*

“It is cavers that rescue cavers”.

National Scout Caving Team



Tony Radmall, Representative on the BCA Council

scouts@british-caving.org.uk

I've represented the interests of Scout caving on the BCA council for over 10 years. In Scout caving each county is autonomous to the next, which makes it tricky to get an overview of how much caving is being done. However 2025 was a difficult year for Scout caving with five teams ceasing to exist, due to issues with volunteers, the charities act or finances. Some Scout caving teams are successfully self-funding which makes them more resilient and less reliant on funds from the county.

If your Scout caving team needs support from BCA or you would like advice on setting up or running a Scout caving team please contact me.

British Cave Research Association



John Gunn, Chair

bcra-chairman@bcra.org.uk
<https://bcra.org.uk/>

The BCRA is a UK registered charity, and a constituent body of BCA. The purpose of the BCRA is to promote the study of caves and associated phenomena. As part of the charitable aims of the Association, we publish various books and an academic journal, Cave and Karst Science, organise field meetings and workshops, including an annual Cave Science symposium, hold monthly online webinars and provide grant funding for cave and karst science projects.

Each year since 2016 the BCRA has published an Annual Review which provides a detailed account of our activities during the previous year. The Review is published in September, ahead of our October AGM, and is sent as a paper copy to club members of BCRA and to subscribers but is also available as a free download on the BCRA website: <https://www.bcra.org.uk/pub/review/covers.html>. The Review for 2025 will be published in September 2026 and the account below covers brief highlights.

BCRA Trustees and Members of Council.

BCRA's trustees form the charity's governing Council. There are ten elected members of Council, plus the President (chosen by Council), totalling eleven; and up to three additional trustees co-opted by Council from time to time, thus totalling up to 14 trustees.

BCRA online seminars

From January to June and from September to December the BCRA hosts a monthly online seminar that is free to attend. Seminars in 2025 were:

- #1 —13 Jan. Microbial Nitrogen Cycling and Cave Passage Modification in Mulu National Park. J. Max Koether, Department of Geology, University of Alabama
- #2 —10 Feb. Sulfuric Acid Speleogenesis: how can we recognize it and what can it teach us? Jo De Waele, Professor, Dept. of Biological, Geological, and Environmental Sci., University of Bologna
- #3 —10 Mar. The Underground Mistakes of My Career. Lessons learned from Maaras Cave, Greece. Christos Pennos, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, School of Geology, Thessaloniki, Greece.
- #4 —14 Apr. Palaeontological Perspectives on Caving in Thailand. Spyridoula Pappa, Senior Curator of Fossil Mammals, Natural History Museum
- #5 —Mon 12 May. Limestone, dirt and iron: using cave magnets to understand the past. Bethany Fox, Senior Lecturer, Dept. Biological and Geographical Sciences, Univ. of Huddersfield

- #6 —09 Jun. Expedition medicine: the art of applying science to cavers. Rostam Namaghi
- #7 —15 Sep. Forgotten Voices Speak: Recording historic graffiti in Kents Cavern, Torquay. Linda Wilson
- #8 — Mon 13 Oct. Cave Exploration, Guano, and Prehistory in Malaya and Borneo, 1870s-1960s: Katherine Enright, PhD student, Faculty of History and Museum of Zoology, Trinity College, Cambridge.
- #9 — Mon 03 Nov 2025. Scientific Investigations in Greenland's Caves: Unlocking High Arctic Climate Histories: Gina Moseley, Assistant Professor of Palaeoclimatology, University of Innsbruck.
- #10 — Mon 08 Dec 2025. The Symonds Yat Cave System, Forest of Dean; initial scientific findings in the recent Redhouse Lane Swallet discoveries: Mark Tringham.

BCRA awards

BCRA give three national awards, normally presented at Hidden Earth:

1. The Arthur Butcher Award is presented, broadly speaking, for "excellence in cave surveying". It was first awarded in 1988 and comprises a cash prize of £100 plus a trophy to keep for one year. It is judged by a panel appointed by the BCRA Cave Surveying Group and in 2025 the award was given to Becka Lawson.
2. The Tratman Award is presented annually for a caving-related paper-based publication in memory of E.K. Tratman, who died in 1978, to recognise excellence and encourage future improvement. Initially administered by GPF, the award's management was passed to BCRA in 2019. It is judged by a team of cavers convened by Chris Howes who make their recommendation for the award to BCRA's Council. The award is always a year in arrears as publications for the whole year are reviewed. The 2024 award was given to "Surrey's Ancient Stone Mines (2nd edn.)" by Peter Burgess. "Adventures Underground (2nd edn.)" by Dave Haigh and John Cordingley received the accolade of being Highly Commended.
3. The Premier Trophy is BCRA's prize for cave photography, which was first awarded in 1975. It comprises a cash prize of £100 plus a trophy to keep for one year and is judged as part of the HE Photo Salon event. In 2025 the Trophy was awarded to Bill Nix.

BCRA Publications

Our primary publication is our journal Cave and Karst Science which is edited by David Lowe and John Gunn and has three issues per annum. We welcome papers on

any aspect of cave and karst science. It is available as a paper copy and to download. In an effort to encourage more cavers to contribute to the journal we now run at least one 'Photo Feature' in each issue. Essentially this comprises at least one photograph of an interesting feature and up to 300 words of description. BCRA members are encouraged to contribute – you do not have to be an academic and if you have an interesting photo but are not sure what it is then send it to the Editors who will try to elicit suitable accompanying text!

The Cave Radio and Electronics Group (CREG) is a BCRA Special Interest Group that produces the CREG journal four times per annum.

As already noted, we also publish an Annual Review which is edited by Phil Wolstenholme.



BCRA Grants

BCRA has managed a research fund for many years and, in 2005, after the fund had been boosted by several bequests, a new Cave Science and Technology Research Fund (CSTRF) was created. Since that date, BCRA has allocated £5000/year to the fund; and this is set to continue to at least 2029. In 2025 £5,445 was awarded to five cavers on a range of topics.

| APPLICANT | PROJECT | TYPE | REQUEST | AWARD |
|-----------------|--|------|-----------|--------|
| Wesley Simmonds | Halloween Rift: Faunal Assemblage inc. <i>Ursus arctos</i> | A | £400.00 | £400 |
| Graham Hullan | Upgrading cave archaeology gazetteers | A | £1,500.00 | £1,500 |
| Perry Verney | Microplastics in OFD cave sediments | S | £1,845.00 | £1,845 |
| Emily Tibby | Mulu Caves 2025 | A | £1,631.00 | £900 |
| Lee Knight | British, Irish and European <i>Niphargus</i> species | B | £900.00 | £900 |

The British Cave Science Centre

In 2018 the BCRA, in cooperation with the Buxton Civic Association, established a British Cave Science Centre at Poole's Cavern, Buxton, Derbyshire. Initial funding for 5 years was renewed for a further 5 years in 2024, and it is intended that the facility will continue to operate in perpetuity! A leading data logging manufacturer, Gemini data loggers, provided initial support by equipping the Cave Science Centre with their Tinytag radio loggers to create a data-mesh linked to a central hub outside the cave. All the data is then streamed onto the web for remote access and close-to real time downloads via a free to access dedicated website (<https://www.cave-science.org.uk/>). Outside the cave there is a rain gauge, barometric pressure sensor, a weather station recording air temperature and humidity and a station recording soil temperature. Inside the cave there is a barometric pressure sensor, multiple temperature sensors and a series of drip rate sensors. In addition to these mesh instruments, airflow, carbon dioxide concentration, radon concentration and the conductance, depth and temperature of the cave stream are monitored by stand-alone sensors. Data from the cave has been used in 13 undergraduate, Masters and Doctoral studies and 10 papers have been published in academic journals including Cave and Karst Science.



Professor Mike Rogerson, Northumbria University, setting up a hyperalkaline leachate monitoring experiment in Poole's Cavern. Photo: John Gunn

Cave Diving Group



<https://cavedivinggroup.org.uk/>

Simon Perkins, CDG Representative on the BCA Council

The following is a summary of exploration, carried out by members of the CDG, and other points of note, during the year 2025. Further details of this exploration can be found in CDG Newsletters 234 to 239 inclusive.

Scotland

Divers progressed exploration in Cnoc Nan Uamh, Assynt, with the discovery of a well decorated chamber that was christened "Tinkerbell's Tears", additional survey work then took place in a subsequent trip.

Further exploration and working dives have also taken place in Loch Croispol, Lower Traligill Cave, The Tartan Hole in Loch Borrallie and Uamh Poll Eoghainn. Thanks to the latest efforts of divers, Uamh Poll Eoghainn now contains the deepest recorded sump in Scotland, at -19.5 m.

Northern

Continued strong progress has been made in Austwick Beck Head, with the exploration being extended in new and existing passages. The total length of the cave now stands at 901m.

Exploratory efforts at Aquamole Pot have recommenced in earnest, with familiarisation dives and logistical/line condition work taking place in 2025

Special mention also needs to be included of the effort made in diving and extending the line in Northern Line Sump, Gaping Gill, following an apparently rather enjoyable three-hour carry featuring.

Resurrection Rising has been pushed significantly beyond the 1999 exploration limit, with the total length being recorded at 169 m, due to significant route finding and digging efforts by the team there.

Smeg Aven, beyond Sump 1 in Redmire Pot, was climbed to a height thought to be around 15 m, where, following a further climb up a steep, narrowing gulley and a 2 m climb through a slot, a moderately decorated passage in excess of 20 m was discovered and left ongoing.

In Dale Barn Cave/Illusion Pot, Kingsdale, 50m of well decorated, albeit crawling sized, passage was discovered at the top of the bolt climb above the 540 m air bell in Boot Trapper Sump, notable draught was apparent and exploration is still in progress.

Renewed exploratory efforts in Marble Steps Pot, Masongill, led to a notable enlargement to the passage within the newly discovered Picnicking Party's Paddling Pool sump being entered, with the return intended to push

this "very promising location".

Yew Cogar Cave has yielded further passage, dry and wet. Though much of it has been explored to the limit of a reasonably compact cave diver, there are still ongoing leads and the possibility of a connection to Robinson's Pot.

Further exploration and working dives have also taken place in Granite Quarry (NE) Rising, the River Kent at Hawes Bridge, Nidd Head(s) NW Rising, Darnbrook Pot, Douk Gill Cave, Goyden Pot, Rowten Sumps in Kingsdale Master Cave, Manchester Hole, Nappa Scar Cave, New Goyden Pot, Resurrection Rising, Southerscales Pot, Cherry Tree Rising, Cowside Beck Rising, Redmire Pot, Tub Hole, Gin Passage in Gingling Hole and the Downstream Sump in Penyghent Pot,

Derbyshire

Speedwell Cavern saw divers continuing to make progress in the Main Upstream Sump of Whirlpool Rising, with the setup now being in place to enable what should be some worthwhile diving in future. Exploration of the Mary Rose Left Hand Inlet Sump of Whirlpool Rising looks to have terminated at Sump 3, owing to the very awkward nature of access to it, alongside the "seriousness" of the preceding diving.

Further exploration and working dives have also taken place in Buxton Water Sump, Styx Inlet Sump and the Resurgence/Swine Hole in Peak Cavern, Russet Well, Winnats Head Cave and Oxlow Cavern

Wales/Forest of Dean

Following the construction of a dam and pumping efforts, upstream sumps 1 to 3 in Kiln Piece Hole were passed, leading to what was previously named the Coal Bunker and approximately 150 m of cave, before a Tippex survey station confirmed that the connection to Wet Sink had been discovered.

In Cwm Dwr 2 the small upstream sump feeding the lower streamway was explored for 10 m. A return, armed with a Derbyshire tube & no-mount setup, facilitated further exploration, though considerable work would be needed to increase the dimensions of the ongoing passage and render it passable.

Exploration and working dives have taken place in Hospital Cave, where a tentative permission to dive was secured from the landowner with some effort, Gothic Sump, Dip Sump, Pwll Twll Sump and Cobble Sump in OFD, Ogof Capel and Ogof Clogwyn.

Somerset

Thanks to the hard work of the CSCC, access to Gough's Cave has been re-established and operations have been successfully completed to overhaul the infrastructure to dive base. This required new platforms, renewing the SRT rigging down the diver's pitch and the installation of new rope and pulleys on the hauling pitch. Diving can resume in accordance with the conditions required by Longleat, subject to compliant weather.

The resurgence at Wookey Hole has seen the construction of a new access platform, away from the unstable section of cliff above, and diving has recommenced here.

Strong, incremental progress has been made at Rickford Rising, with considerable effort and engineering ingenuity being employed in an attempt to persuade the rising to give up its secrets.

Further exploration and working dives have also taken place in Wookey Hole and St Dunstan's Well West.

UK Mines

Survey work has been ongoing within High Rift Mine in the Forest of Dean as part of a wider effort to understand and map the iron mines within the Forest, under the working title of "Project Iron". Further surveying and photogrammetry work also took place in Bream Mine in the Forest.

In Bream mine divers passed the collapsed section at the limit of the northern end of the lower level, though further investigation beyond this point was hampered by a lack of usable belays and, more significantly, by a further collapse.

Over Seas

A dive at Trou Du Hibou, St Engrace, France, saw the discovery of new passage continuing open at a depth estimated to be beyond 100 m.

Following numerous dives, over many years, and the involvement of many cavers and divers, a connection was formed in 2025 between Aguanal and Barbancho, Bricia, Burgos, Spain, creating a potential through trip distance of 10 km with 14 sumps. The total length of the whole system is now around 30 km.

A summer expedition to Pozo Azul saw some successful radio-location activity take place, though no new exploratory progress.

Further exploration took place in the Tras La Jayada in the Picos de Cornion, Spain, in Cueva de Concha Vies, Picos de Europa, Spain, and a number of Greek caves, most promisingly in Nestani, Arcadia, where a 30m sump has been passed and open passage discovered, that has been left for Greek cavers to explore further.

Other Matters

A successful training event was held by the Derbyshire Section in February 2025, with a number of current and prospective trainees in attendance, together with a very strong turnout of Qualified Divers.

The main Training Camp for 2025 was held by the Somerset Section and covered a variety of topics and skills such as line laying and survey work, vertical transportation of dive kit, underwater digging, first aid beyond sumps and rescue techniques. Attendance at the event was strong and copious amounts of positive feedback were received after the camp.

The AGM in 2025 was hosted by the Welsh Section and



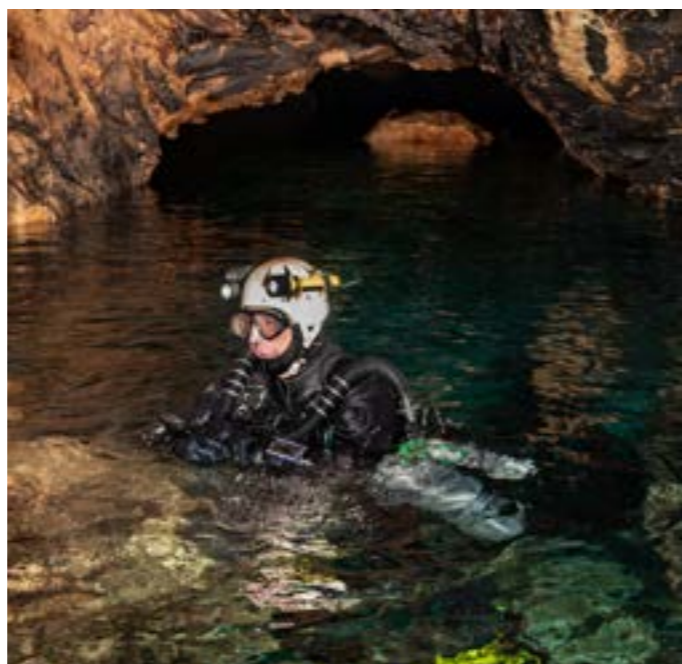
A self-portrait of Craig Holdstock, France
Photo: Craig Holdstock

held in the Forest of Dean on the 26th April. Unfortunately, the meeting was not quorate, despite the easily accessible location and size of the membership base.

Passings

Sadly, Bob Jarman passed away on 10th January 2025. Bob was one of the first members of the Northern Section, responsible for much of the development at Ingleborough Cave and, along with Gordon Nolan, for what is considered to be the definitive survey of the cave in 1960, together with developments in cave communications and involvement in some significant exploration in the Dales.

On the 4th September 2025 Barry Sudell unfortunately passed away. In 1985 Barry was a key member of an expedition to the Picos de Europa, during which numerous sumps were passed and new cave discovered. Early in the trip Barry's diplomacy and understanding of the sensitivities of diving in a national park were fundamental to placating a trio of armed Guardia Civil, thus successfully discouraging them from arresting the entirety of the team. In December 1985, along with Rick Stanton, Barry led the way in discovering the connection between Notts Pot and Ireby IV.



John Volanthen preparing to dive Eva cave in Greece
Photo: Craig Holdstock

National Association of Mining History Organisations



Peter Jackson, Chair

<https://namho.org/>

Our main activity in most years is to facilitate an annual conference in a UK mining area. In 2025 our Conference was held in Wales, centred on Llanwrst. NAMHO officers worked with local groups to facilitate the event, using our experience of arranging and planning at a distance. This method has been adopted because we have discovered that some local groups are unwilling to take on the responsibility of leading a Conference. Similarly, we are finding it difficult to arrange for our current officers to be replaced, despite emphasising the need to have robust succession plans.

documents about aspects of mine exploration, history and archaeology. We are reviewing those documents and ensuring that they continue to be relevant to our charitable aim of promoting education and research into mining history.

Council met twice during the year by arranging virtual meetings. We have accrued significant financial reserves which we are planning to devote to funding a small grants scheme. We continue to have a representative attend BCA Council meetings.

Our future work will depend upon us maintaining our relevance to the study of mining history and as support for



Registration at the 2025 NAMHO Conference
Photo: Peter Jackson

organisations which get enjoyment from visiting mine workings for leisure purposes.

NAMHO publishes Guidance

Technical Speleological Group Trip to the Ardeche, France

Kai Trusson

<https://tsgcaving.co.uk/>

In June 2025 the TSG ran a trip to the south of France to the Ardeche region. We had 29 people on this 2 week trip, some people stayed for a week while others stayed for the full 2 weeks.

Over 30 trips were completed in 2 weeks with a mix of horizontal and vertical trips. Two of the show caves in the local area were visited; Chauvet 2 and St Marcel (both as cavers and tourists).

Kai and Eve organised permits for caves that required them, and booked the hut ten months in advance of the trip. Then gathered all the information on a selection of local caves. Whilst on the trip other activities such as kayaking and wine tasting were organised by various people. All trips were planned the night before and written on the white board.

- Some of our favourite caving trips included:
- Event Superior to Event Fossible (exchange)
 - Aven de Noel
 - Aven de Pebres
 - Neuf Gorges
 - St Marcel to Aven Despeysse (exchange)
 - Estaban to Barbette (exchange)

There were various approaches to getting there. Some people arrived early by travelling in one stretch (but I don't think anyone is keen to repeat this), others broke the journey up. As we had people coming from the UK and Europe there was a mix of cars and public transport.

Although there was a lot of caving we took rest days to kayak down the Ardeche river, cycle up some big hills and go deep water soloing. Other activities included via ferrata, swimming in the Ardeche river, a impromptu cave conference and looking for burial grounds and fossils.

- Some of our top moments from the holiday are:
- Getting our caving kit kayaked across the river by strangers
 - Chauvet 2
 - Via Ferrata
 - Swimming in the river and jumping off the rocks
 - Filling the Landrover with cavers whilst listening to bangers
 - Estavan (enjoying the crawl was more subjective)
 - Caving with new people
 - Group meal
 - Wine tasting



Grotte de Barbette
Photo: Isaac Neale



The TSG team
Photo: Ann Trusson

William Pengelly Cave Studies Trust



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<https://pengellytrust.org/>

Richard Vooght, Representative on the BCA Council

What is the Trust?

Established in 1962, the Trust was created to support work at Higher Kiln Quarry, Buckfastleigh, Devon where there is Joint Mitnor Cave, the type-site of a last interglacial assemblage that features species such as spotted hyaena, lion, straight-tusked elephant, narrow-nosed rhinoceros and hippopotamus alongside taxa such as wild boar, mountain hare, wolf, red fox, brown bear, bison, red deer, fallow deer and giant deer. This assemblage, which includes both tropical and temperate mammalian species, is quite unlike any that are found in the present day. There are other significant caves in the local area, some of which open into Higher Kiln Quarry. The Trust has three principal objectives: education (the dissemination of speleological information), research (into the cave environment), and conservation, working principally through a local study centre in Devon.

Trust management

The Trust is a registered charity, run by a Council, chaired by Dave Warne of the Plymouth Caving Group. The studies centre is operated on a long lease from Devon Wildlife Trust. During 2025, the Council was pleased to appoint a new president, Professor Andrew Chamberlain, who has long been involved with the Trust.



Reed's Cave visit
Photo: WPCST

Education

The Trust operates a museum at the cave studies centre. This is designed to inform and expand their knowledge of the caves visitors encounter, as well as to provide general information about the cave environment. It is an important, heavily used facility, especially when the centre is open to the public.

The Trust organises two principal types of educational events. The majority of visitors come for day-guided walks and evening bat walks during the summer holiday period. In 2025, about 300 visitors came either to see the centre and view Joint Mitnor Cave, to observe bats during evening flight, or both.

The Trust also arranges bespoke visits for specialists and specialist interest groups, and provides year-round talks about the Trust at locations across Devon. Currently, up to a dozen such events are being provided.

There is a series of publications covering local geology, Devon limestone and caves, limekilns and lime-making, bats, and self-guided walks, available at the museum and elsewhere. No new publications (other than newsletters) were produced during 2025.

At a local level, the Trust maintains an exhibition at the local tourist centre during the summer and, in 2025, had stalls at Christmas events in Buckfastleigh. The Council is now looking at providing a travelling exhibit that can be delivered to local centres across SW England.



WPCST Museum
Photo: WPCST

Research

Four studies were conducted in 2025.

- Work on cave spiders concluded in 2024 but continued to be reported in 2025; this included work in Reeds Cave and at other Devon sites.
- In collaboration with the University of Aberdeen, a PhD project was arranged (and will get underway in 2026); this will focus on a new analysis of the bone deposit in Joint Mitnor Cave together with evidence from other sites in Devon, with Andrew Chamberlain as one of the supervisors.
- A review of the history of quarrying on Buckfastleigh Hill and of the discovery and exploration of the caves began in 2025, building on work done in the 1980s and 90s; it is not yet clear how far this will go.
- The Trust continues to participate in the annual bat count, managed by the Devon Bat Group; we expect to develop this further during 2026.

Conservation

Reeds Cave (part of the larger Reeds Cave-Bakers Pit cave system) is accessible only by arrangement, with limitations on the experience level and the number of cavers allowed access. Rift Cave is similarly managed, thus providing cave sites that are not extensively damaged and are thus available for research. All caves at the study centre are closed during the winter because they house significant bat colonies.

Accommodation at the centre

The cave studies centre can provide overnight accommodation for about 20 visitors, and it is regularly booked year-round. The groups include cavers and others involved in environmental studies and activities. Bookings were low in 2024-5 but picked up late in 2025 and are now back at a healthy level.



Reeds Cave
Photo: WPCST



Little Man Chamber, Reeds Cave
Photo: WPCST

The Trust is currently investing in improvements to the accommodation, which is described (with booking arrangements) on the new Trust website.

Library

The Trust has an extensive library of cave and cave-related material. It is now housed at the studies centre, and re cataloguing is in progress. The aim is to have an online catalogue available, avoiding undue overlap with the library operated by BCRA. At present, the material is available upon request from the librarian via the website.

Website

A completely new website was implemented in mid-2025. Whilst it still has a few gaps, it does provide up-to-date information about the Trust, its events, and its accommodation. It will eventually provide the basis for a searchable library catalogue.

Newsletter

The Trust newsletter continues to be published twice a year, and PDF versions are posted on the website.

Involvement with other organisations

The Trust participates in DCUC (which currently meets at the cave studies centre) and is represented on BCA, convening its Conservation and Access Group until late in 2025. It has always had strong links with the Plymouth Caving Group and the Devon Speleological Society, and works with the Devon Wildlife Trust and the Devon Bat Group. It also has strong links with local universities, special-interest groups, Kents Cavern, and the Dartmoor National Park. However, these have always relied heavily on participation in specific activities or events.



BCA Working Groups

The BCA has nine working groups that are currently active:

- Anchors**
- Conservation and Access**
- Finance (report included in the treasurer’s report)**
- Incorporation (report included in the treasurer’s report)**
- National Access**
- Publications and Information**
- Qualifications Management Committee**
- Training and Equipment**
- Youth and Development**

Working groups usually meet 3 or 4 times per year via zoom.
 If you would like to get involved in any of the working groups please contact the convenor.

Reports from some of these can be found on pages 37 to 39



Anchor Working Group

Pete Knight, Convenor

anchors@british-caving.org.uk

The Anchor Working Group formally came together for the first time in late summer 2025. It comprises representatives from all the Regional Caving Councils as well as individuals with an interest or technical expertise in the BCA Anchor Scheme. Due to the late start in the year for the group, our work in 2025 centred around planning for 2026 and initiating discussions on several topics. The hope is that during 2026 we’ll be able to produce new guidance for regions on conducting test beds for the use of new resins, extend the use of BCA anchors to non-karst rock types, review and update the guidance for cavers and installers on inspecting anchors, and to create installer guidance for the removal of old anchors and hopefully the reuse of the placement location for a new one. So we’ve not a lot to report for 2025, however we have big aspirations for 2026.



Bob Mehew and Roy Rogers at the DCA testbed in Horseshoe Quarry
 Photo: Pete Knight

National Access Working Group

Rostam Namaghi, Convenor

wg-national-access@british-caving.org.uk

Every Labour Government since 1945 has had a major access reform and prior to these ‘interesting times’ we are living through, it seemed likely that major legislation was on the horizon. This group was formed in order for the BCA to keep up to date with developments in access and for the Association to proactively advocate for caving in political spaces. We have been active in working with Outdoors for All and the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Outdoor Recreation and Access to Nature, submitting evidence, attending meetings and giving a presentation.

We’ve developed good relations with Andy MacNae MP, the convenor of the APPG - he wrote to Baroness Hayman (under secretary at DEFRA) attempting to clarify DEFRA’s position on CRoW and their position going forward. David Rose has done an excellent job representing the BCA at

a few events, including helping to save the APPG as they were in danger of losing their ‘All Party’ status due to no longer having a Conservative member. Fortunately he was able to suggest David Davies MP who was previously helpful in the earlier CRoW campaign.

Going forward we need to think about how we mobilise cavers over political matters - we’ve been good at keeping up with developments but poor at communicating this more widely. Part of the group’s work will be addressing this and hopefully putting it into action once we begin to get developments on Access at a national level. The group needs more members and people who are active, engaged and connected can make a real difference.

Conservation and Access Working Group

Victoria Kocher, Convenor

Reports from regional councils highlight continued work to improve access, maintain infrastructure, and address conservation challenges across the UK.

In the South West, the Council of Southern Caving Clubs (CSCC) reported that the Longleat access agreement covering key caves in Cheddar Gorge is now operational, supported by a growing number of trained wardens and a programme of recreational, training, and conservation trips. Ongoing work includes installation and repair of entrance infrastructure, while incidents of attempted unauthorised access at sites such as Stainsby's Shaft remain a concern.

The Forest of Dean Cave Conservation and Access Group (FoDCCAG) continues to develop its access systems, including plans to expand online permit booking across major caves. Conservation and exploration work is ongoing, though safety concerns have led to temporary restrictions at sites such as Big Sink and ongoing stabilisation assessments at Symonds Yat Swallet. The group has also progressed its transition to an independent regional council. The new discovery in Redhouse will mean a significant amount of conservation efforts.

Caving Wales (CW) reported continued project work, including bolting in Ogof Ffynnon Ddu and the re-survey of Dan-yr-Ogof. Access issues remain challenging, particularly in relation to Natural Resources Wales and changing landowner relationships. Recent incidents of unauthorised access have complicated negotiations at

conservation@british-caving.org.uk

sites such as Ogof y Ci, while broader questions around governance and funding processes have also arisen.

The Council for the Northern Caving Community (CNCC) has secured grant funding, supplemented by match funding, to support a range of conservation projects including graffiti removal, structural repairs, and waste clearance at multiple sites. Recent work has included stabilisation and restoration projects, as well as support for archaeological coordination. CNCC has also engaged with planning processes, submitting objections to quarry proposals affecting cave systems.

The Derbyshire Caving Association (DCA) reported ongoing conservation work, including projects at mine sites and efforts to improve participation in SSSI monitoring schemes. Concerns were raised about the increasing impact of social media in publicising sensitive cave locations, alongside practical challenges in encouraging consistent reporting.

Across regions, common themes include managing unauthorised access, maintaining and upgrading infrastructure, securing funding for conservation work, and navigating relationships with landowners and statutory bodies. There is also growing interest in developing shared best practice—particularly in areas such as graffiti removal, environmental monitoring, and greater engagement with international cave conservation initiatives.

Publications and Information Working Group

Zac Woodford, Convenor

If I were to describe the previous year in a single word, it would be "quiet". The P&I inbox rarely receives requests for information. When we do, it is usually from individuals or organisations external to the Caving community and those looking for further contacts within the community. Therefore most of the P&I volunteer time has been spent conducting internal projects, for example, the incredible demographics report conducted by Eve Chaddock¹. There are continuing projects to create a comprehensive

¹ This can be found on page 46 & 47

pandi@british-caving.org.uk

student handbook as well as organise events for the first IDCK (International day of cave and karst), but this will be reported on next year.

The next year's focus will be on logging of volunteer output as well as concluding the projects we currently have in development. We also hope to grow the team and are always looking for new members to undertake projects.

Youth and Development Working Group

Isaac Neale, Convenor

youth@british-caving.org.uk



Starting them young, in Carlsark Cavern
Photo: Rob Eavis

In 2025 Y&D was characterised by the progressing of a small number of important projects.

In March the Y&D budget was used to subsidise the costs of Manchester University Speleology Club's SRT training. Maintaining vertical skills is essential for any student caving club. They had been struggling for a long time to find a new venue for their SRT training and eventually found an accommodating local commercial climbing wall. A small financial injection allowed them to lower the price for trainers and trainees, allowing more club members to turn up, and helped safeguard the future of the club.

In June 2025, Y&D was made aware of Organised Fun, a consultancy company investigating practices across a multitude of different outdoor pursuits undertaken by university clubs and societies. Keeping track of developments with Organised Fun, working out and planning for what their report may entail became the main action of Y&D from this point forward and continued into 2026. In September 2025 a meeting was held between Organised Fun and the BCA. In attendance from the

BCA were Rostam Namaghi (Chair), Aidan Kuhlmann (Secretary), Isaac Neale (Y&D Officer) plus Tom Phillips, CHECC Chair. In the meeting it was highlighted to Organised Fun how qualifications were inappropriate for the recreational caving carried out by student caving clubs, and the concerns held by the BCA about caving being included in the scope of the report. The Y&D Officer held multiple meetings with student caving clubs who were part of the universities working with Organised Fun to gain information about what was developing and advise them on the best way to proceed. Many clubs were deeply concerned about their ability to continue practicing their activity upon the release of the report. Rostam and Aidan further attended a meeting with Paul Donovan, a technical consultant brought in by Organised Fun for further advice, to get a picture of how the report was progressing and highlight the BCA's concerns as caving's National Governing Body.

As of writing in early 2026 the report written by Organised Fun has been published and the BCA's involvement with the scenario is still ongoing. Please contact the Y&D Officer if you would like more information.

In September Y&D began to support the formation of a new student club, Staffordshire University Caving Club (StUCC). Support included offering advice on risk assessments, and the use of the Y&D budget to acquire them some additional essential equipment. At time of writing in 2026 the university club in Staffordshire is successfully running regular trips.





Additional Council-Appointed Positions

In addition to the BCA executive, regional caving councils, constituent bodies and working groups the BCA council also includes nine additional council-appointed positions:

- Artificial Cave
- British Caving Library
- FSE Representative
- Insurance Manager
- IT Officer
- Membership Administrator
- Safeguarding Officer
- Training Administrator
- UIS Representative

Reports from some of these can be found on pages 41 to 45



Artificial Cave

Katie Eavis

artificial.cave@british-caving.org.uk

In 2011 Entre-Prises kindly donated an artificial cave system to the BCA. This consists of 12 sections of fibreglass 'cave passage' that can be bolted together in a variety of ways to create a caving experience which can be transported to events, and used to introduce members of the public to caving. The cave is stored in a box trailer in Derbyshire and is available to hire for events.

snug, and although adults can fit through but it is generally only at caving events that adults will even attempt it.

We also reviewed and updated the cave information sheet and risk assessment in 2025.

If you would like to book the cave for an event please email artificial.cave@british-caving.org.uk

Between 2011 and early 2023 BCA was able to lend the cave out entirely free of charge, however in 2023 it was decided to introduce a small hire fee, to cover trailer servicing and storage costs. As a perk of BCA membership in 2025 it was agreed there would be two prices, £40 for BCA members and £50 for non-members, hiring the cave.

Since 2011 the cave has averaged 15 bookings per year (excluding the two covid years) and has 14 bookings lined up for 2026 so far.

It attends all kinds of events – scout camps, village fetes, adventure film festivals, caving club events, school fairs, University freshers fairs, and is used by cave and mountain rescue teams at public relations events. It has even been to a wedding!

In 2025 the cave attended 14 events and was enjoyed by hundreds of children. Some of the sections are a little



Insurance

Katie Eavis

insurance@british-caving.org.uk

In previous years I have been involved in supporting the BCA insurance manager in dealing with insurance queries from clubs and cavers and completing the insurance renewal questionnaire. In 2025 the voluntary insurance manager stood down and hasn't been replaced, so I have become more heavily involved in BCA insurance, along with Aidan and Chris in their roles as secretary and treasurer.

formally been abandoned and includes many mines that are not operated commercially for profit but allow visitors and are inspected for safety. Many of our mining history member clubs maintain, control access to, and, in some cases, provide tours of mines defined as working mines. After some discussions and negotiations with the broker and insurers we have clarified these working mines are covered by the BCA PL insurance policy provided no-one is employed in the mines, and no ore is extracted.

The usual queries into the insurance cover, and requests for insurance certificates were also dealt with in 2025.

As 2025 ended BCA were in the process of discussing cover for tours for members of the public run by BCA member clubs and cover for the Gaping Gill winch meets with our insurers.

The main headlines of BCA insurance in 2025 include negotiating a much better deal on price for 2026, as mentioned in the treasurer's report, and clarifying the cover for 'working mines' looked after by some of our member clubs. It became apparent in 2025 that the brokers and insurers did not really understand the definition of a 'working mine' and the importance to BCA of ensuring cover for some of these was provided by our policy. Working mines include any mine that hasn't

British Caving Library

Jenny Potts, BCRA Library Co-ordinator

BCRA-Librarian@bcra.org.uk

<https://www.caving-library.org.uk>

The British Caving Library (BCL) is a national research and reference library based at Glutton Bridge, near Buxton in the Peak District, owned and managed by BCRA and staffed part-time by a paid Librarian and Library Assistants. It comprises published and archived material collected by BCRA and its predecessor organisations (with a minority of the items on long-term loan from clubs and individuals), plus new and up-to-date publications bought or donated together with an increasing amount of donated archive material. Since 2009 it has been funded by BCA as well as BCRA and its services are available to all British cavers as well as to foreign cavers and also to non-cavers. It maintains links with many British caving clubs who send printed copies of their publications as they are issued and many authors of caving books are kind enough to supply copies of their latest publication for free. The exchange of BCRA's publication Cave & Karst Science for foreign publications ensures a constant supply of up-to-date foreign periodicals, surveys and books.

The paid staff work part-time in the Library at Glutton Bridge on



The BCL tree for the future
Photo: Mary Wilde

a Wednesday: Mary Wilde, the Librarian, and Karen Lydon, our Library Assistant together with Katie Eavis (also BCA's Membership Administrator), who is able to work for us at some periods during the year. BCRA Council member Jenny Potts is the volunteer Library Co-ordinator on behalf of BCRA who works in the Library on a Wednesday and also comes in on other days. We welcome visitors but we do need to know in advance. Please contact the Librarian: BCRA-Librarian@bcra.org.uk.

BCL has an online existence as well as being a collection of printed books, periodicals, surveys and other items. BCL can be accessed online via its website www.caving-library.org.uk. The online sections are maintained by volunteers: the Bibliography/Catalogue by Martin Laverty and the BCRA Online Archives by John Gardner. These are both incredible resources for researchers and the

BCRA Online Archives have now been enhanced by having virtually all the BSA/Simpson collection online and accessible to cavers. We also have an online Audio Archive and the search is on for a suitable interviewer who is willing to carry on this work and also for a volunteer who is sufficiently well versed in IT to be able to deal with the uploading of material to the website as well as general IT maintenance.

Mary, our Librarian, is also our IT expert and is also responsible for liaising with Zen, who now provide our Library WiFi and phone. She also hosts the Library Facebook page, which now has over 2000 followers (approximately 76% are male and 24% female), the highest percentage of our followers are British or living in Britain with a surprisingly large number in Sheffield. The next highest overseas groups are from the USA and from Thailand.

At Hidden Earth in 2025 the Library stand with its "Lucky Dip" was able to pass on many duplicate journals, books and surveys to good homes with club libraries and individual



caver collectors, accepting around £150 in donations for these publications.

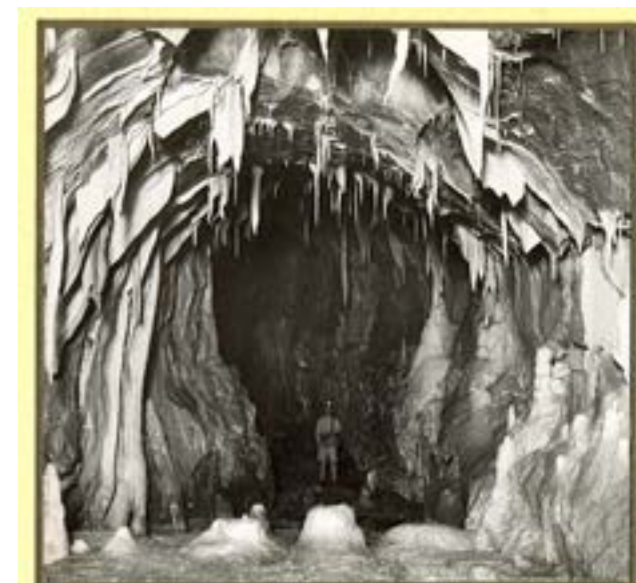
Karen's summary list of the contents of over 300 boxes of archive material, some dating back prior to the formation of BCRA, has meant more of these items are now accessible for research. Cataloguing all these items in detail is a huge task and will depend upon suitable volunteers being willing to take on sections of the project.

During the year 2 local volunteers have been working through the collection of surveys and maps dating from the early years of the 20th. century, many being from Eli Simpson and BSA plus some other items collected during the early days of the BCRA Library. An increasing number of historically important surveys, the work of pioneer cavers in the 1930s, have been identified and will need eventually to be integrated into the general survey catalogue.

It should be noted that the present situation is a very far cry from that in 2007, when former BCRA Librarian Roy Paulson, who worked alone, died. At that time there was no online presence and no catalogue other than an out-of-date printed one. In the last 18 years we have been able to employ paid staff (albeit only for one day a week) and have found a series of volunteers willing to give up many hours of their time, working sometimes in isolation and connected only by email to BCL at Glutton Bridge. BCL being funded by BCA and BCRA and its higher profile online attracts cavers and others to make use of it and also means we receive more donations of materials, legacies, etc.

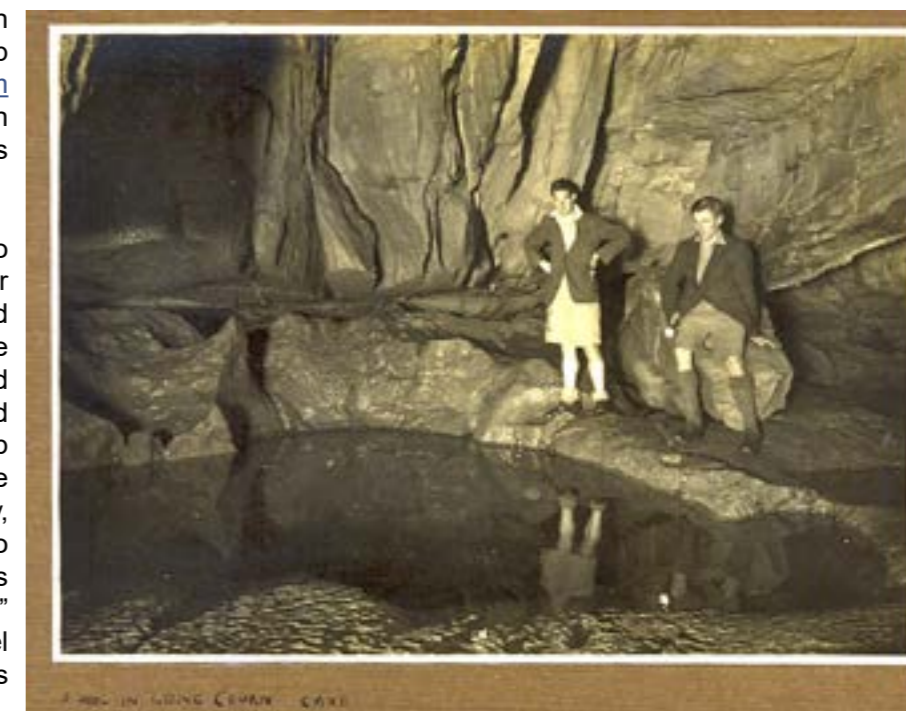
We continue to receive archive collections, some photographic and others documentary, many of these being of considerable importance to the unravelling of the history of caving in Britain. We continue to seek the help of interested cavers via UKcaving.com or Facebook to identify the cavers seen in the photos and also the actual sites in the caves.

The Library has always been open to organisations to use for meetings, either in the evenings or at weekends and even for small groups during daytime mid-week. This use is increasing and in 2025 BCL hosted several BCRA and DCA Council Meetings. A local club set up an evening of talks on Cave Conservation, hosted at the Library, using our facilities to enable people to join online as well as in person. Others are now making use of this "hybrid" feature to enable those unable to travel to the venue to take part in the meetings online.



Penderyn Cave.
discovered in 1939 by quarrymen,
is entered by a small hole 30 feet
down the face of the quarry. This
soon expands into a lofty passage.

Penderyn Cave, South Wales. Photo taken during the 1939 BSA conference. The cave has since been quarried away.
Photo: Rev. W. Black



The Pool in Long Churns, taken in 1934
Photo: Rev. W. Black

Membership

Katie Eavis, Membership Administrator

membership@british-caving.org.uk

When I first started administrating BCA membership club membership was managed via a series of very big spreadsheets – one even extended to 24,000 rows! Whilst the system worked it wasn't easy to use, or pass on and didn't allow clubs to view and edit their own membership lists. Additionally BCA services were all very separate – qualifications were on an online system, direct individuals of BCA managed via a webform, and clubs on the very large spreadsheets. If you were a member of all three of these and moved house you would have needed to update your address with BCA three times, in three different ways!

In September 2024 BCA membership went live on JustGo, an online membership system – joining the BCA qualifications scheme which had already been online for a few years, unifying BCA services on one system. BCRA membership also moved with us, so we now have a convenient 'one stop shop' for UK cavers.

Whilst the move online was in September the real challenge came at renewal time – how would the new system cope with around 160 groups, and 6500 members renewing?

There were a few minor issues, and it was steep learning curve for all the club secretaries, and especially me, but overall it went very smoothly and most clubs are happily embracing the new system. Some clubs prefer to send in spreadsheets, which I use to update the online system and this is fine too.

There are lots of advantages of the online membership system – being able to take card payments is a big one, but also that cavers who join as individuals can now elect to 'subscribe' to BCA and BCRA membership – so their memberships auto-renew each year without any input from them. Also clubs are now able to view which memberships their members hold, rather than work on



Daisy Eavis, age 8, enjoying the underground. Photo: Rob Eavis

trust when a club members states they have got their BCA membership via another club.

The new online system isn't perfect, and doesn't do everything BCA would ideally like it to do. However it is a vast improvement and we continue to change and tweak the system so it works better for cavers.

Using BCA social media I have been keen to promote membership of BCA to cavers in the UK, in particular to explain the benefits of BCA membership and the types of membership available. I often get questions from clubs asking if there is a lower age limit on BCA membership and it is great to be able to say 'no' and in fact under 18 membership is free of charge!

We did have one caving club add a new member on the same day they were born! I'd like to think they told BCA before the grandparents.....

I am always very happy to help with any membership queries, from individuals or clubs, so please do get in touch if there is anything I can help with.



The membership categories, available via the online BCA Membership and Qualification Management System. Within each are further options - such as caving, non-caving, student or under 18 membership for BCA membership.

UIS: The International Speleological Union



John Gunn, BCA Representative on the UIS council

UIS@british-caving.org.uk

<https://uis-speleo.org/>

To quote from their website: "The UIS is a non-profit, non-governmental organization which promotes interaction between academic and technical speleologists of a wide range of nationalities to develop and coordinate international speleology in all its scientific, technical, cultural, social, and economic aspects". [<https://uis-speleo.org/index.php/what-is-the-uis/>]. The UIS is an association of countries that are largely represented by the national speleological organisation. BCA is the UK member of UIS and pays an annual membership fee. This enables BCA to send one voting delegate to the UIS General Assembly (GA) which is the governing body. Much of the UIS activity takes place in a large number of Commissions that cover virtually all aspects of speleology. Details can be found at <https://uis-speleo.org/index.php/uis-commissions-and-working-groups/>.

During the 2025 UIS Congress which was held in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, from 20 - 27 July, there were two GA, one on the first day and one on the last. Andy Eavis acted as UK delegate during the first GA and presented the GB bid for the 2029 UIS Congress.

During the Congress over 450 lectures were delivered, including six by three British cavers: a Keynote Lecture by Andy Eavis ("The Largest Caves in the World"); three lectures by Trevor Faulkner (Quaternary Deglacial Speleogenesis On The Gower Peninsula, South Wales, UK; Speleogenesis of the calcareous littoral caves on the Island of Lismore, Scotland; and More exotic tufa deposits on the island of Lismore, Argyll, Scotland) and two by John Gunn (Contrasts between British Carbonate Karst Areas and Project MIKAS (Most Important Karst Aquifers Springs): progress and request for information). In addition to the lecturers three British cavers picked up prizes and congratulations are due to Andy Farrant who received the Giovanni Badino Award for the paper Pervasive speleogenetic modification of cave passages by nitrification of biogenic ammonia, to Chris Howes who received several awards including the Sami Karkabi Photo Award, and to Mark Tringham who was second in the Cave Survey competition. A full report on the Congress can be seen in UIS Bulletin 67-2 [<https://uis-speleo.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/UIS-Bulletin-67-2-final.pdf>] and there is a list of the many prizes awarded <https://uis-speleo.org/index.php/uis-prizes-2/>.

At the 2nd GA John Gunn was UK delegate and he was also elected as an Adjunct Secretary of the UIS receiving votes from 33 of the 35 voting countries.

- The UIS Bureau 2025 – 2029 comprises:
- UIS President: Zdeněk Motyčka (Czech Republic)
 - UIS Vice President of Administration: Mario Parise (Italy)
 - UIS Vice President of Operations: Mladen Garašić (Croatia)
 - UIS Secretary General: Johannes Mattes (Austria)
 - UIS Treasurer: Nadja Zupan Hajna (Slovenia)
 - UIS Adjunct Secretaries
 - Ángel Acosta-Colòn (Puerto Rico)
 - Josè Maria Calaforra (Spain)
 - Allan Silas Calux (Brazil)
 - John Gunn (United Kingdom)
 - Val Hildreth-Werker (USA)
 - Marc Mentens (Philippines)
 - Nathalia Uasapud (Colombia)

Unfortunately, the GB bid for the 2029 Congress was unsuccessful and the Congress will be held at the Babe-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, Romania.

The main UIS initiative with implications for BCA is the UNESCO International Day of Caves and Karst (IDCK) to be celebrated on 13th September. This was officially proclaimed on 12th November 2025 at the 43rd Session of the UNESCO General Conference, meeting in Samarkand, Uzbekistan. The proposal, which was submitted by the Slovenian Government, was developed, and involved a large amount of work by, the UIS under the leadership of former President Nadja Zupan Hajna. BCRA and BCA sent a joint letter of support for the proposal. The first IDCK will be celebrated on 13th September 2026 with events in Britain and many other countries and a major event in Slovenia commencing on 10th September and held under the honorary patronage of the President of the Republic of Slovenia and the Director-General of UNESCO.

Demographics Report 2025

Eve Chaddock, Publications and Information

Introduction & Aims

The primary objective of this report is to provide an accurate reflection of the age and gender composition of the BCA membership. While previous reports categorized data by “age and sex,” this 2025 iteration transitions to “age and gender” to better reflect modern data collection standards. This report follows a series of demographic analyses published since 2017. The core findings suggest a shrinking gender gap, particularly among members under 60, and a significant increase in participation among young women relative to men.

Method

The data was collected on 30/11/2025 from the membership database, anonymised and then sent to the author. The data was transferred to an Excel spreadsheet and simple statistical tests carried out as per previous iterations of the report. The age data had to be converted from year-of-birth to age, so all ages are as at end-of-year, rather than when membership was renewed. The data has been subcategorised by Active (caving members, students, and under-18s) and All (also including non-caving members). CIMs and DIMs were not separated in the age-gender breakdowns. It should be noted that there has been a definite improvement in the standard of data; JustGo has allowed better standardisation which has reduced the amount of data cleansing needed.

Discussion

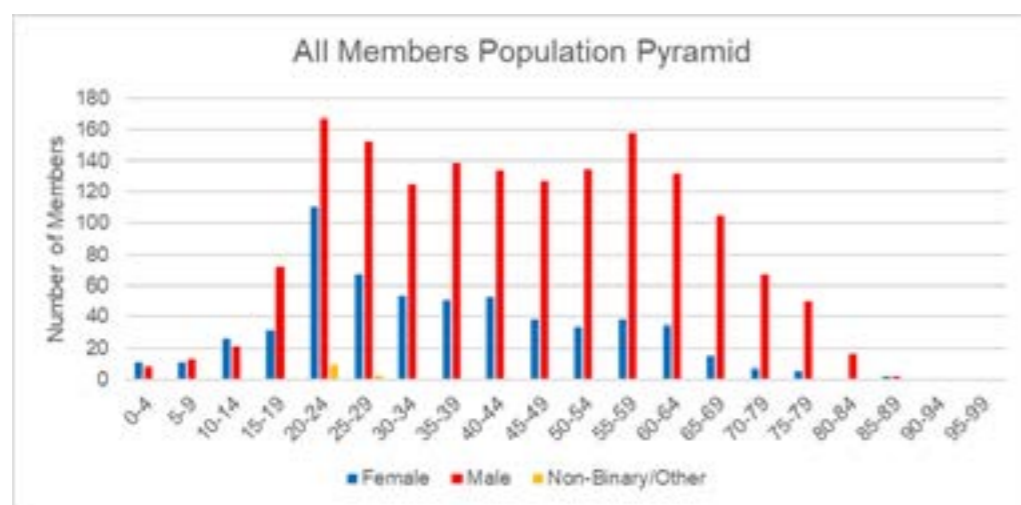
Member numbers have been holding steady over the last couple of years; there were 6788 BCA members in 2025, a less than 1% increase on 2024, and a less than 1%

decrease on 2023. Numbers have not yet returned to pre-covid figures, with 7075 members in 2020. 1256 (18.5%) people were Direct Individual Members (DIMs) whilst the rest are Club Individual Members (CIMs).

Student member numbers have risen since 2023, from 705 to 725. Whilst this is not a huge change, it is good to see our student clubs remaining healthy, as these are an important driver of recruitment for the overall caving community. There are 242 ‘under-18’ members, a number that has been steadily increasing, probably in no small part thanks to Katie Eavis, who has been publicising the benefits and free membership available.

The male:female ratio amongst all members has been improving year-on-year; 2021 to 2023 it dropped from 3.4:1 to 3.1:1, and in 2025 it was 2.9:1. However, there was a blip in 2024 when it was 3.3:1. For 2025, the male:female ratio goes from 1.5:1 in the 20-24 category to 2.5:1 in the 40-44 category to 9.6:1 in the 70-74 category. Interestingly, these ratios are much more highly skewed towards men in this report than they were in 2023, when the male: female ratio was 1.2:1 in the 20-24 category, 1.8:1 in the 40-44 category, and 4.1:1 in the 70-74 category. This suggests that we have had either a massive haemorrhage of women in both the 40-44 and 70-74 categories or there were pre-existing gaps in the aging group of members.

The data analysis for this report found that there were 675 members who identified themselves as female in



2025, however this suggests that there may be some anomalous data as there were 1251 members identifying as female in 2023, and there has not been a halving of female members. We know this as the proportion of gender-complete profiles with female as their gender has remained around 25%. Basically, it seems that we have lost some demographic data for some of our members. It is good to see that the proportion of women taking part hasn't decreased, but it could be worth considering how we reach more women in order to improve our gender-split. The proportion of members identifying as 'non-binary/other' is 0.6%, higher than the UK as a whole ¹. This should be a point of pride for our community, being able to provide a welcoming environment for non-binary and gender non-conforming people interested in going underground.

The average age of a BCA member is 44.1, a drop from 45.5 in 2024. This is slightly higher than the active caver age, at 43 in 2025 and 47.1 in 2024. A drop in age of 4 years in only one year is a massive change; it appears that this may have come from losing quite a few members in the 80-90 area. The 2020 report asks whether we will experience a large increase in members in the 70+ category. Whilst that report does not directly state how many members we had over the age of 70, 17.3% of members in 2025 were aged 65+, compared to 11% in 2021 and 9.6% in 2023, so it does appear that our membership will see an increase here. The UK population aged 65+ was 19% in 2022, so we are still below average.

Geographically, BCA members are very well-spread across the UK, with only 9 postcode areas not represented (out of 124). BS (Bristol) has the largest number of cavers (378), followed quite a way behind by LA (Lancaster), with 270, and Sheffield with 235. That these three areas are in or close to some of the key caving areas is unsurprising. Similarly, university cities have large caver populations, e.g. Leeds (162), Cardiff (157), and Plymouth (138). London does not appear to be very densely populated with cavers; there are several postcodes in London in the bottom 10. None of this is of great surprise as cavers do tend to be more outdoorsy types and less city creatures.

Going forward

It would be good to see the number of members with complete age-gender profiles increase, especially as it is so easy for members to access JustGo and update their own data now, however cavers are not the most pro-active bunch, so this may require some cajoling. There is a chance that this could falsely skew our perception of age, as there is a greater level of computer-literacy amongst young people.

It would also be good to increase the number of demographic

1 Approximately 0.5% (262,000) of UK residents aged 16 and over reported a gender identity different from their sex registered at birth. Within this group, roughly 30,000 people (0.06% of the population) specifically identified as non-binary. (Office for National Statistics, 2021 Census).
 2 Caving members, full time students, and under-18s

factors that the report looks at. This cannot currently be done as things like disability, ethnicity, religion, and sexuality are not actively collected by clubs so there isn't enough reliable data. I recently did a demographics report for the Technical Speleological Group, and we agreed at the AGM that there could be merit in doing a survey on some of these wider factors. If a pilot there comes back with useful data, it may be worth considering a 'caver-census' to help us better understand who our members are, and perhaps who we need to work harder to invite into our sport.

I'd like to encourage any readers of this report to complete the demographic data on JustGo and ask others in the community to do the same.

Tables and Figures

| | All Members | Active Cavers ² |
|-----------------------------------|--------------|----------------------------|
| Total Records | 6789 | 5741 |
| Complete Age-Gender Records | 2226 (32.8%) | 2120 (36.9%) |
| Female Mean Age (Years) | 35.7 | 34.9 |
| Male Mean Age (Years) | 44 | 43.4 |
| Non-Binary/Other Mean Age (Years) | 25 | 25 |

| | All Members | Active Cavers |
|------------------------------|--------------|---------------|
| Complete Records Age Only | 4168 (61.4%) | 3750 (65.3%) |
| Average Caver Age (Years) | 44.1 | 43 |
| Complete Records Gender Only | 2639 (38.9%) | 2458 (42.8%) |
| Average Male:Female Ratio | 1:2.9 | 1:2.9 |
| Total Males | 1947 (73.8%) | 1821 (74.1%) |
| Total Females | 675 (25.6%) | 620 (25.2%) |
| Total Non-Binary/Other | 17 (0.6%) | 17 (0.7%) |



Group Members

In 2025 the BCA had 142 full member clubs, 10 Associate clubs and 7 Access controlling bodies.

During 2025 three new clubs joined BCA. These are Out on Rock¹, the Subterranean Explorers Club and Heighington Shaft Inspectors Caving Club.

Additionally BCA welcomed Morgannwg Caving Club as a member club. Morgannwg CC is a long established club but new to BCA membership. Newcastle University Caving Club re-joined BCA after a gap of several years, and we are very pleased to see them back.

The next three pages celebrate significant anniversaries for some of our member clubs in 2025, plus highlight some of their amazing caving huts!

A full list of BCA group members can be found on our website, along with a useful map showing the area they are based in as well huts and social locations.

<https://british-caving.org.uk/about-bca/caving-clubs/>



¹ An article about setting up the club and their first year as a BCA member can be found on page 4

Caving Club Anniversaries

The Bristol Exploration Club celebrate their 90th anniversary!



The BEC was formed in 1935 after several cavers from Bristol applied to become members of the Wessex Cave Club and were deemed to be the “wrong sort”; resulting in the British class system producing a club that has contributed greatly to British speleology.

The original club hut, a former sports pavilion, burnt down in the 1970s to be replaced with a new ‘Belfry’, now adorned by a gigantic Bertie Bat – the club’s mascot who features on clothes and merchandise. Situated adjacent to a major stream sink, the club took advantage of this by opening up St Cuthbert’s Swallet in 1953. It is still the second longest cave on Mendip and offers opportunities for further exploration. The club owns the land the cave lies on and a warden system operates for visitors.

Members of the BEC have been involved in many discoveries both on Mendip and elsewhere in the U.K. as far afield as Northern Ireland and Northern Scotland as well as in Eire. Overseas expeditions have members to China, the Philippines, Australia, South Africa and the Americas not forgetting Europe where for a time members established a world depth record.

The club’s H.Q. at Priddy has been improved and extended over the years and is a good central location for anyone visiting Mendip. There is also some good walking directly from the hut. New members are always welcome and that includes complete novices. Some long-standing members had never been underground before joining the BEC.



The original members of “Earby Pothole Club”.

Earby Pothole Club are 80!

In 2025 Earby Pothole Club celebrated their 80th anniversary. The club plans to hold a celebration with members and ex-members in June 2026. The photo shows original members of the Earby. Today the Earby is a small club with a strong interest in digging.



The University of Leeds Speleological Association turn 60!

The University of Leeds Speleological Association celebrated their 60th anniversary in 2025. A weekend celebration brought together over 100 members, past and present (photo above).

Great Orme Exploration Society’s 40th Anniversary!

The Great Orme Exploration Society celebrated their 40th anniversary with a gathering at the Kings Head pub, Llandudno, the place where it all started four decades earlier (photo on right). Vice chair Phil Barratt spoke of some of the characters from GOES’ early years, through to stalwarts of the society who kept it going through the leaner years, to today where we have seventy members. He then proposed a toast to GOES and all those who love the Orme both underground and over ground.



Looking for your next adventure?

Why not visit one of the fabulous huts owned by BCA group members?

We asked our member clubs to send details if they wanted their hut included below - however more fantastic caving huts are available!

Visit our website and look for the hut icons to see more:

<https://british-caving.org.uk/about-bca/caving-clubs/>

Scotland

Grampian Speleological Group
Elphin Caving Centre
Elphin, Sutherland
IV27 4HH
hutbookings@gsg.org.uk



Lake District

Yorkshire Ramblers' Club
Low Hall Garth
Little Langdale, LA22 9NT
<https://www.yrc.org.uk/venues/low-hall-garth/>



Yorkshire Dales



Bradford Pothole Club
The Dump,
Brackenbottom,
BD24 0EU
warden@bpc-cave.org.uk



Craven Pothole Club
Ivy Cottage, Horton in
Ribblesdale, BD24 0HF
hutwarden@cravenpotholeclub.org

Northern Pennine Club
Greenclose House,
Clapham LA2 8HW
bookings@northernpennineclub.org.uk



Red Rose Cave and Pothole Club
Bullpot Farm, Casterton
LA 6 2JP
bookings@rrcpc.org.uk



Yorkshire Ramblers' Club
Lowstem, Clapham
LA2 8HL
<https://www.yrc.org.uk/venues/lowstem/>



Yorkshire Subterranean Society
The Old School, Helwith
Bridge, BD24 0EH
hutbookings@yssuk.com

Peak District



Derbyshire Pennine Club
Carlswark Cottage, Stoney
Middleton, S32 4TN
dpccarlswark@gmail.com



Technical Speleological Group
The Chapel, Castleton
S33 8WE
tsghutbookings@gmail.com

South Wales

Chelsea Spelaeological Society
Whitewalls and Old Darren
Sunday School, NP8 1LG
hut.warden@chelseaspelaeo.org



South Wales Caving Club
Powell Street, Penwyllt
SA9 1GQ
bookings@swcc.org.uk



Westminster Speleological Group
Caerllwyn Cottage, Rhigos
CF44 9UW
cottage@wsg.org.uk



Mendip

Bristol Exploration Club
The Belfry, Priddy
BA5 3AU
<https://bec-cave.org.uk/belfry-booking/>



Mendip Caving Group
Nordach Cottage,
Charterhouse-On-Mendip,
BS40 7XW
<https://mendipcavinggroup.org.uk/cottage-facilities/visitors-cottage-bookings/>



Shepton Mallet Caving Club
The Minerries, Priddy
BA 5 3AU
hutwarden@shepton.org.uk



Devon



Devon Spelæological Society
Crest Hill, Buckfastleigh
TQ11 0AN
hut.warden@devonss.org.uk

More fantastic huts marked on our website: <https://british-caving.org.uk/about-bca/caving-clubs/>



Helictite in "The White Forest" discovered 06/04/2025 by Daniel Jackson, Richard Newhouse, Alex Knight, Falkland Anderson, Dan Sandford, Tim Nichols

Photo: Tiffany Cooksley