

Minutes of BCA Conservation & Access Group Meeting held at 7.30pm on 10th October 2024 by Zoom

Richard Vooght (RV) chaired the meeting. Linda Wilson (LJW) took the minutes.

1. Introductions and Apologies

Present: Richard Vooght (RV) (Chair)

Voting members: Richard Vooght [Pengelly], Stuart France (SF) [Caving Wales], , John Boulton (JB) [DCUC], Andrew Hinde (AH) [CNCC], Victoria Kocher (VC) [DCA Conservation Officer] John Hine (JH) [NAMHO & FoDCCAG], Wayne Starsmore (WS) [CSCC].

In attendance (non-voting): Tim Nichols (TN) [FoDCCAG, Observer], Linda Wilson [CCC Ltd Conservation Officer, Observer], Jenny Potts (JP) [UK Cave Conservation Emergency Fund, Observer], Bob Mehew (BM) [Observer].

Apologies received from: Tara Beacroft [DCUC], , Kay Easton [CNCC]

2. Regional reports:

CNCC [Given by AH]

Access: CNCC have been looking at Hudgill Burn Mine Cave. This is only open to scientific research at the moment but they are trying to find out if this can be extended to some recreational caving. Access to Kirkgill Head Cave is now via the farmer, not the pub. There used to be a memorandum of understanding with the Langcliffe Estate but this is no longer in existence as the BCA insurance no longer covers all non-BCA members. The new land agents are consulting solicitors on this. CNCC are trying to track down the owner of Smeltmill Beck Cave. The lack of access to High Birkwith is unlikely to change in the near future.

Conservation: The old drum has been removed from Stream Passage Pot and replaced with a new pipe. No fixed rigging has been left and this has been left for people to rig themselves. Stiles have been repaired at Low Birkwith Farm and at Calf Holes, where the work was done by the Craven on CNCC's behalf. The removal of diggers' rubbish from Notts II is ongoing. There has been frost damage to the concrete lid on Aquamole Pot and this needs recasting. The Foxholes entrance to Ingleborough has suffered collapse and needs unblocking. Rubbish needs to be removed from Strangle Pot. The Coal Hole collapse needs piping. Fencing at County Pot is an ongoing project.

DCA [The following report was received by email from VK]

Continuing with our Cave Conservation form submissions until the end of the year. They will be entered into a £50 draw for Starless River. Submissions need to be accompanied by photos.

Clean up in Masson. Removed three large bags from inside the mine. September 2024.

Clean up needs to be done at Horseshoe Cave-pending. Discussions ongoing with Natural England for protection of the site.

Another sign for DCA was placed at the entrance to Giants Hole. This is to inform and encourage anyone of the risks and possible dangers within. We have had many reports of people entering unprepared.

Gates checked along Lathkill Dale for NE.

DCUC [given by JB]

Access has been regained to Penrecker Slate Mine. The top entrance can now be used again. The gate on Aften Red Rift needs replacing as does the one on Bunker's Cave. Work is needed to the stile and fencing at Baker's Pit.

Caving Wales [given by SF]

The Cambrian Caving Council was renamed Caving Wales at the AGM this March. Llygad Llwhchwr has blocked again as it is in a sink hole with trees affected by ash die back. Work to reopen this is ongoing. The cave is still accessible but entry is awkward. The bolting programme is ongoing in OFD to provide P-hangers on the main routes. The hydrology project in OFD 1 is now online. This is vulnerable to squirrels! (Not a line that appears often in minutes.) There is also a depth sensor in Dan yr Ogof but this was affected by a lightning strike that took out the underground system.

There have been 250 redundancies at National Resources Wales (NRW). The mines access scheme has not yet been reviewed. The Welsh Government owns the land but has little understanding of mines access so for now access is on a trespass basis. NRW will be approached again in 2025.

There is now a fourth entrance to Ogof Draenen, this time with a different landowner who is supportive but not necessarily enthusiastic. One of the original two directors of the landowning company that the PDCMG deal with has retired and since replaced by his wife. The other original director sadly passed away some years ago and was also replaced by his wife. The PDCMG is trying to create a limited company of its own to facilitate a new cave access agreement with the landowning company.

The entrance series of Ogof Marros is reported to have collapsed, blocking access. This entrance was gated by the original explorers. Llethrid Cave on the Gower, which was re-opened by the same team, now has its access controlled by the same individuals.

CSCC [given by WS]

The Longleat Estates Board has approved CSCC's suggested access framework. This will hopefully be up and running by the end of the year. At Loxton Cave there has been an issue with another club but they are not intending to hand this agreement back to the CSCC within the next 18 months. There is a new access agreement with Somerset Wildlife Trust for the caves in Harridge Wood. The lid on Hunters' Lodge Inn Sink has now been fixed. Conversations with the landowner at Bethel Quarry near Bradford on Avon regarding

concerns over anti-social behaviour haven't led anywhere yet. The lid on Cow Hole is in a sorry state. CSCC will be talking to the landowner to see how things can be improved.

The review of the CSCC access guide is ongoing and the 6th edition of Mendip Underground is underway, possible for publication next year.

3. Any other reports:

Forest of Dean [given by TN]

There have been major discoveries over the summer at Redhouse Lane Swallet, as presented at Hidden Earth.

All major routes in Wet Sink have been re-taped, incurring costs of £600 so far. The land purchase has been completed. The site has also been re-fenced and the lock changed. A key safe has been installed nearby. For access, email the permit secretary as before, who will provide the code for the box.

[SF commented that Caving Wales hadn't known that the land purchase was going through and that the correct financial planning procedures had not been followed, thus funding had not been included in CW's budget bid to BCA. A separate meeting has been scheduled with BCA, FoDCCAG and CW to discuss finance with a view to resolving this. SF said he will be suggesting that CW could lend the money and then recoup it in future years.]

[JP commented that the UK Cave Conservation Emergency Fund had offered assistance with the purchase as legal costs are accepted under that scheme but had been told the funds weren't needed. RV will raise this in the separate meeting.]

4. Any Other Business:

4.1. Voting members. It will help with vote taking if voting members could clearly identify themselves as such at the start of the meeting, especially if more than one person is present from each region. The voting members are the regional councils and constituent body reps eg Pengelly and NAMHO.

4.2. The FSE have emailed to ask BCA to put in an annual report about cave clean ups. This can be provided by the regions and compiled into an annual report,

4.3 RV gave notice that he wishes to stand down as convenor after three years in the post. He is willing to convene the January meeting if a successor has not been identified by then but not any further meetings. Everyone present extended their thanks to RV for all his work as convenor. Action all to seek a successor.

7. Date of next meeting

This will be held in January 2025. RV will circulate suggestions for a date. This will be at 7.30pm by Zoom