

Minutes of BCA Conservation & Access Group Meeting held at 7.30pm on 17th September by Zoom

Victoria Kocher (VK) chaired the meeting. Linda Wilson (LJW) took the minutes.

Introductions and Apologies

Present: Victoria Kocher (VK) (Chair) (DCA)

Voting members: Victoria Kocher (VC) [Derbyshire Caving Association Conservation Officer], Wayne Starsmore [Council of Southern Caving Clubs] (WS), John Hine [FoDCCAG, NAMHO] (JH), Stuart France (Caving Wales) (SF), Andrew Hinde [CNCC] (AH), John Gunn [BCRA] (JG)

In attendance (non-voting): Linda Wilson [CCC Ltd Conservation Officer, Observer] (LJW), Jenny Potts [UK Cave Conservation Emergency Fund, Observer] (JP) Tim Nicholls (FoDCCAG C&A Officer, Observer) (TM), Bob Mehew (Observer) (BM)

Apologies received from: Richard Vooght (DCUC)

SF commented that in his view neither FoDCCAG or NAMHO should have a vote on this committee. JH said FoDCCAG has been part of this committee from the outset and had always been counted as a voting member. JP and BM agreed with this. This was left to be resolved but for now, the custom and practice is that FoDCCAG and NAMHO have a vote.

SF requested it to be minuted that due to circumstances beyond their control Caving Wales were not aware of the recent meetings and so did not attend.

SF requested clarification that the grant from the UKCCF was to support conveyancing costs. JP felt this clarification was unnecessary.

Regional reports:

CNCC The following report was supplied by Kay Easton:

YDMT Grant

We have successfully applied for a Yorkshire Dales Millenium Trust grant for cave conservation, however for only £2000 rather than the full £4183 requested, with CNCC match funding of £1500. Accordingly, Andrew Hinde emailed Victoria requesting a proposed "projects" budget request. This would be to the value of £2183.59 for materials /consumables, £1500.00 Vol Travel expenses, £3683.59 Total.

The provisional sites covered by this grant are Long Churn (stile repair), Yordas Cave (graffiti cleaning), Aquamole Pot (repairs to shaft top), Sweetwater Hole (repairs to fencing), Pasturegill Pot Langstrothdale, (removal of rubbish) Fume Pot Clapdale (entrance works, in conjunction with YDNP and UCLAN)

Archaeology Coordinator

We have coopted an Archaeology Coordinator (Tony Brown) to act as a contact point and pointer towards resources for any archaeological finds in caves.

Recent work

Graffiti cleaning at Yordas, stile repair at Long Churns, restoration of entrance to Foxholes (not a “sporting” cave but archaeologically significant and hydrologically interesting), stabilisation of collapse in Shuttleworth Pot, repair of fencing at Rumbling Hole
£400 to Black Sheep Doggers for pipe for re-opening the entrance to Limley Mine

Submission of objection to Planning Application for extension of quarry affecting Keldheads Cave, Wensleydale (application not yet decided)

Possible insurance claim

A dead cow was found in a small unnamed pot down valley from Lancaster Hole, we estimate it had been there perhaps a week by the time it was found. The shakehole had always been an open pot ~3m deep but had been the subject of some digging activity, we think around the 1980's. Though the bottom of the shakehole was still partially covered with old planking we believe the soil at the edge of the pot had given way when the cow dropped in. With the agreement of the farmer Red Rose have now backfilled the pot to the point that is no longer a hazard to livestock.

The owner of the cow will likely be making an insurance claim for the loss of the animal and his initial reaction blames the incident on the digging activities and enquires about our insurance cover. CNCC are seeking advice from the BCA Insurance Officer.

Caving Wales Report from SF:

Caving Wales was unhappy with FoDCCAG applying direct to BCA for funding rather than through CW. SW stated that there were discussions in 2024 about what funding was needed for Redhouse. This came to approx. £1k, listed as expenses for individuals rather than FoDCCAG. SW said this left CW in a awkward position as they do not generally fund via individuals. CF said CW would not fund the claim for padlocks as they felt the cost was excessive and so deducted £500 as did not feel this should be met from national funds. This brought the claim down to £640, however this has not yet been claimed. SF says FoDCCAG have been told that they will have to claim by the end of September of the grant will be cancelled.

Ogof y Ci is a small cave used almost exclusively by one outdoor pursuits group. Ownership of the cave has recently changed and the new owner asked the group to stop using the cave. They then accessed the cave via a ‘secret route’ and were caught. The owner was understandably unhappy with their actions. The owner objected to his land being used for commercial activities by a group who did not contribute anything. The group’s parent body was going to take the matter up in an attempt to resolve this as there is currently no access to the cave. If nothing changes, SF will take up the matter of recreational caving with the owner at some point.

SF received an email about recent graffiti in a slate mine. The person who raised this wanted the mine to be gated. Instead, SF suggested obliterating the graffiti with a mix of slate dust.

There is a multi-club effort in progress to re-survey Dan yr Pgof with an inaugural meeting in December. The owner is in favour of this as long as this does not result in the creation of a second entrance.

SWCC are continuing with a bolting programme in OFD under the BCA scheme Four new installers have been trained.

National Resources Wales took action against a landowner with regard to the fifth entrance to Ogof Draenen. The landowner has not reacted to this as he was in favour of the entrance. It is believed that Caving Wales are at risk of legal action for conservation infringements from NRW as an 'occupier' of the land. CW have replied to a letter from NRW to rebut this, saying that they are not an 'occupier' and that cavers are merely visiting as guests of the landowner.

Comments:

LJW made the point that no such action should be taken without a full photographic record first being taken of the walls as otherwise there is a risk of accidentally obliterating earlier historic graffiti.

TN stated that he has provided SF with full details of spending (including receipts) for the expenses claim regarding Redhouse. He believed that constituted an application for the funds. If not, and if there is a form to sign, he asked for a copy of this so he could deal with it. TN confirmed that FoDCCAG does have a bank account in their name and the application was from them, who will then reimburse the individuals. He will resend the email with the receipts to SF.

TN asked for it to be noted that they did not consciously go behind CW's back, and indeed copied them in on the request to BCA.

SF stated that BCA is intended to pursue incorporation and that BCA did not want FoDCCAG to become a separate regional council until that had been done. LJW corrected that statement as she has been at at BCA Council meeting the previous night with VC in which it was clearly stated that there was no barrier to FoDCCAG becoming a regional council now if that is what they want to do. Any such request will be put to Council for ratification. This is how things were managed when DCUC separated from CSCC many years ago. SF said all he needed was an email from the BCA secretary regarding this and CW would then confirm that they have no objection to FoDCCAG separating from them.

CSCC Report from WS

WS stated the main thing for CSCC is the access agreement with Longleat Estates is now ready for signing, but the Longleat solicitors are not using Docusign very well and this last hurdle is becoming slow to cross.

In other news: The diggers at Stockhill Mine are now ready to hand access over to CSCC. WS states he will be arranging for a new lid. The large moving boulder in Thrupe Lane has been stabilised. Rickford Farm Cave has been rediscovered. The landowner does not want general access as the cave is in the middle of their nicely landscaped garden and mud from

the cave will make a mess on their driveway. The traverse rope in Waterwheel Swallet has been replaced. Holme Close needs a new lid. When that is in place, access will be allowed.

For next year, CSCC is looking at approx.. £3 - £4k for the new lids.

DCA Report from VK

VK reported that a lot of work is being done at Great Masson Mine. There are three caves on the new owners' property. They would like work done on lids etc.

DCUC

No report received.

Any other reports/comments:

JG asked if anyone is involving Natural England in any projects in their area.

AH said that when consents are needed under SSSI schedules, they do obtain them.

LJW said the same for the CCC Ltd caves she deals with.

AH suggested the group asks Hannah Townley from NE to a future meeting. VK asked for her contact details.

JP would like to add the UKCCEF constitution as an appendix to the minutes. One of objects is to assist with the purchase of land, which is why she invited FoDCCAG to apply. She also commented that FoDCCAG is included on the UKCCEF panel as they were in existence when it was formed. DCUC is not included as the separation from CSCC had not happened at that stage.

Any Other Business

JG commented that we haven't involved ourselves international maybe as much as we should have done. He wonders if engaging more with international bodies would lend weight to what is being done in the UK. John is now on the UIS bureau. They have a Karst and Cave Protection Commission. He said we should be letting people know how we are protecting and cleaning our caves. The group agreed we would look at this more going forwards.

Date of next meeting

21st January 2026 at 7.30pm by Zoom