



BCA Annual General Meeting Monday 3th June 2024

The meeting was held via Zoom starting at 7.00

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1) Welcome from the Chair

Russell welcomed everyone to the 2024 AGM. He commented that it was a pretty good turnout looking at the list of attendees.

2)Apologies

Steve Holding, Bob Mehew, Ged Champion.

Attendance and declaration of Quorum

Russell Myers, Allan Richardson, Chris Bolton, Jenny Potts, James Waite, Aodhán Ó Gabhann, Andy Eavis, Raymond Bell, Tom Phillips, Andrew Hinde, Tony Radmall, Karen Lydon, John Gunn, Chris Boardman, Lydia de Brett, Linda Wilson, Aidan Kuhlmann, Janice Walker, Zac Woodford, Graham Mullen, Tobias Turner, Wen Soong Chua, Kai Trusson, Rostam Namaghi, Alan Clark, Dave Linton, Violet Han, Lizzie Caisley, Adrian Jones, Ian Ball, John Sneed, Tom Jackson, Mike Higgins, Jess Brock, Carolina Smith, Rosa Brew, Oliver Phillis, Isaac Neale, Amelia Oliver, Harry Kettle, Jonathan Lester, Steph Jones, Liam McCarthy, Jonty Pine, Lara Bartleet.

The meeting was declared to be quorate.

3)AOB

None declared.

4)Acceptance of the Minutes of the 2023 AGM

Prop Jenny Potts
Second Graham Mullan

Abstention Aodhán Ó Gabhann
Rest in favour passed

5)Action Items and Proposals arising from the 2023 AGM

There were no action items or proposals arising from the 2023 AGM

6)Reports

Chairman

This will be my final AGM as Chair as I am standing down from the position after four and a half years first as Secretary and then as Chair of BCA; I feel I have “paid my dues” and look forward to “retirement”. It has been an interesting, indeed, fascinating period of time since I volunteered to help BCA in April 2020 and a real privilege to represent British Caving and the caving community at large.

I feel that the intervening period between now and the Covid year has seen a marked shift in attitudes towards running organisations such as ours, where previously we could rely on a steady stream of volunteers to undertake the many and varied functions necessary to make the Association work. We are not alone in having difficulty recruiting volunteers as I hear similar concerns from

other organisations but inevitably this has meant us engaging paid staff to perform specific key functions.

Having said that, we do now seem to be turning a corner with volunteers coming forward to fill key positions and none more so than the Treasurer's when Council co-opted Chris Bolton. Chris has done a sterling job since his arrival, unfortunately delivering bad news that our finances need a big boost in revenue and inevitably an increase in subscriptions. Put in perspective, this is less than a pint of beer in my neighbourhood but I won't steal Chris' thunder and let him explain the situation in his report.

We have struggled to fill other key positions and despite getting some outside help, I feel that we have not really performed very well at promoting BCA and explaining what benefits the Association provides to members. Insurance is the oft quoted reason for being a member but BCA's brief is wider than that, providing funding for a range of benefits that go largely unnoticed in the caving community, such as financing the regional councils underpinning access and conservation to name some obvious examples.

If you have "dangled" off a modern era i.e. 21st century anchor, it will, in all probability, have been funded by BCA and installed by volunteers. If you are reading this having "dangled" off such an anchor or indeed, benefitted in other ways and you are not a BCA member, get your hand in your pocket and join up!

I must thank the many individuals who supported me in so many ways during my term in office. I'm tempted to name them but that would be at risk of missing someone out; suffice to say you know who you are, your help has been much appreciated. On top of that, I must give credit to our paid staff for the service they provide to us all. Working in the background, they do ensure BCA keeps ticking along and I would go so far as to say, that what they do for us, is above and beyond expectations and a pleasure to have worked with them.

Finally, I am leaving BCA in a better shape than I first found it and whilst not claiming any spectacular successes or innovative ideas, do feel it has stabilised into a business-like, functioning organisation providing support to the national caving community. Long may it remain so because, at the end of the day, it is all about ensuring we can go caving.

Kind Regards
Russell Myers
Chair
BCA
19th May 2024

Graham Mullan proposed a vote of thanks
Second Linda Wilson

All in favour Passed

Secretaries Report to the AGM

I was originally co-opted as Secretary, taking over from Russell, then elected on a three year appointment.

The work of the Secretary doesn't vary that much, setting up agenda's and writing minutes of meetings are the Secretaries bread and butter.

Having said that there is a lot more to the job than just meetings administration.

Answering queries from members and the General Public, offering advice where necessary or referring queries to the appropriate person, be they a BCA Officer, Regional Councils or whoever. I don't keep a count of how many queries I get, but it must be between 150 and 200 a year. As part of the executive I have been involved in the decision making processes, here my wide ranging underground and work experiences have come in useful, most recently I have been involved in the discussions on the adoption of "JustGo" Membership Management system. The lack of an IT Convener over the past year has made life more difficult, as it has not been possible to publish details of meetings on the Web Page, with the appointment of an IT convener that will make life easier.

I am standing again as Secretary as I still have the energy and interest to continue my involvement with BCA.

Allan Richardson
19th May 2024

No comments or additions.
No questions to the Secretary.

Treasurer's Report for AGM

The March Council meeting co-opted me as BCA Treasurer, a vacant role since Howard Jones' term finished the previous June. That meeting approved the budget for 2024, with a deficit of £27.5k. Previous deficits were for specific reasons like COVID or CRoW but 2024 is a routine year.

The 2023 accounts are online. Expenditure this year is broadly in line with the budget. Just over half the membership fees pay the Insurance Premium (cover now £20m). Less than one sixth goes on admin and IT, and one tenth to the BCRA Library. Slightly more to the Regional Councils, delivering caver training, cave access and conservation and local liaison. Other expenditure includes Youth and Development and a grant to the Ghar Parau Foundation for expeditions.

Being new to BCA, I spent time understanding the accounts and reading minutes of Council meetings going back many years. People told me that BCA had pots of spare money, and it needed spending. That is out of date. Ten years ago, we had so much money we cut membership fees then again five years later, when the Treasurer wrote that the spare money should be spent for the benefit of cavers. It has now been spent.

Not all the money was spare. The need for an insurance reserve has been fundamental since the founding of BCA. A big claim could result in the premium being doubled; if unpaid, insurance would stop, along with access to the caves where the landowners required it. A general reserve is held against less specific events, the amount tied to annual income. By the end of 2024, funds will be down to those minimum levels. If the deficit continued, BCA was heading for a crash.

I recommended, and Council decided, that we should increase fees just sufficiently to level out the dive. Over the next 2 or 3 years we may see small deficits but I didn't feel we could ask members for more at the moment. We need to understand that BCA no longer has money to spare. We will continue to fund things that benefit all cavers. No BCA funded activity will have to stop, but there

may be more cost-effective ways and BCA should not be the only place to ask for money. In parallel, I will lead a risk analysis to understand if the amount we hold in general reserve is appropriate and if we can avoid risks rather than carry funds to recover from problems.

Every penny that BCA spends comes from cavers' pockets.

BCA unfortunately has a reputation for not communicating with cavers. This is a result of too few volunteers and too much work, rather than an attempt to hide things. To be more open, I posted my conclusions about the BCA's finances on UK Caving and I'm pleased there was a positive reaction.

Bookkeeping is now done by Karen Lydon, who works part time for BCA. This has given me time to look at strategic issues. As Treasurer, I'm also a member of the BCA Executive. This is a busy role and one that I'm still settling into, as most decisions require a good knowledge of the background. It's also fallen to me to be the Exec's technical liaison for IT.

Looking ahead, I will be reviewing BCA's financial processes and discussing the budgets for 2025 with the Working Group Conveners and Regional Treasurers. I also need to confirm that we're following all the legal requirements for an organisation of BCA's type.

I look forward to working with our new Chair and building on the stability that Russell, Allan and the present Council have achieved.

Chris Bolton
20 May 2024

Chris added to his report that the increase in subs was the minimum necessary to survive on, any more would not have been acceptable to some of the membership. We have to watch what we are spending as we don't want to end up like the BMC with a huge deficit. In my approximate judgement we are going to spend something like what is in our budget this year, but because I don't really understand how the budget was made up, we might end up £15,000 overspent or underspent. Next year I will be asking everybody for a more detailed budget, whilst accepting that things change and that there are things we don't know about, so that I have a better idea whether we are spending what we should be spending or are we going to overspend. I want to make the accounts more informative so that people can see where their money is going. The Regions spend about 11% of our budget and do a great job with it, I don't want them to stop doing what they are doing due to us watching the budget.

Andy Eavis asked about the reserves, Chris replied that we had about £165,000 at the end of last year, we will make a £27,000 deficit this year, We have an £80,000 insurance reserve and a £50,000 general reserve so we don't have any spare reserve.

Andy Eavis asked about putting up fees next year, Chris replied that he didn't wish to do that, and that the current fee increase will mean that we are roughly neutral next year. Chris added that he was going to do a review to see if the amount of general reserve is actually necessary, as at the moment he was only able to go on policies that the Council have agreed previously.

FSE delegate report to BCA AGM June 2024.

The FSE has a membership of 30 countries.

The FSE's last General Assembly Meeting (GAM) was held in May 2023 at the German National Congress in Breitscheid, Germany. This was also labelled a Eurospeleo Forum.

The work of the bureau continues to be conducted by exchange of emails, regular update meetings held online which since February have included commission leads and the newsletter editor. A new working group on 'Children and Young Cavers' was established at the last GAM and the BCA have contributed to a survey that was sent out to all FSE member countries. The findings of the survey can be found in the last FSE newsletter. EuroSpeleo Projects (ESPs) sponsoring and supporting caving expeditions, events, and projects from member countries. Last year there were two successful applications for funding from the UK, for expeditions to Austria and Lebanon. This year the FSE has received three new applications from CUCC expedition to Austria, Imperial College exploration in Slovenia and the Ario expedition. All which have been successful.

The next GAM of the FSE will be held at the 16 th Eurospeleo Forum at Syphonia 24 in Caselle Pittari, Southern Italy on 1 st November.

I will be stepping down from the position of FSE representative for the BCA but have agreed to cover the role until a new rep is appointed at the BCA AGM on 3rd June.

Ged Campion.

Acting BCA delegate to FSE

7)Accounts

The accounts are on the BCA Website.

BCA Membership Report for the 2024 AGM

20th May 2024

[L][SEP]Katie Eavis - Membership administrator

Renewals and membership updates

The busy BCA membership renewal season has now finished. There are a few clubs re-joining late, and also new clubs joining. Clubs also continue to update their membership lists with BCA throughout the year. 2024 renewals have gone well and everything ran relatively smoothly. The main change for membership since the last AGM is the introduction of the ecards, and phasing out plastic cards. There were some delays in launching the ecards, however now they up and running and regularly sent as cavers renew, or new cavers join. [L][SEP]I would like to thank David Gibson for all his work on the ecard system. [L][SEP]I was keen to embrace the change from plastic cards, but didn't have the technical skills to produce and send the ecards on my own. Luckily David Gibson volunteered to help.

Just Go Update

In August last year I started talking to 'Just Go' about the possibility of using their professional membership management system to administrate BCA membership. The BCA qualification

management have been using Just Go for about 3 years and very happy with it. After talking through the BCA requirements and getting quotes BCA council agreed the move to Just Go in December. To make sure the busy renewal time ran smoothly and ensure I had enough time to dedicate to the move it was decided to start working with Just Go in the spring. At this point Just Go have mostly set up an online platform to meet our membership needs. They are currently working to upload our 2024 membership data. Once this is complete there will be some time to check the system works how we want it to, and tweak anything that needs changing. We will also use this time to ensure the interaction between the qualifications and membership sides works ok. Once we are happy Just Go will go live for BCA membership – currently estimated at mid June. Individual members will be able to use Just Go to manage their BCA membership and I will help clubs with using Just go to add members and get to grips with it all, before renewal time 2025.

Social Media and UK caving

I have been using facebook and Ukcaving to help BCA stay in touch with its membership. My diverse role within the BCA (membership, looking after the artificial cave, being involved in the library) means I am in good position to post regular news, data and information on BCA and what it is up to.

No questions to Membership

British Caving Library Report to BCA AGM, 3 June 2024

The British Caving Library (BCL) continues to expand its work and the services it offers to British cavers and others, including overseas enquirers, non-cavers and even UK “officialdom”. (The Natural History Museum wanted information on insects collected during a 1940’s caving expedition to the Himalayas - we were able to supply this from Brigadier Glennie’s papers.) We continue to track the varying division between enquiries which simply request a scan of an item, as opposed to those which require us to carry out some research for the enquirer and may involve many hours of work. It is encouraging that so many of those we assist make a monetary donation to the Library, including substantial amounts from overseas.

There is increasing use of the Library for meetings and events: BCA Trainer Assessor groups, BCRA and DCA Council Meetings, a Conservation & Access Event run by a local club with visiting speakers, etc. We are able to manage these meetings face-to-face and online as well, allowing people to participate via our online systems. We have also hosted a BCRA Field Meeting. Visitors wanting to do their own research are once again a regular feature, though much of our work in dealing with enquiries is dealt with online and by sending scans of material.

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

The large collection of BSA/Simpson archive material, currently on permanent loan from the Library to the British Geological Survey (BGS) at Keyworth, is in the process of being made accessible to enquirers online via BCRA cloud storage. This is being achieved by the co-operation of BGS staff in Keyworth and Edinburgh, caver volunteers from Grampian Speleological Group

doing the scanning and our volunteer IT experts. The project is now in its final stages, after some 15 years of effort, so we hope it will go live before too long.

The backlog of archive surveys and maps from the pre-war and Simpson era catalogued by our two volunteers is being stored at Glutton Bridge with the end of this project now in sight, although more such material continues to come in in the form of donations. Cataloguing the backlog of modern surveys and maps is now almost complete, thanks to our Library Assistant and volunteers, and these will gradually be incorporated into the online bibliography/catalogue. New surveys coming in can now be added to the catalogue as they arrive.

Among the donations of items we receive, many from the relative of deceased cavers, are large numbers of duplicates. We never throw away publications but arrange for them to be passed on to other clubs or cavers - in one case we are helping to restock a club library lost due to flooding. The reappearance of Hidden Earth last year enabled us to take a large amount of duplicate publications to pass on via our "Library Lucky Dip" stand, leading to donations to the Library funds amounting to £155 from cavers who helped themselves to publications and surveys.

We receive a steady stream of archive material of all kinds and are making as much as possible of this accessible online, either through the Library website or by using separate cloud storage. We are looking into the best way to safeguard such material, hence we were particularly grateful to receive a legacy of £1000 from the late David St. Pierre. As well as archives on Svalbard caves and Grotto Casteret, David also left us his collection of books, most of these have been added to the Library holdings while some, which were duplicates, are being offered first to the Norwegian caving group to whom he left other material.

The increasing amount of archive material we are being offered has already made BCL, de facto, the British Caving Archive and we maintain links with other caving or independent organisations which hold collections of caving archives (the Wells Museum is an example of the latter). We appreciate that this has implications for storage and costs and we are taking steps to assess what we might need to do to manage such collections.

BCL grew out of the former BCRA Library in 2009, thanks to co-operation and a promise of funding from BCA; so it is now managed by BCRA but funded by both BCRA and BCA. During this time the Library has progressed immeasurably from being a paper only collection, accessible at the Derbyshire Local Studies Library only on weekdays and occasional Saturday mornings with almost no use being made of it. BCL is now accessible online at any time; there is a knowledgeable Librarian, Library Assistants or volunteers to help with enquiries or provide scans which can be emailed to you; it deals with both British and international enquirers; it contains standard publications such as books, periodicals, maps and surveys; items stored electronically and an increasing number of archive collections; it is becoming a centre for meetings and events. Hundreds of cavers and others have used our services since 2009. So in this, BCL's 15th. Anniversary Year, we can perhaps celebrate a little.

Oh, and we also plant trees.

Jenny Potts, BCRA Library Co-ordinator
15-5-24

Nothing to add and no questions to the Library.

P&I Report

Having only just taken on the role several days before writing this report, I do not, at this time, have much *to* report. I will instead put forward my vague plans for my time in the role.

Initially I wish to work on re-organising the BCA's P&I team to better enable it to efficiently collect information on the organization and the community and then disseminate that information in such a way as to reach the majority of the caving community. Much of this work will be on devising policies and procedures for the team to follow.

During this work, I also intend to compile and release several info-graphics on the structure of the BCA alongside the functions of each of its groups. This is to make the organization more transparent in a way that people can better understand and engage with.

My long term objective is to begin publishing caving content to the general public, via the platform of the BCA, with the aim of giving people outside the caving community a better understanding of what it is we do as a community. However, the policy work stated above is a prerequisite to be able to do this properly.

Of course, all of this is subject to change and I would greatly appreciate the expertise and feedback of those in the community. While I do have some experience in this field I will be learning and growing with the role so I ask for a little of your patience while I get settled in.

Zac Woodford, 20/05/2024

No questions to the P&I rep.

Retiring UIS Representative Report **to BCA AGM – Monday 3rd June 2024**

Since last BCA, AGM June 2023, UIS has had a consolidation year getting the new bureau in place and working on a number of objectives, but not particularly concentrating on the next international congress which will be in Brazil in 2025 between 20th and 27th July.

The French international congress of July 2022 was a spectacular affair, and the debriefing has been going on to try and have an even better one in Brazil.

As normal, a bureau meeting was held two years before the international congress I attended this bureau meeting in July 2023. It was in conjunction with the annual congress of the Brazilian Speleological Society and was a very impressive affair. Brazil has a lot of limestone, a lot of caves and a lot of limestone mining. Quite a lot of money comes from the mining to the cavers to try and minimise the damage to the caves and karst. It does result in probably less damage than would otherwise happen, and quite a considerable amount of finance going into Brazilian caving.

This will certainly be the case at the international congress which will be a lavish affair and extremely good value, as the Brazilian mining companies will be paying a lot towards it. We as cavers should take advantage of this, and as many people as possible sign up to be in Brazil in July 2025. The Brazilians are looking at airlines sponsoring the congress and flying people from around the world into Belo Horizonte. We will let BCA know what offers come up!!!

After this in-person bureau meeting there were a number of Zoom meetings. An application for full membership of the International Science Council was proposed. It would seem this has now been granted. This is an excellent step forward for the UIS and the reputation of caving. Full marks and great thanks to Nadja Zupan and her team which included John Gunn Chairperson of BCRA

The next in person meeting of the UIS bureau will be in Yogyakarta in Indonesia from 10th to 16th August 2024. This is at the Trans Karst Conference organised by the Asia Pacific Regional branch of the UIS. Prior to this, many of the bureau members are visiting Mulu - a trip that I am organising.

Another main event within the UIS is a proposal for an International Day of Caves and karst, a follow on from the international year of caves and karst, which had over five hundred events during 2021 and 2022. It was a pretty good success but of course hampered by covid and lockdown, and the fact that it was not fully official under UNESCO. It is hoped the day of caves and karst will be an official UNESCO day. It has been put forward by the UIS president Nadja Zupan in conjunction with Slovenia's national commission to UNESCO. UIS is looking for further support from other countries that are part of UNESCO.

There will be a few more bureau meetings by internet between now and the congress in Brazil.

This will probably be my last official report to BCA Council as Ged Campion has now passed over his role reporting on the European Speleological Federation, and as adjunct Secretary of UIS, Ged will take over as the official representative of the United Kingdom and report to BCA Council. I have been doing it for 38 years.

I will continue as Honorary President of UIS which is a lifelong position and attend, as in the past, most of the bureau meetings, both physically and digitally. I wish Ged has as much enjoyment of activities within UIS as I have had. I hope he can attend all or most of the meetings. I will continue to be self-funded, but if there are funds available for maintaining a United Kingdom presence within international speleology it should be channelled towards Ged and Allan Richardson, the new European Federation representative.

I hope to see everyone at the AGM, but I will be travelling at the time, so it will depend on the internet connection.

Andy Eavis
May 15, 2024

Andy added about the next International Congress in Brazil, there is a very strong caving membership in Brazil, so it could be very cheap and lavish, they are also talking about organizing airplanes to get people there, so watch this space.

No questions to the UIS rep.

Russell proposed that we accept all the above reports.

All in favour, passed.

Chris Bolton asked on behalf of a member about reports from Working Groups, Allan reported that he had not received any, Rostam said that one was on its way from Y&D, Russell pointed out that it should be going to Council not the AGM, as Working Groups report to Council.

It is important that the Working Groups try to get their reports to the next Council meeting, as one of the main Agenda items for that meeting will be consideration of working Groups and their conveners.

8) Election of BCA Council Members for vacancies arising in 2024

There are three posts up for Election

Chairman

Rostam Namaghi (10644)

Proposed by Josh White (14859)

Seconded by Jonathan Lester (17140)

Treasurer

Chris Bolton (07006)

Proposed by Russell Myers (00708)

Allan Richardson (00022)

Secretary

Allan Richardson (00022)

Proposed by Russell Myers (00708)

Seconded by Jenny Potts (00062)

Aidan Kuhlmann

Proposed by Rostam Namaghi (10644)

Seconded by Pete Knight (9362)

9) Election Statements

Chairman

Rostam Namaghi

My name's Rostam and I'm running for chair. I've been heavily involved in caving for 15 years, having started with Sheffield University (SUSS). I was lucky enough to have come through following a group of very inspiring cavers who had fought with the union to keep the club in existence. When it came to my time at the helm we'd had a few poor years of recruitment and we had to change the way we did things, lent on the Alumni, the TSG and many other cavers.

We were lucky. I realised this after talking to other clubs and hearing their similar problems. I thought I had useful advice to give and so I joined the BCA Council as the Youth and Development Officer. It wasn't possible to do everything myself and so a working group was formed. I brought in some brilliant people, such as Josh White and Will Whalley. Over 5 years we helped start 4 new caving clubs, lobbied on behalf of the scouts and student clubs, made membership free to the under 18s and helped provide training and networking opportunities that helped CHECC grow.

I went on to serve a further 2 years in Publications and Information, wanting to develop the services that BCA could offer its members and more importantly track and manage our demographic data.

This brings me to my main focus in volunteering - we have a golden legacy. Where we've got to took a lot of work, a lot of physical, financial and emotional investment over many years. We now have maybe a third of the cavers than we did in the 1980s. It's not just bricks and mortar either, think of the impacts of Ghar Parau has had in developing expeditions, of the BCRA or the Cave Research Electronics Group's impact in developing knowledge of caves and caving, it then hurts to think of struggles with recruitment and finding the right younger volunteers. There's a coming demographic cliff and it needs some proactive effort to manage.

I stood for Chair 3 years ago because the position I was put in made it impossible for me to continue, which reflects a continuing dysfunction still at the heart of BCA. Large numbers of posts remain unfilled, minutes often take months to a year to be published and there is very poor communication with the membership. As critical as I am, I don't think this is an issue with any one person, and it will take more than one person and more than one term to fix. I am standing again because I think I can bring the people in and put the procedures in place. We have good volunteers wanting to step up.

The potential of BCA is huge, we've got a tight knit community and a large centralised funding pot. Where we've not quite taken the next step is looking after and developing our volunteers, which is my main strength and why I think I'd be good for the role as Chair. We need to bring back clear procedure at meetings, communicate more with the membership and be far more transparent. We need to focus on helping our members be what they can be by proactively supporting our clubs, sharing what works and helping bolstering

organisations in need of more volunteers.

We can make changes and the future is really bright, there are so many enthusiastic cavers coming through and so many passionate cavers that want to pass on what they've learned.

In the meeting Rostam added that having had 2.5 years away from BCA, he felt that there were a lot of good people coming through, who we need to support and develop. We have had numerous things hit the organisation, as a result this has hit our competency and capability without necessarily growing our financial commitments. I am very optimistic so yes please vote for me.

Ian Ball asked about tenure, Russell replied that all executive positions are for 3 years. Rostam pointed out that originally they were staggered, he would be looking into re-staggering the process.

Chris Boardman stated that he really appreciated that Russell had been able to attend the many Committee meetings in BCA eg QMC, he wondered whether Rostam would have the time as you must be very busy with your job, perhaps you could spread the load out amongst the executive or other volunteers, so that there could be representation at that level. Rostam replied that one of the things he intends to do is attend every Regional Council meeting in the next half year, to get an appreciation of where people are coming from and where they are going. I have also noticed that we need to make a more conscious effort going forward to attract volunteers, with more of the senior people actually mentoring and bringing young people through. We need to create a volunteer ethos in BCA as at present its a more of a bureaucratic rubber stamp. Discussions on Zoom have meant that we have lost the element of discussion and development of volunteers, not wishing to go back to the marathon 8 or 10 hour meetings, but there was a balance to be had and it would like to go back to face to face meetings.

Tom Phillips asked how would he go about supporting CHECC? Rostam replied that he had been heavily involved with Y&D for 5 or 6 years prior to moving to P&I, he was still involved in the background. In the future he wanted to become more hands off and allow those who have followed me to be in the driving seat.

Chris Boardman asked for another member, what did Rostam think was his greatest weakness, Rostam replied that he had just demonstrated giving short answers, Chris replied "I like that"

Andy Eavis said that as Rostam was a medical Doctor, he was going to be short of time, so he thought that would be Rostam's biggest weakness. He was pleased that Rostam was talking about delegation, in his time as chairman it was successful. Andy recommended party weekends for getting people to sign up to get involved with BCA.

Treasurer

Chris Bolton

I am standing for Treasurer because the role is vacant and somebody needs to do it. It's important for caving in the UK that BCA works effectively to fund the regional councils, manage insurance

and co-ordinate qualifications, technical aspects and other cross regional topics. The present Council have overcome the toxic reputation that BCA had in some quarters, but volunteers have been unwilling to come forward. BCA remains under resourced and this affects what it can do and cavers' perception of it.

The BCA needs to communicate with cavers and demonstrate that it is working in their interests. I have no ambition to change what BCA does, but the way it does it needs to be sharpened up. As Treasurer, I will maintain a view of the organisation's budget and risks so that Council can make informed decisions. Finance underpins all activities, so needs to be well understood.

A trend among all national sporting bodies, to which BCA is vulnerable, is the increasing need to employ staff to do things which used to be done by volunteers. There are two ways to address this. Firstly, BCA must maximise volunteer effort by making it clear that volunteers are welcomed and respected. Second, the only source of funds to pay staff is the BCA membership, and cavers need to be convinced that BCA is doing a good job for them.

Why do I think I can do a good job as Treasurer for the BCA? I'm a caver, a logical thinker with an eye for detail, and I have considerable experience as a committee member and volunteer Treasurer in more than one type of organisation.

My first caves were with Scouts in the 1970s, then a short revival in 2006 curtailed by other pressures and eventually a more committed return, now that I'm retired from work, in 2022. I'm a member of Derbyshire CC and Craven PC.

I have no financial qualifications but am numerate and understand both the benefits and pitfalls of spreadsheets. My background is in design engineering, which I define as the analysis of problems and development of solutions.

I was Treasurer for the North West Region of British Canoeing from 1988-1990, and Chair for 3 years after that, with a seat on the national Council. In 1999 I was Chair of the Earthquake Engineering Field Investigation Team. That brought me to the attention of my own professional body, The Institution of Structural Engineers, following which I had 8 years on their Council and 5 years on their Trustee Board, including two as Honorary Treasurer. This was a strategic role, providing advice on financial matters to the other Trustees and maintaining an oversight; the Institution had an annual turnover of £5-6million and employed professional accountants. As BCA Treasurer I will address both the strategic and (in co-operation with the bookkeeper) the 'hands-on' aspects.

I look forward to being part of a team to take BCA forward and ensure that it can deliver the needs of UK cavers.

Chris Bolton, 4th March 2024

Nothing to add and no questions.

Secretary

Allan Richardson

I was introduced to the underground world via mine exploration, exploring the old mines and looking for minerals in the Northern Pennines and Lake District, after a year or two of this I went to College where I was told that due to my experience, I was now in charge of the caving section, having never been down a cave. However many years of underground exploration in different parts of the World, have given me the opportunity to gain a great deal of experience in the world of caving and mine exploring. I wish to continue to give back to the sport the enjoyment and experience that I have gained over the years.

I was elected Secretary three years ago after being initially co-opted to fill the vacancy, it is an interesting post to occupy, as you are normally the first point of contact for the BCA. I am regularly contacted by a wide range of people and organisations, many of whom are cavers but not all. We are seen by the public as the go to organisation for all things underground, the requests vary from the mundane to the downright bizarre, but all have to be handled with tact and diplomacy, it helps that I have been a caver for more years than I care to remember, and that along the way I have made many contacts both at home and abroad.

So apart from carrying out the necessary meeting administration I have been involved in other BCA activities, as a member of the Executive I have taken part in the decision making process on a range of matters, one of the most recent was to be involved in the discussion and signing off on the "Just Go" membership system, this system will make the life of the Membership Secretary much easier. It will also enable us to more easily contact the membership, currently this is a problem which we have been trying to solve, as communication with our members is paramount.

You may have noticed a lack of communication from BCA over the past year, as up until just recently we have had neither an IT Convener or Treasurer. Previously the Minutes of BCA meetings were published in a timely fashion on the BCA Website, as well as being circulated to all the Regional Bodies as required. A number of people said that they could access the website and publish details of meetings etc, when it came to it, they were unable to. We were able to get some information onto the website but this was not a permanent solution. This lack of BCA Officers was not for want of trying, a number of people were approached, the positions were advertised etc. The problem has recently been solved as we now have an IT Convener and a Treasurer.

I would like to carry on as Secretary, as I believe in giving back to the sport that which I have enjoyed for so long.

Allan Richardson

Aidan Kuhlmann

I'm standing for election as Secretary of the BCA against the incumbent Allan Richardson on a platform of transparency.

During his four years as Secretary Allan has consistently failed to publish agendas and minutes, a core element of the role. At the time of writing (beginning of April) the minutes of the 2023 AGM remain unpublished and not uploaded on the BCA website and no minutes have been published or uploaded for any General Meeting since February 2023.

This failure to publish these documents has unfortunately meant the BCA has an Executive Officer who has consistently failed to abide by the far from onerous requirement contained within the Manual of Operations to publish draft minutes “No later than eight weeks after” the meeting. Furthermore, the Manual of Operation clearly states, “the Secretary should: Upload them to the BCA website”.

Additionally, in his reports at both General Meetings and AGMs Allan has consistently failed to even approach the necessary amount of detail such a report should contain, despite having previously acknowledged requests to remedy this, with the average word count for such reports of those publicly available being a mere 79.

Unfortunately, I believe such failings are a leading cause behind why so many Cavers & Mine Explorers feel the BCA is an opaque and inaccessible organisation that does little for them besides provide public liability insurance. This opacity means that it is very hard for those who don't have friends in high places to hold the organisation to account for its actions, decision-making processes, or to simply just have an idea about what's going on. It certainly cannot help the BCA when dealing with other organisations.

I myself am an active North Wales based (but far from limited) club caver and mine explorer with strong links to the student community, who some may know professionally through my work as a freelance outdoor instructor. I have been the chair, secretary, treasurer, and held various technical roles in several sporting clubs and societies in the past. I also work doing coding and databasing work for a well-known outdoor equipment retailer and if one were curious about any academic qualifications I hold relevant to the role, I have a degree in law.

I believe the BCA can do far better and I want to combat the democratic deficit this lack of publication has created so that it can become an open, accessible, and accountable organisation.

In the meeting Aidan added that he had been a caver for a long time, grew up in the Dales. In the last couple of years I have been heavily involved in setting up University of Bangor Caving Club, which was the first start of a student club to be successful, I also helped with the Birmingham start up.

I would like to see better publication of reports and meetings, just to keep everyone involved and to dispel the idea that BCA is a faceless organisation, which obviously isn't true as we got loads of faces in front of us.

Andy Eavis commented that Russell and Allan have had a pretty rough time over the last few years, it wasn't helped by Covid, they had it pretty tough.

I agree with quite a lot of what you say in your report, but I would like you to have been more positive about what you are going to do to put these things right, I am sure this is what you mean but it would have been nice for you to have said so.

Aidan replied that hindsight was a wonderful thing, I hadn't realised about the challenging times which they persevered through during Covid when I wrote those things, so yes I'm very impressed. Certainly I wouldn't have been able to do that if I had been there. So yes I would like to write those things but equally Allan has done an incredibly good job at the time.

Ian Ball commented that the majority of your statement is about the publication of information which is great, eg for Working Groups, would you be interested in setting out some sort of, I hate to say Newsletter because that's a big undertaking, but as a normal member I don't really see anything from these groups about what they are discussing and I don't know how to find information from them more easily, do you see that as a Secretarial role, if so how would you approach it
Aidan replied that his big gripe coming to BCA that he couldn't find minutes, I was helped in this by some people on Working Groups. I would be keen to see meeting notes published on the Website, Descent or advertising space.

Russel asked does that answer the question, Ian said yes, then asked if he could ask Allan the same question, which was "is it part of the Secretary's role to publish information about what BCA is doing" and if it is how would you go about it?

Allan replied is that not why we have a P&I Officer. Certainly as Secretary it is my role to publish Agendas and Minutes of Council meetings, if I get other information, then yes I pass it on, but there's no BCA policy about that. We haven't had a P&I Officer for some time, now we have one who is interested and has ideas, I would have to be careful that I wasn't treading on their toes.

Russell pointed out that we are dealing with volunteers, who to some extent are under an obligation to report their activities to Council, getting these reports is not easy. In the grand scheme of things we would have a Council meeting where all the Working Groups could present their reports, these would then be included into the Minutes of that meeting, posted on the website etc.

Rostam clarified on the P&I role, they originally were not a publicity person, but were managing all the publications that came out.

Amelia Oliver and Isaac Neale of CHECC asked what would both candidates consider their biggest weakness to be?

Allan replied that in my case having an overinflated belief in what I can do, taking on too much, for example I am Secretary of a number of groups, basically because I was asked to. Having said that, your weakness is best pointed out by someone else

Aidan replied that he was probably obsessive about the formatting of things, as this does my head in, but otherwise just being busy.

Individual Representatives (two positions)

1) Andy Eavis (07816)

Proposed by Russell Myers (00708)

Seconded Allan Richardson (00022)

Andy reported to the meeting that with the exception of Jenny he had attended more Council meetings than anyone else, he found himself attending the meetings as the UIS rep. As the position was vacant he thought he would stand for it. He said he was a great fan of BCA and BCRA and would continue to attend meetings anyway.

2)Jess Brock (14504)
Proposed by Zac Woodford (19834)
Seconded Janice Walker (18557)

Hello I'm Jess Brock. I would like to run for individual rep as I have been caving my whole life. I started up in Yorkshire with the Northern Pennine Club and then at Uni I joined the University of Bristol's club where I joined the committee and rebuilt the training programme. On this committee I was driven and devoted to make improvements within the club and implement structures to aid future years and successful handovers. As a student I have really enjoyed the CHECC community and want to help diversify the student body. In this role I would be driven and dedicated to the caving community as I have been for the past twenty one years.

Many Thanks,
Jess

At the meeting Jess said she had been caving all her life, having grown up in caving clubs especially the NCC, I'm very involved with the student community and I'm really dedicated and organized, especially within my student council. I have done a lot to put structures in place to make caving safe, exciting and accessible for everyone.

Group Representative (two positions)

1)Jenny Potts (00062)
Proposed Russell Myers (00708)
Seconded Allan Richardson (00022)

Group Member Representative, Jenny Potts – (current term ending 2024)

I joined Derbyshire-based Orpheus Caving Club in 1965 and have caved with the club all over the UK and Ireland as well as abroad in Europe, the USA and Canada. During Club visits to Arctic Norway in the 1960s, '70s and '80s I was involved in discovery and surveying of new caves.

I have held various roles within Orpheus (as well as in DCA, NCA, BCRA and BCA), including: newsletter editor, cottage booking secretary, librarian, treasurer, secretary and chairman. In 1992 I was part of the group of cavers who organised the survey that eventually led to the introduction of club membership for the NCA, in turn leading the transformation of NCA into the BCA, with introduction of individual membership.

Other major projects I have been involved with on a national scale include proposing the subject of access to caves as part of the CRoW Act, becoming the first leader of the BCA CRoW working party. I helped to set up the British Caving Library, subsequently becoming responsible for its organisation and running.

I am a supporter of the continuing evolution of BCA into a national body that all British cavers can be proud to be a part of.

2)Aodhán Ó Gabhann (14960)
Proposed by Linda Wilson (02552)

Seconded Janice Walker (18557)

For those who don't know me I am a rather enthusiastic caver within Ireland who with a touch of whiskey and the promise of adventure also seems to wind-up in my fair share of UK caves from time to time.

I feel I would be a good candidate for the position of group representative on the BCA committee due to my experience of representing the interests of both Irish and Northern Irish cavers as chairperson of the Speleological Union of Ireland for the last year and a half. As well as my previous experience within the DCU caving club's committee and more than 10 years of underground exploration.

If elected I would like to use my position to build upon the long standing relations between UK and Irish cavers and to provide a voice for the interests of cavers from the Northern Irish region on the BCA committee. I hope my joint representation on both committees will help to strengthen the long standing cooperation between the BCA and SUI and open the door to further cross border support and collaboration between our two organizations and associated clubs.

Is mise, Le meas,
Aodhán

I felt that to represent all Irish cavers, getting involved with BCA as a Group Representative would be the best way forward, so that we can align Irish and UK caving on a more common basis. Currently I live in Co Mayo, but I am from Northern Ireland originally.

10)Proposals

There have been no proposals put forward.

11)AOB

None declared

At the meeting Chris Bolton pointed out that we have to appoint a scrutineer, but if it is not possible at the AGM then it can be done by Council.

12)Date of next AGM

To be decided at a Council meeting.

The general feeling was that a midweek evening was best, with their being no objections to it being on a Monday, Council to decide.