

BCA Newsletter

Number 20 - April 2015

This newsletter was originally only published as a web page but has been re-created as this PDF in July 2019.

Annual General Meeting & Party Weekend

Another reminder that the AGM & Party will be held in conjunction with the BCRC Conference over the weekend of 12-14 June at Dean Field Studies Centre, Parkend near Lydney in the Forest of Dean.

Please book early – the organisers need to know numbers in order to arrange coaches for Saturday night. There is a £10 discount if you book by May 10th.

The Booking Form and Guidance Notes are here and can be returned electronically.

The Conference Secretary is GCRG Chairman, Paul Taylor, who tells us:

For those arriving on the Friday evening there will be a well stocked bar with plenty of Real Ales and the opportunity to have a good chat till the early hours.

There will be a full programme of Rescue related events on Saturday, mostly at the conference venue (although the Rock Splitting is being held at a local quarry. It is much easier to take people to the rocks than the rocks to the people)

The programme includes talks or workshops on Bad air; Casualty Care; Rock Splitting; Stretcher Hauling; Scenes of Crime; Cave Diving; Larkin frame and there will be Mine Cam and European Rescue Techniques demonstrations. Many of these items will be hands on so come prepared to get involved.

There will also be the opportunity to visit many of the local Forest of Dean Caves and Mines. Some of the sites will be pre rigged ready for you so all you have to do is go and enjoy them.

There will be time for a wash and brush up and a couple of pints before boarding a coach at 18.30hrs to the evening event which is being held at Clearwell Caves. This is an old Iron Mine that is now a Tourist attraction and we will have the complex to ourselves for the evening.

A band has been laid on, the meal is underground and there will be films, pictures and a variety of presentations as well as the opportunity to have a look around (Bring a warm coat and a head torch).

Nearly forgot – we also have a Beer, Cider and Whisky Festival on offer.

The return coach is booked for 22.30 hrs and when you get back to the main venue the bar will be open until it closes.....

On Sunday there will be a multi scenario rescue exercise in the Old Ham Iron Mine. Don't be put off - the Forest Mines look more like caves and there will be plenty to involve everyone including Stretcher Carrying, First Aid, Surface and Underground Communications and Surface Control.

The Annual General Meeting itself will begin at 10.30am on Sunday. The Meeting Documents is now available and the Officers' Reports will be published by 6th June.

Caving in the Forest of Dean

With the BCRC Conference/BCA Party in the Forest of Dean it is likely that many cavers will be visiting for the first time. The Forest of Dean Cave Conservation and Access Group (FoDCCAG) Secretary, John Hine, tells us something about the area's history as a caving region and what to expect when we visit:

The three clubs active in the Wye Valley and Forest of Dean have about 250 members and a long history of friendship and co-operation. For 50 years they have provided the bulk of the membership of Gloucester Cave Rescue Group and it is about 20 years since they got together to form (FoDCCAG) and negotiate an access agreement with the Forestry Commission.

Since 1998 this agreement has allowed access to over 170 caves and disused non-coal mines on Forestry Commission land in and around the Forest of Dean. Access is for all cavers with BCA insurance, whether or not they are members of clubs. Permits are available by e-mail following the procedure set out at: <http://www.fodccag.org.uk>.

With other landowners also allowing access to local caves and mines there are almost 200 underground sites which can be visited in the immediate area.

Most cavers will know of Otter Hole, which is undoubtedly the best decorated cave in Britain. Other caves in the area include Wet Sink which, at over 14 km long, is 10th longest in the UK; Miss Grace's Lane Cave, now almost 5km long, is well worth visiting. Redhouse Swallet has almost 2km of quite tough caving and Big Sink, reopened last year after a collapse, is over 1km long with some delightful formations to be seen by those who can reach the end.

Other serious challenges are to be found on both sides of the River Wye. Ban-y-Gor Cave is quite tight in places and Itton North Swallet is about one-third the length of the Daren Cilau entrance series yet takes about the same time to navigate. Woolaston Woods Cave is now over 500m long and work is in progress to make access safe for visiting cavers. The entrance to Seymour's Swallet was stabilised a couple of years ago with financial assistance from BCA who have also recently funded a permanent ladder to allow access to the furthest reaches of Westbury Brook Iron Mine. The upper levels of Clearwell Caves (really a mine) operate as a tourist attraction but the deep levels connect with a series of other local mines Old Ham, Old Bow & Lambsquay to create a complex warren of passages. The lower levels of the Noxon Park Iron Mines are often used for cave diver training and Wigpool Iron Mine contains some stunning formations.

During the conference weekend there will be warden guided visits to Otter Hole and the entrances to Wet Sink, Miss Grace's Lane Cave, Big Sink and Redhouse Swallet will be pre-rigged. There will also be guided visits to Wigpool Iron Mine.

Weil's Disease

BCA has just completed an update of the information on Weil's disease and revamped the webpage. Whilst the chance of catching the disease may be low, it seems that those who do have the misfortune to do so are exposed to a high risk of death if the symptoms are not treated quickly. The web page provides simple information on the disease and a link to more information. Remember if you are suffering from something worse than simple flu symptoms some days after caving, then go and read this page – it might just save your life.

Membership

Our membership currently stands at 158 Clubs and 5,173 individual members (439 Direct & 4734 Club Individual Members).

Once a membership number has been issued it remains with the member for life. The fact that membership number 15,000 was issued in February tells us there has been a significant turnover in members. In fact, number 10,000 was issued in March 2009 and, despite 5,000 new members since then, total numbers have remained fairly constant.

Liability Insurance

In the last edition of the news-sheet Insurance Manager, Nick Williams, explained the policy changes for 2015.

The new policy and the confirmation of cover letter for 2015 are now available. An updated Q & A sheet has been received and will appear as soon as possible.

CROW Update

There has been plenty going on behind the scenes since the poll result and some of it was highlighted in the last newsletter. Since then BCA Secretary, Damian Weare, published a summary of recent progress in mid-March.

Even more recently the BCA Chairman, Andy Eavis, and Conservation & Access Officer, Andrew Hinde, reported to the last Council meeting on their recent meeting with officials and officers of the British Mountaineering Council. It is clear that with 75,000 members and 30 largely full-time employees BMC is able to do things we cannot contemplate. Their feedback was that the meeting had been both informative and constructive and that BMC could be a very useful ally – on access, as well as other more general matters. They came away from the meeting with a clear understanding that the BMC experience had been that it was beneficial to lobby members of both houses of Parliament to ask questions of Ministers which could lead to change. BMC had pointed out that in their experience there would be little point in lobbying until the new parliament had settled down and that it would be useful to have a celebrity or two on our side.

Members' Online Contact Management System

For a while now we have been working to automate our membership data management system. Along other benefits, this will allow each member to log in and change their own details when, for example, they move house. Dave Cooke reports that:

The live data still needs loading and once Council and the Membership Administrator have had a chance to review it and assuming favourable comments, it can be announced to our members.

As it stands the system will allow members to login under their own membership number and set their own e-mail contact preferences. They can change their e-mail address and password as necessary. They can review their membership details (membership status, insurance status, address etc) as held by BCA. If those need to be updated, they can e-mail the Membership Administrator. Behind the scenes there are routines to sanity check and upload the latest spreadsheets provided by the Membership System. Members will be notified of changes to their profile by e-mail.

This will provide BCA with a verified and maintained list of email addresses and crucially, to remain legal, the consents to use them.

Training

The Training Committee has produced new guidelines for Technical Advisors which will soon be published as a pdf. For lovers of statistics, there are currently 465 holders of the Local Cave Leader Level 1 Award; 255 holders of Level 2 and 79 of the Cave Instructor Certificate. At the next Training Committee meeting it is intended to review the criteria for offering recreational training grants.

Hidden Earth

Everyone should know by now that Hidden Earth 2015 will be held at Churchill Academy from 25 – 27 September. This year's lecture secretaries are Paula Grgich-Warke and Emma Porter. Contact details are at <http://hidden-earth.org.uk/info/contact.html>. This year, there is an online form for you to register your interest in giving a lecture or workshop. Go to <http://hidden-earth.org.uk/forms/lectures>

Photo and Video Salon updates

There are likely to be some slight changes to the Photo and Video Salons this year. These will be confirmed later in the year on the Hidden Earth website, but are expected to be...

- Photo salon: digital entries must be uploaded in advance. You will not be able to deposit them on the day.
- Video Salon: the long (20 minute) competition will not take place. Shorter entries (10 mins) must be entered in advance and the media posted to the co-ordinator two weeks before the event. You will not be able to deposit your entries on the day.

As last year, Photo Salon entries must be made in advance this year. There will be no entry on the day.

Anchors and Anchor Placement

The Equipment & Techniques Committee has been considering alternatives to the products in current use. Nick Williams, the Convenor of the Committee tells us:

We have identified a second resin as being suitable for anchor placement. This is more widely available than that we have previously been using, and comes from an impeccable source (Fischer).

Additionally, we have approved a second anchor as suitable for placement under the Anchor Placement Scheme. This is the IC anchor which is made from laser cut stainless plate. It has several advantages over other anchors including that it uses a smaller hole and permits holes to be more readily re-used.

CNCC News

With more changes in the CNCC area Matt Ewles, the CNCC Secretary, has provided an update. There have also been more access changes which are reported in the access update section.

The CNCC Annual General Meeting took place on 7th March in Hellifield. It was an extremely productive meeting, which saw three new Officers elected: Kay Easton (Conservation), Pete Bann (Treasurer) and Dan Irving (Training). They join the two returning officers, Roy Holmes (Chair) and Matt Ewles (Secretary), and Johnny Latimer as Access Officer, a position which will be transitioning to a full Officer role over the coming year. We also saw a new student club, York University Cave and Pothole Club elected to the Committee. We voted in a completely new constitution document, replacing our previous constitution, and there was general positivity for the CNCC seeking to include individual (non-club) cavers in future access agreements where this is possible, in a style similar to the recent Ingleborough Estate agreement. The CNCC team are looking forward to another very positive year hopefully with further improvements to access and the identification of more ways that we can enhance northern caving.

British Caving Audio Archive

Recent additions to the archive include an [interview with Margaret Scarr](#), who farmed land around Ease Gill between 1958 and 1968, and [two interviews with Stuart Whitmey](#) who remembers the 1964 & 1967 expeditions to the Gouffre Berger.

Protecting our Fragile Sites

One of the action points arising from the CROW poll was to continue to explore ways to effectively protect our more fragile sites. The Conservation & Access Committee has made good progress with this. Conservation & Access Officer, Andrew Hinde, reports:

After reviewing the many caving codes that are in circulation the C&A Committee concluded that the current Cave Conservation Code was too long and the Minimal Impact Caving Code was severe in its tone and over prescriptive.

With the help of a few committee members I have drafted a shorter and more compact 'Caving Code' and a 'Minimal Impact Caving Guidance' which expands on the themes within the Code. I think it is important that we have an internationally recognisable Minimal Impact Caving Guidance that will be familiar to delegates of the Speleo 2016 event.

The documents have been out to consultation within the full C&A committee. There was broad support for the 2nd draft of the Caving Code and the 5th Draft of the Minimal Impact Caving Guidance. By the time of the recent Council Meeting the Minimum Impact Caving Guidance was at Draft 6 and work continues.....with drafts 3 and 7 expected soon.

Once finalised and approved by Council the script will be part of a pdf with colour photos, illustrations and useful hyperlinks. The photos should support the text and enhance understanding. It is proposed to have flier and poster versions of the Code for caving huts and pubs.

EuroSpeleo 2016

Planning is now well underway for Euro Speleo 2016, hosted by BCA and held at Dalesbridge in the Yorkshire Dales.

Make no mistake; this will be a massive event with sufficient variety that it will be virtually unmissable for any self-respecting caver. Probably attracting more than 1,000 cavers from the UK, Europe and beyond, Euro Speleo 2016 will be everything that is brilliant about Hidden Earth, with the plus that the majority of the Dales' caves will be pre-rigged; piles of field meets and specialist get-togethers with like-minded cavers from across the world, and 7 nights of solid entertainment for anyone who can hack the pace! There will be plenty of onsite camping and, for those who'd rather cave than cook, all meals will also be available onsite.

Tickets will be available in the coming months with a substantial discount for early-bookers, so get 13-20 August 2016 into your diaries now!

British Caving Library

The library has issued a request for donations of specific issues of BCRA and pre BCRA publications. The list is available by scrolling down [this page](#) – please help by checking your collection for duplicates.

The Association of Scout Caving Teams

Scouting probably introduces more youngsters to caving than any other source and it is vitally important to the future of our sport that Scout caving is encouraged. The Association of Scout Caving Teams is a constituent body of BCA, Idris Williams is its Chair and he tells us how we can help:

The Association of Scout Caving Teams (ASCT) exists to promote the causes of Caving within Scouts and of Scout Caving within the Caving Community. Full membership is open to those Teams or Clubs, whose main concern is providing caving activities for Scouts, and who have joined BCA as member clubs. The ASCT has a seat on BCA Council as a constituent body.

All of the member teams (clubs) are based around Scout Counties or Districts, although we have a number of associate members who are active in those Counties where there is insufficient numbers of Scout Cave Leaders to form a Team.

So why caving for Scouts? Caving provides adventure in an environment that few get the chance to visit. It involves team work, and the learning of new skills, to overcome the obstacles, and a need to conserve a fragile environment. This is surely what Scouting is all about!

So why are Scouts good for caving? If you look around any gathering of cavers you will note an inverted age pyramid where the over 60s abound, the rest are mainly middle aged and people in their teens & twenties are scarce. Caving needs a continual input of new young blood to keep the pastime viable & dynamic, where better to start this than from Scouts?

Although the bread & butter work of a Scout Cave Leader is an introductory trip for young people who come, only this once, around 20% get interested and are prepared to come on more advanced trips. These numbers do dwindle, as the trips get more advanced and exam pressure mounts, but every year 18 year old ex-Scouts go to University with the skills & knowledge to become the lead cavers of their University Club.

How can the average Joe or Joanna caver help? First to become a Scout Cave Leader let us dispel the myths that you need qualifications spilling over you or that you have to be a fully-fledged uniformed leader running a Troop week in & week out.

To be a Scout Cave Leader you must be, (for insurance purposes), a member of the Scout Association, this does not, necessarily, involve wearing a uniform or making a promise to a deity and monarch in which you might not believe! Many Scout Cave Leaders are appointed as a Skills Instructor or as part of a Scout Active Support Unit with other activity leaders. What you will need to do is be assessed by a Scout Caving Assessor who will need to satisfy himself that you are:-

- *A competent caver to the level at which you wish to lead. (e.g. No vertical pitches).*
- *That you have an empathy with and an ability to lead/instruct young people.*
- *That you understand the Scout Activity rules for Caving.*
- *You will need to go through the CRB or Disclosure & Barring Service, as it is now known procedure.*
- *You will also have to go through some simple safety and child protection (or safeguarding as it is now known), training. This can be done on line & should take no more than 1½ hours.*

How do you go about this? You could contact your local scout group and offer your services. Alternatively if you get in touch with the ASCT we should be able to find somebody to take you through the process.

What else could you do to help? Many Caving Clubs have procedures and rules designed, it would seem, to discourage new-comers and particularly young people. Be part of a move for change in these attitudes if you wish the future of the pastime to be assured.

BCRA News

New Chairman for BCRA

After five years in the post, Dave Checkley has decided to step down as Chairman of BCRA. The trustees have elected our current President, Prof. John Gunn, as Dave's replacement. John Gunn currently chairs our Cave Science and Technology Research Fund panel and is a joint editor of Cave and Karst Science.

Those of you who know Dave Checkley will not need reminding that he has worked hard to promote BCRA over the years, and we are pleased that he will continue as a trustee of the Association. Dave currently sits on our Library Steering Group sub-committee and our Heritage Lottery Fund sub-committee. The latter is investigating the possibility for obtaining grant money to digitise BCRA's archives currently held in controlled storage conditions at the British Geological Survey. This archive includes a large amount of material that formerly belonged to Eli Simpson and the BSA.

The trustees have also appointed Dr Paul Hardwick as our new Conservation Officer, and our representative to BCA's Conservation and Access Committee. Paul replaces Dave Judson in these roles.

Cave and Karst Science 42(1) now In Press

C&KS 42(1) is now "in press" and should be on doorsteps by the end of April. The online version will be available at a similar time.

Cumbrian Ring field meeting: reminder

25 April 2015. See <http://bcra.org.uk/forum> and contact Trevor Faulkner as soon as possible if you wish to attend

CREG field meeting, change of date

The Cave Radio & Electronics Group field meeting in Ingleton, planned for 25-26 April has been postponed until 22/23 August. For information, please sign up to the CREG-announce list at <http://list.bcra.org.uk>, keep an eye on the CREG forum at <http://bcra.org.uk/cregf> or follow the Event's Facebook page – either search for "Cave Radio " or try this link... <https://www.facebook.com/events/1614464812122387/>

Cave Science Symposium: update

31 Oct. See <http://bcra.org.uk/forum> and contact Gina Moseley if you wish to submit a paper. Following the symposium, on 1 November, there will be a field trip to the Alderley Edge Mines. For details see the news forum at <http://bcra.org.uk/forum>

BCRA/Hidden Earth Cave Science Bursaries

There has been little take-up, so far, of the BCRA / Hidden Earth Cave Science Bursaries that are now available. This is a project that uses some of the surplus from Hidden Earth to fund undergraduate dissertation projects. In addition to this funding BCRA Council has agreed to top-up it's Research Fund with a further £25,000 for the five years from 2015. Details of BCRA's Research Fund and the BCRA / Hidden Earth Cave Science

Bursaries can be found at <http://bcra.org.uk/research-fund>

BCRA on Social Media

BCA's online newsletter is just one example of an inexorable move towards a different method of communication. This isn't just the inevitable march of technology; it is to do with costs, and the availability of volunteers. If you have not already discovered BCRA on social media, we are on Twitter and Facebook...

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1485495795064870/>

Twitter: https://twitter.com/bcra_speleology

Cave Access Update

Axe Hole (Derbyshire)

A 'freezer-sized' boulder has 'slipped' out of the steep bank directly above the crawl entrance to Axe Hole. The boulder has now dropped into the entrance, closing it off.

New Contact for Penyghent Pot Permits (Yorkshire)

The new contact for permits for Penyghent Pot and Dale Head Pot is Sam Allshorn, (replacing Malcolm Hughes). Permits are available by email or post. Details on the CNCC website have been updated and an availability calendar for these two pots has been added for convenience. Efforts are ongoing to improve access for these caves.

Leck Fell permits new contact (Yorkshire)

Andrew Farrow has now taken over as Leck Fell permit secretary. Contact details on this CNCC website have been updated.

Little Hull Pot and Hunt Pot access (Yorkshire)

Effective immediately, there is no requirement for a CNCC permit for access to Little Hull Pot and Hunt Pot (including Shrapnel Pot) on Penyghent.

Instead, please make a courtesy call to Mr Chris Sutcliffe at Holme Farm in Horton-in-Ribblesdale on the day of your trip (same as Sell Gill Holes). Alternatively, you may call at any reasonable time on 01729 860281, or write to request advanced permission if this is more desirable (Holme Farm, Horton-in-Ribblesdale, BD24 0HD).

Hull Pot access (Yorkshire)

A permit is no longer required for Hull Pot and High Hull Pot/Cave on Penyghent. Furthermore, no permission or courtesy call is required to visit these caves.

This also includes Red Moss Pot, at the southern end of the Birkwith Cave system (although note that the northern entrances to this system including Birkwith Cave, Dismal Hill and Old Ing still require a courtesy call at High Birkwith Farm).

Underground sites in Wales on NRW/FC land

An agreement has been signed between Cave Access Limited (on behalf of Cambrian Caving Council) and Natural Resources Wales and the Forestry Commission Wales to allow cavers and mine explorers access into 11 underground sites on land formerly owned by Forestry Commission Wales. More details are available at <http://www.caveaccess.co.uk/> which is currently in the process of being updated.

Titan (Derbyshire)

Access to the Titan Entrance Shaft remains suspended. The middle section of the shaft is lined with heavy duty glass fibre rings, and six of these, along with their associated steel fittings, are showing signs of severe deformation and are highly likely to fail, at any time. Updates will be posted to <http://www.peakdistrictcaving.info/cave1501.htm>