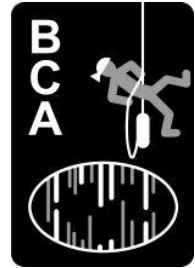


BCA Newsletter No 35

January 2019



EDITORIAL - by David Rose, Editor

This is something of a bumper issue, due to the fact that a large number of people have sent me excellent contributions, for which many thanks. Long may this continue. Anyone who wants to write something in a future issue please send it via email, to newsletter@british-caving.org.uk. Special thanks to the photographer Mark Burkey, who supplied the portfolio of superb, recent shots from various British caves with which this issue is illustrated.

At last year's AGM, the BCA launched a project to refine its mission for the future, and a 'Vision and Reform' working group to develop this and report back. An important step is the questionnaire included below: please fill it in and send it back. This is your organisation, and it would be very helpful for those working on this project to know what you want.



Bakerloo Straight, Dan yr Ogof, by Mark Burkey

Finally, it is a little frustrating that only 8 per cent of BCA members currently 'opt in' to receive the newsletter by email. I'm told by our webmaster David Cooke that data protection laws make it difficult to remove the opt-in, and instead just send it out to everyone. But it would be nice to get that figure up, although a good many hundred more do appear to look at it via the BCA website. So, please, if you don't already, please opt in, and suggest that your friends do the same.

CHAIRMAN'S PIECE by Les Williams

I was recently honoured to be invited to attend a reception at the Speakers Residence in the Houses of Parliament, to recognise the achievement of the British cave divers in the Thai rescue. I was representing the British Caving Association and there were many cavers present from the BCRC and the CDG.

There were presentations from the Thai Ambassador, BCRC, CDG and from Mr Speaker himself.

As I'm sure we're all aware, the rescue was a major achievement and it's good to see the Divers getting the wider recognition that they all deserve, in the New Year's Honours list.

We shouldn't forget the many volunteers working behind the scenes, in Thailand and back here in the UK that helped to enable such an amazing and positive outcome.

I also found myself at SUICRO which was held in County Clare in Ireland. I was enthralled by another presentation on the Thai rescue, given by Jim Warny, on his part in the rescue. I was privileged to be able to award him an engraved tankard (We had already honoured the other divers in a similar way at Hidden Earth) on behalf of the whole caving community, to recognise his part in the endeavour.

It should be remembered that all the people working within UK caving are volunteers who are giving their best, for the benefit of all cavers. We should recognise these people and thank them for their valuable time and effort.

I suspect that it is not commonly realised that there are quite a few members of the caving community who have worked tirelessly behind the scenes for the benefit of the rest of us over a period which extends over many years.

Those people have sought no publicity and no thanks for their efforts, which are largely unknown to the 15,000 + individuals who have been members of BCA nor to those whose clubs were members of the predecessor NCA.

One way or another, three of those individuals have left us in the past year or so and I believe it is appropriate to offer them our thanks for the vast amount of work they have done on behalf of us all.

Sadly, **Boyd Potts** left us permanently in 2017. He represented Derbyshire Caving Association on the Council of BCA for many years and, before that had taken the same position with NCA. He was a Trustee of the Derbyshire Caving Association, regularly undertook maintenance work on cave sites in the region and was the prime organiser of DCA's Cliffhanger involvement.

It is for health reasons that **Nigel Ball** recently stood down as a trainer/assessor for the BCA training schemes. His love of the subterranean environment and his ability as a teacher led him into early involvement with NCA training; initially as a 'Cave

Leader' but later converting this to a 'Cave Instructor Certificate' as the NCA extended its caving qualifications.

With the founding of BCA, he continued to develop professional caving and was actively involved with the development of the CIC syllabus and for many years was chair of the CIC panel. He only relinquished this post to become BCA's training officer, a position which he held for several years.

He has also acted as technical advisor to caving clubs, voluntary groups (such as the scouts), outdoor centers, military groups and county councils. He leaves a huge gap in caver training and will be sorely missed.

If I had to choose the one person who has contributed most to British caving in the last 30 years it would have to be **Nick Williams** who recently retired as Secretary of BCA due to ill health. He served BCA for many years as Equipment & Techniques Officer, Insurance Manager and Personnel Manager and didn't hesitate to offer his services when BCA needed a Secretary in the summer of 2017. He had previously served BCA's predecessor the National Caving Association as Treasurer, Equipment Officer and Insurance Manager and, amongst others, he was key to the creation of the "one stop shop" that is BCA.

Apart from his involvement with BCA and NCA he was a past Chairman of BCRA as well.

He is also a long serving Trustee of the Ghar Parau Foundation and, happily, feels able to continue that role.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2019

The 2019 Annual General Meeting of the British Caving Association will again take place as part of a weekend of activities. The weekend will be based at the headquarters of the Yorkshire Subterranean Society, Helwith Bridge and further details of the weekend will be published in due course. We are grateful to the YSS for agreeing to host the event.

The AGM itself will be held at the **Horton in Ribblesdale Village Hall**, Chapel Lane, Horton in Ribblesdale and will begin at **10:30am** on **Sunday 9 June**. Formal notice of the AGM appears on the BCA website.

VISION AND REFORM (1) – by Hellie Adams, group convenor

The BCA vision and constitutional changes working group was set up following a proposal by Tim Allen at 2018 AGM, and we thank him for seeing the need for change.

The hope is to give BCA a new vision, and in order facilitate this, the first stage is to open up the process to ideas – of which none should be discounted. The point of

brain-storming is to see where it leads. Later stages will work on the details. If the BCA is to have a new vision, it must be something that comes from the members, and our values and beliefs, not those imposed on us.

Caving is the poor relation in outdoor sports, with the BMC and BCU having big budgets and lots of paid staff, but sadly the BCA does not have their level of funds. Meanwhile caving is a sport that binds people together, and the new discoveries we explore are one of the last unknowns on this planet. Our sport is full of great people - even if non-cavers don't always see or understand that, and still find themselves amazed that we want to spend our spare time underground.

The plan is to look forward, to find a way to show others what we do and to forge a new path together. For this to work all voices are important, and anything you have to say, we want to hear.

The questionnaire – published below - can be e-mailed to me at little_caver@hotmail.com

THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Thank you for taking time to help the BCA with your insight towards a new vision. This is about us opening up ideas. All ideas are welcome and no idea is stupid, because inspiration can be found from the most unusual places!

1 are you a BCA member?

Yes No Unsure

2. How long have you been caving?

<1 year 1-3 years 3-5 years 5-10 years 10-20 years 20+ years

3. Gender

M F Rather not say

4. Age

Under 18 18-25 25-30 32-50 41-50 52-60 61 or over

5. How do you find out about caving (do now or would prefer in the future as well)

Circle all that apply:

- Descent
- ukcaving
- Darkness Below
- BCA newsletter
- club newsletter
- Facebook
- BCA website
- twitter
- Instagram
- Other (please specify)

6. Would do you think BCA could be doing to help cavers? (Take as much space as you want)

7. What do you see BCA's role as? (Take as much space as you want)

8. Is there one thing you think that would make BCA more relevant to you?



Balcony Chamber, Shatter Cave, by Mark Burkey

VISION AND REFORM (2) – by Tim Allen

While the wider BCA membership is urged to respond to the questionnaire above, we already have some interesting data from the last Council of Higher Education Caving Clubs meeting, a well-attended annual event which is one of the few occasions where young cavers are brought together in number. Following discussions between Hellie Adams, Tim and Jane Allen, a short questionnaire – somewhat different from the main BCA one – was developed to ask the opinion of the younger caver on behalf of the BCA Vision and Reform Group and the then BCA Publications and Information Officer (Jane). The questionnaire took the form of a single A4 sheet of paper and was completed on Sunday 25th November 2018. The results have been collated into this report.

86 questionnaires were returned. The average age of respondents was 23, and they had been caving on average 3.7 years. 56% were men, 31% women with the rest giving no gender.

Q1. Are you a member of the British Caving Association (BCA)? Only 65% knew they were members of BCA. However, most if not all were members. 16 out of the 18 who said they were not members of BCA also gave their BCA member club name for example.

Q2. What does BCA do for cavers? What does BCA do for you? A high number, 43 respondents, mentioned insurance, which might be expected. 25 mentioned BCA as a governing body or representing cavers. 22 mentioned access rights/access campaign, which suggests the BCA CRoW campaign has been well noted among young cavers. 'Don't know' was next highest with no other service achieving a high score.

Q3. What more, if anything, could BCA do for student caving? The highest answer by far (30) was that respondents did not know what more BCA could do for student caving. 12 wanted to see more support of clubs and/or interaction with the university or student union. 11 wanted to see more involvement/visibility generally from BCA. 11 also mentioned more funding.

Q4. Where do you get your information about caves and caving from? A large number (65) got there caving information from friends, the club or word of mouth. The highest specific place to be mentioned was Ukcaving with 32. This may not be surprising as Ukcaving has supported the CHECC forum for the last three years. Guide books featured well for information on caves. Of the regional councils the CNCC received 13 specific mentions due to their informative web site and social media presence. The DCA received 4 mentions. No mention was made of any other regional council. Facebook specifically (10) and 'on-line' generally also featured. There was no mention of Descent magazine.

Q5. What medium is best for BCA to use to pass on information to student cavers? The internet was dominant here. Specifically, Facebook 38, email 31 & Ukcaving 15. General mentions of social media/web/internet 28.

Q6. Would you like to receive information from BCA? 70% said yes, 14% said no and 5% maybe. The rest blank.

Q7. What methods should BCA use to try to contact you or pass on information about caving? Email was dominant at 48 mentions (including club email). 13 were willing enough to write down their actual email address. Facebook (15) and Ukcaving (7) also featured, as did a number of other social media sites but no mention of Instagram. The overall conclusion I draw is that BCA needs to promote what it does better and be much more informative over a range of social media platforms.



Medusa's Children, Ogof Draenen, by Mark Burkey

MORE ON THE MERDEKA AWARD – by Andy Eavis

As many cavers already know, the Mulu Caves Project was last year given a prestigious Malaysian government award. The Merdeka Awards are given annually in a number of categories, which tend to vary from year to year depending on applications and suitability. Ours was given in recognition of the project's contribution to the people of Malaysia. As is usual with this prize, it was assigned to an individual rather than an organization, and I am very honoured and grateful that in this case, the authorities saw fit to present it in the name of Andrew James Eavis – in part, I suppose, because I have been involved with exploring Mulu's caves over a long period, since 1978, and although I was absent from many trips led by others, I am still involved now, with my next expedition later this year. However, as I have repeatedly pointed out, the award was really given on behalf of the many people who have contributed to exploring and surveying well over 500 km of some of the greatest caves on earth.

In conjunction with a certificate and trophy, a sum of 300,000.00 Malaysian Ringgits, worth in the region of £50,000, went with the prize. The money is currently sitting in a bank account in Kuala Lumpur, drawing a reasonable amount of interest. It will ultimately get transferred back to Britain in as cost effective and tax efficient way as possible. It is likely that gift-aiding and tax relief will considerably add to this base sum.

At the moment it is very likely, unless anybody objects, to go into the Ghar Parau Foundation. This will considerably bolster its funds, and enable more money to be distributed annually to British caving expeditions applying to go anywhere in the world. No priority will be given to Malaysia in connection with the award. However, currently, the GPF regulations specify that only British citizens can apply. This may

be modified so that Malaysian citizens can also apply if part of a British expedition, but this has not yet been decided or approved. Suggestions are welcome. Please email me if you wish to discuss these issues: andy@andyeavis.com

There is no way that any person will benefit individually from this money. The entire sum will be transferred to the appropriate charity. I am delighted that the Mulu Caves Project has received this award and hope that it will ultimately benefit more British expeditions abroad.

OUR FRIENDS IN THE NORTH – CNCC NEWS by Matt Ewles

Since the last BCA newsletter, the CNCC has been busy on several fronts. Perhaps the most notable initiative has been the full launch of the online booking system, which replaces permits for caving on Ingleborough Estate. This is a bespoke system which is integrated into the CNCC website and allows any caver to book access to Ingleborough Estate caves (Gaping Gill, the Allotment, Hurnell Moss and Newby Moss areas). Unlike the previous permit system, this is open to anyone and bookings are active immediately.

The CNCC is keen to emphasise that this has been developed as a compromise system, designed to fulfil the wishes of the landowners for managed access, while making it as easy as possible for all cavers to comply with these wishes. One booking is available per entrance per day, so there's plenty of availability. A short video explaining the system is available: Youtube: <https://youtu.be/sCdLrx88Z5o>

Work is ongoing to see the caves of Leck Fell and Casterton Fell integrated into the system too; which, if successful, would represent one of the biggest improvements to access the north of England has seen for decades.

You may remember that in early 2018, the CNCC withdrew from the long standing agreement and permit system for the caves on the Langcliffe Hall Estate land, including Penyghent Pot and Dale Head Pot. This was done due to the agreements not reflecting the wishes of cavers, being outdated, and difficulties encountered in discussing the matter with the Estate. Due to the combination of CRoW and the Tax Exempt Heritage Asset status of the land, confidence was high that cavers had an open right of access to these caves.

Since then, the Estate has been very forthcoming with further discussions, with extremely positive outcomes. The CNCC Access Officer, Tim Allen, has worked with their agents to produce a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between both parties that effectively formalises open access to the caves on CRoW land, as well as effectively open access to those not on CRoW land (e.g. Swan Dyke and Snatcher Pots) across the Langcliffe Estate area. This is an excellent and modern agreement that simply sets the right of access into writing, while reassuring the landowners of our aims, as a Regional Caving Council, to help conserve the caves and make their entrances safe to livestock, for example.

The CNCC wishes to alert cavers to the recent sale of High Birkwith Farm. The new owners have now moved in, and unfortunately it is looking like we cannot assume that the same freedoms of parking, or access to the nearby caves will necessarily be carried forward. Some concerns have already been raised by the new owners. The caves in question here include Calf Holes, Browgill Cave, Old Ing, Birkwith Cave etc.

We would like to ask anyone visiting these caves to first check the situation on the CNCC website, and to be courteous to the new owners and respect their requests. The impression cavers give over the coming months will no doubt impact on the future freedoms of access that can be negotiated. Naturally, the CNCC are on the case with this, and discussions are planned for coming months.

The catalogue of cave route descriptions on the CNCC website continues to be expanded, with the addition of a substantial document covering most of the major Scottish caves, kindly written by Alan Jeffreys. A full list of all descriptions can be found here: <https://cncc.org.uk/caving/descriptions/>



Rowten Pot, by Mark Burkey

On 30th-31st March the CNCC is sponsoring a Cave Surveying Group paperless surveying course at How Stean Gorge in Nidderdale. Signup for this course was rapid and all places were quickly filled, however, if you are interested in potentially attending a future course, probably at the same venue, email Nick (csgtheriontraining@gmail.com) to register your interest. Hopefully a second course can be organised.

The CNCC Annual General Meeting will be on Saturday 9th March 2019 at Hellifield Village Institute, Hellifield, 10am (and typically lasts about 2-3hr so lots of time for caving afterwards). All full members are strongly encouraged to attend (and if you wish to vote, please bring a letter signed by a club official naming your voting representative, or email this to the CNCC Secretary in advance).

The CNCC emphasises that everyone and anyone (not just our member clubs) are welcome... and encouraged... to our meetings; either if you're curious to see what happens, or you have something you wish to bring up, or you just want the chance to give your opinions. The more people we can get engaged in our work the better for us, and the better for northern caving. The agenda will be on the CNCC website meetings page from Saturday 26th January, and reports will be posted there in the week before the meeting.

Currently agenda items look likely to include an update on the online booking system, discussions about a CNCC Mission Statement, and a CNCC Display/stall which can be taken to venues such as Hidden Earth and CHECC to get more people interested.

CAVE FICTION ROUNDUP – by Linda Wilson

Montage by Graham Mullan

I'm always surprised by how often caving turns up in the world of crime and thrillers, usually written by authors who have no knowledge of or connection to the caving community. In recent years, there's been a wide variety of cave settings, some well-described, some less so. Some authors have clearly done their research well, and it shows, others have winged it.

I was brought up on books where the protagonists went underground. First with Enid Blyton, whose kids (and their pets) were forever exploring caves, mines and secret tunnels, and even Anne, the least sporty of the Famous Five, had no trouble climbing hand over hand up and down a rope in a 60 foot well shaft. It was only some years later that I realised this wasn't quite as easy as Enid Blyton made out. This piece takes a look at caving in fiction over the last few years for those who like adding novels to their no doubt already crowded bookshelves.

US big-name thriller writer, Michael Koryta, has some well-described caving scenes in *Last Words* (Hodder & Stoughton, 2015), where investigator Mark Novak goes to a small town in Southern Indiana to investigate an exceedingly cold case. A 17-year-old girl went into Trapdoor Caverns with her boyfriend many years ago, but something spooked them and her boyfriend told her to hide while he went to investigate, but when he went back to look for her, she'd gone missing. The rescue teams brought into search for the girl found no trace of her, and finally the local police chief called in loner Ridley Barnes, the man who was meant to know Trapdoor Caverns better than anyone. He came out several days later, hypothermic and almost out of his mind, carrying her body, which promptly made him the front-runner in the murder enquiry. The caving scenes are extremely well-described, despite the author seemingly buying into the popular misconception that prolonged periods underground lead to hallucinatory experiences.

Prayer for the Dead (Penguin, 2015) is part of Scottish author James Oswald's long-running DI Tony McLean series set in Edinburgh. The series is an entertaining mix of



police procedural and some darker, supernatural elements. In this outing, McLean has to go underground into the man-made caverns and tunnels of Gilmerton Cove, where a mysterious ritual has resulted in a man's death. The archaeologists working down there get an unexpected shock when they find his body. The walls of the chamber around him daubed with Masonic symbols drawn in the dead man's blood. In this case, the setting is very real, and Gilmerton Cove is open to visitors.

French writer Xavier-Marie Bonnet turns to a fictionalised version of Cosquer Cave in his novel The First Man (Maclehose Press 2018) when the mysterious and dangerous Le Guen's Cave near Marseille claims another victim, an experienced diver who has been studying the Upper Palaeolithic paintings and engravings found ten years previously. The man gets

into trouble resurfacing after a dive to a depth of 38 metres and has decompression problems. He's not expected to survive for long. The diving scenes are certainly convincing and there is nothing far-fetched about the opening scenes as the original cave really has claimed the lives of three divers.

Mendip is the setting for the caving elements in another crime thriller, Sharon Bolton's Daisy in Chains (Corgi, 2016). The bodies of the three murdered women have been found in caves under the Mendip Hills – two in Burrington Combe, the well-known and frequently visited Goatchurch Cavern and the equally popular Sidcot Swallet. The third was found in Rill Cavern, in Cheddar Gorge. Neither Rill Cavern nor Gossam Cave, another one named in the story, exist, but if they did, Rill Cavern would certainly be a popular trip. I immediately focussed on one angle of the plot,

convinced that there was no way you could hide a body in a cave so that it could end up being badly decomposed before being found. Decomposing bodies smell, and even a dead mouse or rabbit can stink a passage out. My critical pen was already poised over the page... But I needn't have worried. Bolton serves up a dark, edgy thriller that will suck you in from the beginning and hold your attention right to the end. She is also the absolute mistress of the killer last line.

The Chalk Pit by Elly Griffiths (Quercus, 2017) is part of her long-running series featuring Norfolk archaeologist Ruth Galloway, and in this one, the extensive chalk mines under Norwich play a large part in the story. This was a great one for me, as I have a certain amount of history with those mines – albeit at a distance – and my connection with the old chalk workings came up very quickly in the story, with a mention of long-ago events in 1988, which I remember very well. Whilst sitting at my desk at work on a Friday afternoon, I received a rather bizarre phone call from a fellow caver in Norwich, telling me that a double decker bus had fallen into an old chalk pit, and he was worried that the city council were just going to fill all the tunnels with concrete.

I got the call as I was then the chair of the Council of Southern Caving Clubs. In response to my weak rejoinder that I didn't really think our area went that far, he briskly pointed out that Norwich certainly wasn't 'Ooop North'. I then suggested he tried the Derbyshire Caving Council as they were probably geographically closer. His rejoinder: 'They told me to ring you!' rather put an end to my attempts to pass the buck. I then spent the rest of the afternoon on the phone to the planning department, trying to convince them of the historic value of the mines. I think the wholesale deployment of concrete was at least temporarily foiled by my frequent mention of bats being a protected species! I had no idea whether there were bats there or not, but neither did they, so the argument carried some weight. Fortunately, my boss at the time was caver and cave diver Mike Thompson who saw nothing odd in the slightest about me spending all afternoon, when I should have been working, talking to people about a bus down a hole on the other side of the country.

The White Road by Sarah Lotz (Hodder and Stoughton, 2017) features a combination of caving and climbing, ending with the story of an attempt to reach the summit of Everest, but before that, there are some tense, well-described caving sequences in South Wales, where climber Simon Newman is trying to recover his confidence after a bad fall by venturing into Cwm Pot, a cave with a very dubious reputation, with a man he met on an internet forum. The cave has been closed since the deaths of three cavers there in a flash flood some years previously.

The trip is a punishing mix of climbs, crawls and squeezes, and history seems likely to repeat itself when Simon and Ed get trapped by rapidly rising water and have to sit out the flood in the same chamber that houses the bodies of the three cavers who died down there. Only Simon survives the trip. The descriptions will ring true to anyone who has ventured underground. Cavers will spot echoes of the Mossdale tragedy and will quickly work out that Cwm Pot is an amalgamation of features like The Letterbox in Ogof Ffynnon Dhu, the piped entrance to Cwm Dwr and the squeezes in the Daren Cilau long crawl. For non-cavers, the books will almost certainly reinforce the commonly-held view that we are all as mad as a box of frogs for ever venturing out of sight of daylight! The occasional appearance of the word

'spelunker' instead of caver, as well as the use of the plural 'caves' for what is clearly a single cave made me think Sarah Lotz, who writes under various pseudonyms, is of US rather than UK origin.

Derbyshire is the setting for author Roz Watkins debut, *The Devil's Dice* (HQ, 2018). Respectable patent lawyer Peter Hamilton is found dead at a spot known as The Devil's Dice, a remote crag in the Peak District which houses a vast network of caves known as The Labyrinth, feared for their complexity and dark reputation. The caves, now gated, have long been known as a suicide spot. The legend is that if you find your way to a large chamber under the hill, there will be a noose, and if you find your initials carved into the cave wall, it's the sign that the noose is waiting for you. DI Meg Dalton heads the investigation into the murder. For non-cavers, the descriptions of the darkly sinister Labyrinth will play to all the cherished stereotypes about cavers being as mad as a box of frogs. The references to the cave and the underground descriptions appear to come from the perspective of someone who has seen the holes that riddle the Peak District hills but would prefer not to venture into them, something that was confirmed when I chatted to the author. She'd researched the other elements of her story, but just hadn't thought the caving side needed full investigation!

From a caver's perspective, I had a wry smile at the description of a system so complex that even the local rescue teams feared to set foot there. All the Derbyshire cavers I know would have been into the place like a whole tribe of very enthusiastic rats down a drain. The Labyrinth would have been mapped, published in the guidebooks and the surveys stuck on the wall in caving club huts. The idea of a hidden entrance that cavers only knew about certainly rang true, though, but I've never known any real caver, let alone a member of the local rescue team, pay out a rope to guide them back through a cave system. It would have needed an awful lot of rope to enable them to have played at Ariadne in the minotaur's lair, but the rope did come in useful in a tense sequence that reminded me of the trip through the Earldelving in Alan Garner's *Weirdstone of Brisingamen*. *The Devil's Dice* is an enjoyable police procedural, but it would have been better for some input from a few Derbyshire cavers.

No round up of caving in recent fiction would be complete without the inevitable barking mad thriller, in this case, *The Anomaly* by Michael Rutger (Zaffre 2018). TV archaeologist Nolan Moore is in search of a mysterious cavern in the Grand Canyon, discovered in 1909 by Kincaid, a man who returned with fabulous tales of an immense cave, decorated in places with what he described as hieroglyphs which hint at a more ancient occupation of the Americas than has always been believed. *The Anomaly* is a classic one-damn-thing-after-another thriller, with peril heaped on misfortune to build a tense action story that bears as much resemblance to real cave exploration as the film *The Descent*, beloved of caving clubs everywhere who want an alcohol-fuelled film night where they can jeer loudly and throw popcorn at the screen. It's fast, it's fun, it's daft.

It's probably fair to say that the majority of the books probably don't present caving in the most flattering light. Caves seem to mainly be the setting for some obligatory dark deeds and are designed for their thrills and chills rather than for any appreciation of the beauty of the underground world, but they do demonstrate an

abiding interest in all things subterranean, and clearly publishers feel the same draw to caving as we do. There are certainly some big names from the publishing world in this round up. It'll be interesting to see what 2019 brings on the fictional front!



Pant Mawr Pot entrance pitch, by Mark Burkey

BCA CAVING INSURANCE – by Howard Jones, treasurer

The insurance scheme that BCA provides as a member benefit is a liability insurance scheme, NOT a travel policy. It allows cavers access to caves on land where the landowner wants liability insured before they allow public access. Landowner indemnity certificates can be made available if needs be. It also provides protection for members and officers in the event of any third party claim due to their activities, and it allows the BCA and other bodies such as the regional councils and access bodies to function. Without insurance, many national and regional activities would be curtailed. In short, this scheme ensures that if anyone sues you or your club, you won't have to pay legal expenses and damages out of your own pocket. The policy covers member to member claims too.

All members of BCA are covered either as individuals or via a member club or other organisation. There is no age limit to the cover, either lower or higher. To obtain cover you have to be a member of BCA. The policy has been specifically worded to cover all normal activities of cavers and caving clubs, and mining history organisations and their members. This includes cave diving and the use of explosives, with the exception of Hilti caps use. A full copy of the policy wording may be found on the BCA website.

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Hiscox Insurance (policy number 9545073)
AIG Europe Ltd (policy number 246515562)

Both are large organisations that comply with the necessary fiscal laws in the UK and can withstand likely claims. The total Limit of Indemnity is £5 million for each successful claim. The insurance broker that BCA contracts with (Howdens Group UK) deal with most day to day insurance issues.

If you have any insurance related questions please contact:

Jacqui Mitchell

Howden Insurance Brokers

0121 698 8056

jacqui.mitchell@howdengroup.com

Cover extends worldwide, excluding Canada and the USA, but all cases will be judged only according to English law.

Other items to note:

BCA is currently working with Howdens to obtain access to a travel policy, watch this space!

BCA has several other smaller insurance policies to cover its employees (legal requirement) and certain assets and computer equipment.



The Rising, Dan yr Ogof, by Mark Burkey

CAVE EXPEDITION INSURANCE – by Andy Eavis

For more than 40 years we have been trying on an all too infrequent basis to improve the situation with insurance for British caving expeditions. Many insurers have been approached over the years, and many have said they will cover the type of situations we need but most have fallen by the wayside. Currently the only firms are Dogtag, Snowcard and PJH. ADAC, the German automobile association, was a good option, but they have now decided only to cover German nationals.

Many things have changed recently in the insurance world, and three major rescues, in South America, Germany and Thailand, have all affected the thinking regarding cavers. In Europe, some authorities are demanding very high rescue cover. The German rescue in Riesending in 2014 was very expensive and the rescued caver, Joann Westhauser, was left with a huge bill. If you haven't got 10 million Euros rescue cover, you will not get a permit for Riesending.

The new BCA Treasurer Howard Jones and I met with the existing BCA insurance brokers and a partner broker of theirs who is involved with the BMC expedition insurance scheme. The meeting went very well, and a number of suggestions came from it. Currently PJH are covering caving expeditions with certain limits and in a rather imperfect way. It is hoped that this will be improved quite soon, and the results published on the appropriate websites. As Howard says, watch this space.

CROW AND THE BMC – by David Rose, CROW group convenor

On 10 October I attended a meeting as BCA CROW group convenor with Julian Glover at the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Julian, who is the chief editorial writer at the London Evening Standard, has a weekend house in the Peak District National Park and is conducting a review of National Parks and policy towards them. He is an outdoors lover and accepted my invitation to go caving when the weather warms up. I made the CROW access case strongly and followed up with personal emails, in which I enclosed previous BCA submissions by Tim Allen and my sister Dinah Rose QC's legal opinion.

Later, Bob Mehew, a member of the working group, kindly drafted a formal written response for the Glover review. Other group members made contributions, I edited them together and submitted the response in early December, well before the deadline. I am hopeful that the BCA policy will be reflected in the eventual Glover report. He certainly seemed to get our argument that the current Defra position (CROW access only as far as the daylight ends) is perverse, and does not reflect the will of Parliament when it was debating the Act. I have urged him to get Defra to revisit the old legal advice on which its policy, and that of Natural England, is based, in light of Dinah's opinion.

In November, thanks to a contact forged by Pete Ward of Spanset, working group members Stuart France, Andrew Hinde and Tim Allen and I had an excellent meeting at the British Mountaineering Council HQ in Manchester, with their access

officer Cath Flitcroft and other BMC officials. She was very sympathetic and agreed to organise a meeting in early 2019 on the subject of CROW access for cavers with the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Mountaineering, of which she is secretary. When this happens, we will make a presentation and, I hope, a strong impression on MPs and peers.

VISION AND REFORM (3) – SOME USEFUL POINTERS?

The following two articles are reproduced here from the Darkness Below website:
<https://darknessbelow.co.uk>

I've included them because it seems to me they tell us something of value in what for many cavers is a constant battle to improve our sport's image and appeal with the wider public – and hence to increase the numbers of new cavers. They concern an unusual assignment set for journalism and public relations students – to make presentations as if they were bidding for a contract to burnish the image of the BCA. Please note that nothing here is intended as any kind of criticism of the excellent work already being done by the Youth and Development team and other BCA volunteers. The two reports – the first by me, the second by Linda Wilson – merely record what was said.

SESSION 1 – by David Rose

Most older cavers are aware of an uncomfortable fact: that the average age of active participants in our sport is increasing. In one way this is positive: it suggests that cavers are staying healthier for longer, and indeed, some are able to enjoy the underground world into their seventh, eighth and even ninth decades. A few years ago, George Cornes, the original discoverer of Lancaster Hole, famously did a Lancaster to County Pot through trip on his 80th birthday.

However, this demographic phenomenon has a less cheery aspect, too. The supply of young, new recruits seems to be diminishing. Some once frenetic university clubs – long a crucial source of fresh blood – have shrunk to become mere shadows of their former selves, and in some cases, have closed altogether. Inexplicable as it may seem, it appears that fewer young people want to spend their downtime down caves. Earlier this year an analysis of British Caving Association members established that their median age is 49, with those in their 50s the biggest decadal cohort – considerably more than those in their 20s and 30s. Almost a fifth of BCA members are over 65.

Journalism and Public Relations lecturer Sharon Wheeler – also a contributor to Darkness Below – had given her third year undergraduate class at Bristol's University of the West of England (UWE) a fascinating assignment: to research, write and deliver presentations, as if they were bidding for a contract with the BCA aimed at making caving more attractive to young people, and more socially diverse.

Sharon invited me to attend the first three presentations, and I found them all both eye-opening and impressive. Only one of the 12 students in the three groups had

been caving, although many of them said – encouragingly enough – that having researched the subject, they'd love to try it. Also present was Darkness Below co-editor Linda Wilson, a long-time stalwart of the University of Bristol Speleological Society, and she promised to try to facilitate their initiation by setting up a meeting with their UBSS counterparts.

But while they were not experienced cave explorers, what these students represented was still very relevant to caving's demographic dilemma. For this was about as media-savvy a bunch of smart young people as you could hope to find anywhere, and their message, for those tempted to feel complacent, was compelling.



The first group of students who presented, Helena Trehwitt, Michael Rossiter, Daisy Ferreira and Olivia Evans - by Sharon Wheeler

Each group differed in its ideas and possible solutions. What they shared was a brutal, bleak diagnosis. The current BCA website, they agreed, was dull and old-fashioned, and as a shop window for British caving, mediocre.

Worryingly, none of the students seemed to have found their way from the BCA homepage to the [New to Caving](#) website, with its stacks of useful information and alluring photos – although the site was designated as an 'official' BCA partner more than a year ago.

As for social media – the critical means of communication for anyone under 30 – caving as a whole, caving clubs and the BCA might just as well be invisible. 'The

BCA doesn't even have an Instagram account!' one of the presenters said. Well, er, no, it doesn't. 'On the day we checked, the BCA Facebook page only had 841 likes!' said another, evidently astonished. According to the students, if cavers and our national association are serious about trying to widen the sport's appeal, we need a revamped website, to get an Instagram page up and running, maintained with frequent, fresh content, and in general, a transformed, much bigger social media presence.

Another common theme was the need to generate awareness that women both enjoy and derive great benefit from caving. The first of the groups developed some imaginary profiles of young women cavers to convey the new image caving might try to emphasise, emphasising 'female empowerment'. Along the way they came up with some slogans that could be applied both on social media sites and on the front of T-shirts, such as 'Not all heroes wear capes – some cave!' and 'I caved – did you?' Above all, they said, caving needs to 'break the boundaries of caving stereotypes' – that it tends to be the preserve of gruff, bearded men.

The second group began their presentation with a memorable formulation: 'You know caving is cool. We know caving is cool. But not everyone knows caving is cool' – and part of the job of the BCA should, they said, be to ensure they do. The Thai cave diving rescue could, they added, be a 'light at the end of the cave to bring the BCA out of the dark' – an event so positive in its impact that it could be exploited to generate wider interest in the sport. They also suggested the BCA website could contain some virtual reality videos to show casual visitors what the sport is like.

The third group said strong social media is the ideal way to maintain interest once it has been sparked, with YouTube a potentially important resource. They also suggested cavers should begin an outreach programme with inner city schools as a way of making caving more diverse. They had, it seems, realised that at present, the proportion of black and minority ethnic cavers is embarrassingly small. Social media could also be a way of generating interest in particular caves or trip – with links through to surveys and descriptions to whet readers' appetites.

I came away with a sense that caving really does have a lot of work to do to attract future generations – and at present, little understanding as to how this might be done. Not every suggestion the three student groups made was on target: their idea of 'scavenger hunts' to pick up litter from inside rubbish-strewn systems was one example that was a little wide of the mark. But overall, they had many constructive ideas – and by revealing just how out of touch older cavers are, a diagnosis we ignore at our peril.

SESSION 2 – by Linda Wilson

You'd imagine that the success of the Thai cave rescue was seen from all sides as something overwhelmingly positive, wouldn't you? After all, it had the lot – drama, heroism and a happy ending. Turns out that not everyone was convinced ... I was able to attend both weeks' presentations, but will concentrate here on some overarching themes and the two presentations from the second session. First up were Myriad Global, who led with the need to start young, targeting the 10-25 age

group. The students made a great point that fear of darkness and claustrophobia is learnt not inbred. They had planned a two-year campaign, targeting schools and universities, and one of the first things they wanted to do was dispel any negative impressions left by the Thai rescue, pointing out that, in their words, 'danger sticks'.

That took me by surprise. As a caver, I'd seen the success of the rescue as a huge positive for the sport. Cavers were heroes. What I hadn't done was look at the rescue from the point of view of an outsider, where coupling the words cave and rescue so strongly together had, in many people's eyes, left a perception that divers were heroes but that cavers were the people who had been in need of rescuing. That negative perception was a theme running throughout all five presentations and was a useful reminder that not everyone sees things the way cavers do.

The first group identified as strengths the fact that caving is self-funded and cavers are in general passionate about their hobby. The weaknesses were seen as a low social media and website presence, with not enough information on where people can cave. The group felt that in the aftermath of the Thai rescue there would need to be a great emphasis on how safe caving is. They pointed out that the organisation needed to consider where it was now, where does it want to be and how will it get there, looking at objectives over six months, one year and two years.



Shawn Yan, Carmen Hoo, Caryn Chong and Ray Chel Ng, by Sharon Wheeler

They suggested visiting schools, and also putting on 3D cave visits in the hope of attracting people to indoor caving first, mindful here of the popularity of indoor climbing walls. Interestingly, none of the groups discovered the existence of the BCA's artificial cave. They felt the BCA's newsletter needed pushing as only eight per cent of members have signed up to received it. Other ideas included partnering with prominent influencers such as Bear Grylls (I kept a commendably straight face when he was mentioned!) and Go-Pro.

On the subject of social media, the group recommended revamping the website and the Facebook pages (making use of sponsored posts), creating an Instagram account, and working on Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) as the BCA does not come high on searches related to caving. In the same vein, the group had not found its way to the excellent New to Caving site, which suggests that visibility is lacking here too. In fact, none of the five groups of media-savvy students had found it.

One of the group's more radical suggestions was that as landowners are one of the most influential stakeholders in British caving, the BCA should create a separate body for them within the organisation, invite them to discussions and 'treat them as part of the family.'

Their emphasis was on putting over the message that caving is accessible to everyone and they felt it was important for there to be free membership for students.

The second group, Proactive, also felt that the Thai rescue had created a negative perception of caving. In general, the perception they had taken away of the BCA and cavers in general were very similar to those of the first group, with comments being made on low social media presence and low reach to the public. They advised that the BCA needed to know its way around the media and use that to its best advantage.

Proactive suggested a three-month summer PR campaign called Let's C.A.V.E. in which the capital letters stand for Caves Are Very Exciting and they produced a poster to be used in this context. Their campaign was aimed at those in the 15-25 age group, as they had gained the impression that most cavers fell into the 30-50 age bracket. However, they did make the point that as most cavers have a break while they start a family, that they should be encouraged to start caving again at the appropriate time.

They suggested creating a Let's Cave virtual reality roadshow as 90 per cent of the input to the brain is visual. This should create an immersive experience, stressing the beauty of caves, and create an interactive roadshow. They also came up with the idea of developing a cave-based conservation game and partnering with the gaming community to create awareness of this. They also suggested the creation of an Instagram account and flagged up caver and cave diver Christine Grosart as an important influencer in this field who has a good following on social media. Their view was that the campaign should stress the qualities that caving fosters, stressing trust, leadership, resilience and teamwork. The success of the campaign would be evaluated against a change in perceptions evidenced by audience testimonies, media portrayal and website traffic.

Watching all the presentations was a fascinating experience, and was a salutary reminder that 'outsiders' see our community in a different way to how we perceive ourselves. I don't know of any cavers who thought that the Thai rescue would have created a negative impression of the sport as – for once – cavers were in the limelight as heroes. But in the eyes of five groups of very diverse young people it was divers who were the heroes and cavers that needed rescuing. The emphasis on better web presence and better use of social media came as no surprise, as cavers tend to be interested in caving rather than sitting around on their phones all the time (try that in the Hunters and see where it gets you!)

What the experience taught me, I think, is that cavers need to spend more time looking at ourselves through the eyes of others and that the BCA should blow its own trumpet a lot more. There is a lot going on in the BCA, but its work needs to be made more visible both to cavers and the general public.

JANE ALLEN'S RESIGNATION

At last summer's AGM, Jane Allen was appointed BCA P&I (publications and information) officer. She has a lot of experience in outdoor industry marketing and many ideas for progress in this field. She came to the January council meeting to present some of them, including plans for changes to the BCA website and a new logo. Your editor was not at the meeting, so I can't comment on what was said, or by whom. But it evidently caused ill-feeling – so much so that, shortly afterwards, Jane resigned. I hope this was largely the product of misunderstanding, and I am aware that one council member has already sent Jane an apology. Afterwards she sent out an email, and has asked me to reproduce it here, so it's pasted below. Full disclosure: Jane is a personal friend. But this episode saddens me. We need her energy and ideas – and more women in important roles. I hope this will provoke reflection.

13 January 2019

For the attention of BCA Council and BCA members.

I am tending my resignation as BCA Publications and Information Officer with immediate effect.

It had been my hope to help BCA promote the organisation in a positive manner to its members and the wider caving community. It had also been my hope to help promote caving to those who have yet to discover our great sport. I had thought my professional sales, marketing, PR and social media experience would be of value to the organisation.

I had looked forward to showing Council examples of what change might look like, however the reaction I received from some members left me feeling humiliated, embarrassed and chastised. It was a pretty awful drive home and I feel little better today.

The effort I believe it would require, once a P&I committee was set up, battling against procedure and the dominance I see of BCA by a few people is simply too much.

It's little wonder BCA struggles to enlist and retain volunteers, particularly women.

Regards, Jane Allen



The Sabre, Pant Mawr Pot, by Mark Burkey

The End