

BritishCaving

The newsletter of the British Caving Association



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Editorial

by David Rose

In Praise of Old Farts

Some years back, the Alpine Journal carried a fascinating article by a member who was also an insurance actuary. He analysed the entire cohort of Alpine Club members from several decades previously, and worked out that, taking into account their socio-economic status and including those who died in climbing accidents, they lived about seven years longer than you would, statistically, expect. The reason, the article suggested, was that members of the club tried to stay fit and active as long as possible, because of their love of being in the great outdoors.

Recent issues of this newsletter, and discussions within the BCA, have rightly emphasised the need to attract young people to caving, and welcomed the evidence now coming from several directions that these efforts seem to be achieving success.

The revival of university clubs, CHECC, the attendance of younger members at BCA meetings and their involvement in expeditions are hugely positive signs. Not many years ago, a lot of cavers were expressing fears that as their generation aged, the activity would eventually die out. Lately, I haven't heard people saying this at all.

So in this editorial I'd like to celebrate something else – that there are so many older cavers who are staying active into their seventh, eighth and even their ninth decades, in many cases having started pretty young.

A few years ago, there was a party held to mark the 50th anniversary of the Giants Hole – Oxlow Caverns connection. By any standards, that's a fairly hard trip: the fact that part of the long, wet, often tight crawl between the two systems is known as The Chamber of Horrors tells you most of what you need to know. Repeating the traverse was one caver who'd been part of the team that did it first time around – the somewhat legendary Clive Westlake, who must have been underground more often than just about anyone. To me, that's every bit as impressive as the ascent made by Riccardo Cassin of his eponymous route on the Northeast Face of the Piz Badile in Switzerland – 50 years after he did it for the first time in 1937.

Many keen diggers, in all the main caving areas, freed by their pensions from the need to earn a living, are well past retirement age. In many cases, their efforts are not confined

to projects on the surface, but require challenging underground trips to reach their pushing fronts. Last year saw the death of Harry 'Eski' Hesketh after a fall deep in Curtain Pot, a cave he and his friends were still exploring on Fountains Fell in the Dales. Tragic as this was, there is some bittersweet consolation to be drawn from the fact that he was 74, and pushing a cave so challenging that the CRO had to carry out extensive widening operations before a rescue could be contemplated. Eski had been a caver since the 1960s, or in other words, for at least 60 years.

Full disclosure: I recently turned 60 myself, so my perspective is coloured by my own desire to continue to journey underground for as long as I possibly can. At the same time, I'm in awe of my many friends of around the same age and older, and the fitness and energy they still deploy on outings that would exhaust most people half their age.

The fact so many of us do keep going for so long is in itself evidence of the exceptional and multi-faceted interest that exploring the underworld holds. This, of course, is the reason why our efforts to get much younger people involved are beginning to succeed. Yes folks, on the whole, caving is an awesome thing to do.

Meanwhile, my hunch is that if we repeated the exercise conducted by the Alpine Club, we'd find that BCA members live longer, on average, too – even if some of us do have trouble with our knees.

Latest news and events...

british-caving.org.uk



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ukcaving.com

BCA Party Weekend and AGM 2020

13/14 June 2020, Priddy, Mendip

The BCA is very grateful to the Council of Southern Caving Clubs for agreeing to host the BCA's annual party weekend and Annual General Meeting for 2020. We'd like to encourage as many cavers as possible to come along, have a great time, and of course participate in the BCA AGM on the Sunday morning. There will be caving, training, talks, films, barbeque, disco and beer.

Venue: Priddy Village Hall, Priddy, Wells, BA5 3BE

The programme is currently only provisional:

Saturday 13th June:

- Caving trips
- Training event
- Daytime: Various talks, lectures and films
- Early evening: Competitions
- Evening: Barbeque, bar and disco

Sunday 14th June:

- Breakfast and lunch rolls with tea/coffee/beer(!)
- BCA AGM at 10:30am followed by Council meeting

Priddy Village Hall has excellent AV facilities and a good internet connection. There are three caving huts within walking distance, a commercial camp site (clubs offer camping as well), a farm shop for breakfast, The Queen Victoria Inn serving meals and The Hunters Lodge offering inexpensive meals and good beer.

The Annual General Meeting:

The AGM will be held on the Sunday (14th June 2020) at Priddy Village Hall, 10:30am. All BCA members are welcome. Individual members (CIMs/DIMs) should bring their BCA membership card as identification if wanting to vote.

The following vacancies on BCA Council will arise at the meeting:

1. Conservation and Access Officer (three year term)
2. Two representatives for Group members (two year terms)
3. Two representatives for Individual members (two year terms)

The deadline to apply for these positions, and to submit any proposals is midnight on Saturday 4th April 2020. If you would like to stand for a position or submit a proposal (or would like any further information) simply email the BCA Secretary;

secretary@british-caving.org.uk

The agenda of the meeting and a finalised programme for the full party weekend will be published on the BCA website in due course; watch our website (www.british-caving.org.uk), UKCaving, or follow us on Facebook.

We look forward to seeing lots of you on Mendip in June.

Steps Forward for Access



Since the last newsletter, the Government's review of National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, led by Julian Glover has been published. This can be found by searching online for the Glover review

Leading up to this, in late 2018, our CRoW Officer, David Rose, actually met with Julian and his review team at Defra's HQ in London and presented a strong case that the current official position on CRoW access and caves is wrong. We're pleased to say the Review appears to have accepted this input. See

page 21 for a super photo, and then some very supportive comments on page 81:

"Concerns were also raised about what are perceived to be restrictive laws, or restrictive interpretations of them. We heard, for instance, how cavers face restrictions on what is otherwise designated as open access land once they move beyond an unspecified distance from cave entrances, perhaps the limit of daylight."

The full context makes clear that Glover's

view is strongly sympathetic to caver access.

Best of all is proposal 18, on page 98. This says the government should consider expanding access rights, and mentions cavers specifically:

"It feels wrong that many parts of our most beautiful places are off-limits to horse riders, water users, cavers, wild campers and so on. We hope that as part of the government's commitment to connect more people with nature, it will look seriously at whether the levels of open access we have in our most special places are adequate."

The BCA believe this is a very useful step forwards, which will make it harder for Defra and Natural England to ignore the BCA's representations that it is time to review the legal advice which has been used to deny freedom of access to caves on CRoW designated land. It will also make it easier to drum up further political support.

The BCA will continue to work hard to capitalise on this excellent progress, hopefully enabling cavers to one day benefit from the same freedom of access on CRoW land as many other outdoor activities.

| Stop Press

Only a day before publication, we have heard from Stuart France, Cambrian Caving Council Access Officer, that the Welsh Government's Access Reform Advisory Group have categorically decided that caving is not considered an open-air activity, and will not be covered by the scope of that group.

This is disappointing for cave access, and the whole spirit of what countryside access is meant to be about; to promote enjoyment of our natural resources, physical activity, and all the associated socio-economic and health benefits. No doubt more detailed news will follow soon, but be assured the BCA will not be giving up on our campaign on the basis of one setback.

| BCA Finances are in Excellent Shape

by Howard Jones (BCA Treasurer)

Although I am BCA Treasurer, the opinions expressed below are my own as an individual.

Since I retired 18 months ago (having spent my career growing successful businesses) I have gotten involved in three organisations in a voluntary role. Two of them have a vision, a united Council and lots of ideas to deliver the vision but not enough money. I see my role as helping them raise cash.

The other organisation is BCA, it has no agreed vision, has an argumentative Council BUT lots of cash.

When BCA was established 15 years ago it had £50,000 in the bank. Today it has six times as much, or £300,000. If this was a saving plan towards an objective then the situation would be laudable, but I don't think it has happened by design. When I joined Council, I saw no evidence of what the cash

Many of you will have noticed that some of our membership fees have changed in 2020.

The CIM rate remains the same, but the DIM rate has come down by £5 to match the CIM rate. This follows a proposal put forward by the BCA Secretary, Matt Ewles, to see no financial penalty imposed for those who choose to join the BCA outside of a club structure.

It was acknowledged during the discussion that processing DIMs does incur additional work compared to CIM membership (as multiple CIMs are usually processed in one application). However, BCA Council rejected maintaining even a small price difference.

was being hoarded for and still don't. I saw few ideas of what member benefits the cash should be spent on, though that is slowly changing.

There are many areas BCA could fund, some are already funded to a degree, for example BCA fully funds the British Caving Library and the public liability insurance policy as member benefits. It employs three part time administrators who do a great job providing services to members. What else could it do? Some examples:

1. Pay for some of the volunteer work to be done by employees and/or contractors. Is it sustainable for BCA to rely so heavily on volunteers, and do they have the skill sets required?
2. Put more cash into caving expeditions. In 2019 UK cavers spent over £200,000 on caving abroad, BCA funded just £6,000 or 3% of that.

We hope that planned modernisation of our membership systems will reduce administrative burden and make our systems much slicker. More on this in the next newsletter hopefully.

Joint DIM discount no longer exists as this related mainly to historical savings in posting of publications (i.e. only one copy between two) which are no longer relevant. Despite scrapping this discount, the reduction of £5/person to each DIM still makes it cheaper than 2019 overall.

Associate membership was also reduced to just £25. All other group fees remain the same as previous years.

3. Put more cash into BCRA who are currently running down their reserves to meet their objectives, a situation that cannot be sustained.
4. Do more training for cavers such as the courses Whernside Manor used to run.

I see my role as BCA Treasurer to encourage the investment of our surplus cash into developing caving in the UK beyond where it is today, but no one person has all the ideas or vision to drive this activity. If you have ideas and vision please make them known to BCA via the appropriate channels.

If I am successful in my vision then my successor will take over a smaller (but more than adequate) pile of cash, but a more active BCA providing better benefits for its members.

| Taking Under 18s Caving? The BCA can help...

by Chris Boardman, BCA Safeguarding Officer

I became BCA's first Safeguarding Officer in summer 2018. The first job was to draft a safeguarding policy and practical guidelines for clubs and members. These are available on the BCA website.

All members are particularly encouraged to read '**BCA Good Practice Guidelines**' and clubs should read '**BCA Safeguarding Guidelines for Clubs**'. There is a wealth of useful information.

My contact details are on the website and clubs are welcome to get in touch if they have questions.

BCA now has the ability to carry out DBS checks on request (DBS is the replacement to the former CRB check). The scenario these apply to is when members are taking under-18s caving and no family member of the child is present. Two members have already gone through this process, which BCA provides free of charge.

Safeguarding is about considerably more than just DBS certificates. If clubs are taking under 18s caving, we recommend that:

- Clubs appoint a Youth and Vulnerable Adult Officer.

- Clubs require a consent form from parents.
- An officer of the club needs to know which adult will be in charge of a trip and should be satisfied that they are a fit person, in terms of experience, skills and temperament.
- A DBS check is carried out (by the BCA Safeguarding Officer, free of charge) for adults who will be directly supervising under 18s if parents will not be present.
- Clubs ensure that children and vulnerable adults are wearing clothing, footwear, helmet and lighting that are appropriate for the caving environment.
- Discussion must be held between a club officer and the adult leading trips with under 18's regarding the venue(s) they propose to visit (including any backup plans). For example, a list of possible caves might be agreed, which are appropriate to the children's age and experience.

The above list is taken from the 'guideline' documents and can I stress again the importance of clubs and members reading these two documents from the BCA website; www.british-caving.org.uk

Ballot Results and BCA Democracy

by Matt Ewles (BCA Secretary)

At the 2019 AGM, I put forward a package of constitutional changes.

The changes were intended to remove the two-house voting system at General Meetings, leaving voting by individual members (CIMs and DIMs) only. They would also create a requirement for online voting to be made available, whereby all motions that achieve a defined level of support at the AGM itself (not just constitutional matters), as well as contested elections, are put to an online vote of all individual members for a roughly one-month period after the AGM.

I delivered arguments at the AGM to support these changes, including that I felt the two house system created double-representation, increased bureaucracy, and was very unfair as it meant a group with three members had the same weighted vote as a club with 300 members or a regional council representing thousands of cavers. Arguments to the contrary were also put forward with feelings that most cavers would rather their club dealt with BCA matters hence the importance of maintaining the group vote. There were mixed opinions, and it is safe to say that I was not confident that our groups would vote with enough majority to abolish their own vote.

The motion passed at the meeting and so was progressed to a full ballot.

The ballot was conducted online using a system developed bespoke for the BCA by our webmaster, Gary Douthwaite. All our members, individuals and groups, were sent a ballot ID to use to vote in the system, which worked remarkably well. Although about 2000 postal ballots had to be sent out (due to us not having email addresses for about a third of our individual members), only about 5% of all votes that were cast were done by return postage.

The ballot question was whether to support the constitutional changes (hence abolish the two-house system and implement online voting for individuals only), and the results are as follows:

House of Individuals:

Votes to support the motion: 854 (82.5%)

Votes to reject the motion: 181 (17.5%)

Turnout: 1035 of 6285 (16.5%)

House of Groups:

Votes to support the motion: 66 (76.7%)

Votes to reject the motion: 20 (23.3%)

Turnout: 86 of 185 (46.5%)

Result:

Both houses exceeded the 70% support requirement, and so the motion passed. The constitutional changes have been enacted and updated on our website.

I would therefore like to remind everyone that voting at the 2020 AGM will be individuals (CIMs and DIMs) only; bring your BCA card please! All non-housekeeping motions will need to meet a threshold acceptance at the meeting to progress to an online ballot after the meeting. Watch your email for this coming through following the AGM this June. Check the BCA website, follow us on Facebook or watch the BCA forum on UKCaving for further updates.

I would like to convey to groups that your involvement in BCA democracy is still valued, and encouraged. Your members may still appreciate you discussing BCA matters on their behalf or acting to educate them on upcoming matters. You can even encourage your members to vote in accordance with your club stance. This means clubs can still have a strong democratic influence, but one which is proportional to their membership.

The next-generation ballot system is now being developed and is likely to require an email contact to enable participation. We see that 95% of participants in this ballot cast their vote electronically, and of the 5% who did not, many might have done so if an option for postal return not been available. I believe it is debatable whether the BCA can really justify the costs (>£2000 per ballot) and huge administrative burden of continuing to provide postage as a standard option these days.

The BCA's Vision

by Hellie Adams (BCA Vision Group)

The BCA Vision Group has been working to come up with some suggestions for an organisational mission statement. We now have six suggestions, and we'd like to start circulating them, as BCA member feedback is hugely important:

Here are our current contenders:

1. The aim of the British Caving Association is to promote the interests of the caving community.
2. The aim of the British Caving Association is to facilitate safe careful caving for all.
3. The British Caving Association will be an organisation with a simple membership structure - understood, appreciated, and functioning in the best interest of its members.
4. The British Caving Association exists to ensure an active and progressive caving society for the future.
5. The aim of the British Caving Association is to be an organisation that all cavers want to belong to.
6. The British Caving Association: safe, respectful caving for everyone.

We have created a survey (www.surveymonkey.com/r/D2QN287) where you can pick which of the above you prefer, or make an alternative suggestion.

We also would like to hear from anyone who wishes to be part of BCA Vision working group, to help the BCA remain a forward-looking organisation. Anyone is welcome to get involved. My contact email is: little_caver@hotmail.com

BCA Public Liability Insurance Increase

At the January 2020 BCA Council meeting, we voted to increase the value of the public liability insurance policy we give as a benefit to all our full members from £5m to £10m.

This has been an ongoing discussion for a few years. However, a recently settled claim on a comparable BMC policy (~£9M) has now set precedent and requires that we increase our cover for it to remain meaningful. Pressure from other areas (e.g. some landowners) for a higher value policy has also increased recently.

As of 10th February, our Insurance Manager, Howard Jones has found a suitable policy. BCA members now have a public liability limit of £10m worldwide, limited to £5m in respect of claims as a result of activities in USA/Canada. The latter caveat was unfortunately unavoidable in the current climate.

This comes at a total annual cost to the BCA of £9500 (about £1.50 per individual member), however, for now there are no immediate plans to increase membership fees to cover this additional cost.

Derbyshire Caving Association



It's mainly been a season of conservation and access projects that have kept our volunteers busy over the last few months.

Odin Mine

Official access has been denied to this site for a few years now but has recently come back onto the agenda. Work behind the scenes is currently on-going with a view to opening this site. For Longcliffe Mine and Son of Longcliffe, a guiding system is going to be put in place so that sensitive areas are not damaged, but the current suggestion is that representatives of local caving clubs are trained up to fulfil this function for their own clubs, and keys will be kept at the TSG. More details for both sites will be released in due course.

Wardlow Sough

Natural England and Historic England requested the assistance of DCA and Peak District Mines Historical Society (PDMHS) to re-open the old sough tail and re-instate the public footpath. This was originally dug open in the 70's to reveal ~300 m of passage but run in over the years. Over the course of a week, this was dug open, a pipe installed with fixed ladders and the level was re-entered. A full report can be found in The Derbyshire Caver (152) on the DCA website.



New entrance at Wardlow Sough. Photo: Wayne Sheldon



Prior to work at Wardlow Sough. Photo: Wayne Sheldon

Snelsnow Swallet

Here, a large-scale cleanup of the abandoned underground digging equipment has occurred, including re-bolting of the site. Official access has now been restored. A report about the cleanup will follow in the next DCA newsletter. Access information



Snelsnow Shaft. Photo: Wayne Sheldon



Snelsnow Inner Pitch. Photo: Wayne Sheldon

can be found on the DCA website.

On an administrative side, we finally have an Access Officer in post. We are still on the lookout for a Secretary and Conservation Officer to assist the current officers. Anybody who feels they could do these roles or would like more information about the roles, please get in touch with me via the website (www.thedca.org.uk).

Wayne Sheldon, DCA Chairman

Devon and Cornwall Underground Council

Access has been a big focus for DCUC in the last 12 months. We have lost access to a few sites, although we are working hard to secure new formal access agreements with most of these lost sites. Some of this will rely on maintaining gates and changing locks. On a positive note, regaining access to other sites where access was lost years ago is looking promising, this will be a great bonus and it will be good to get inside these systems as and when the access is secured.

At the time of writing there is no access to Great Rock Mine, Berry Head Caves, Penn Recca Mine and some of the Chudleigh Caves (seek an update from DCUC Access officer for latest information as these are all a work in progress with access to some closer to being agreed than others).

We are looking to change some of the locks on gated sites. This will coincide with a new database of keyholders and distribution of key packs.

A new gate is ready to be fitted to Radford just awaiting support to help carry and fit it.

Conservation is ongoing in Bakers Pit; the old taping was on the floor getting dirty and in need of replacement to make the preserved areas more obvious. We had a look at different types of tape, decided on the best type for the cave and are now using pig tails to keep this tape off the ground and maintain its position.

During the last year DCUC has been carrying out a bolting program in Devon. As NAMHO is in Cornwall this year, there was a need to P-bolt a few of the popular mines in the Tamar Valley. Due to the nature of the mines in Devon and Cornwall the standard P-bolt design had to change due to the requirement to withstand the acidic mine conditions. As access arrangements are agreed, the need for bolting in other locations will be assessed to aid the future of further exploration in Devon.

Finally, the Council has looked at itself internally, at its structure and how it conducts business. This has resulted, as the first stage, with a revised constitution being agreed at the Annual General Meeting in January.

Thanks to everyone who has worked towards all the above projects.

Geoff Dommett, DCUC Chairman

Council of Southern Caving Clubs

In addition to hosting and arranging the BCA's 2020 party weekend (see separate article), the CSCC have informed us that their website has been updated and "refurbished" and is the place to find out the latest information about conservation and access as well as all things Mendip and the south.



Online Booking for Leck Fell

Since the last BCA newsletter, the CNCC have successfully brought the caves of Leck Fell onto our Online Booking System, joining the caves of Ingleborough Estate too. This system was developed for the CNCC by our webmaster, Gary Douthwaite, and provides a compromise system for cavers to enjoy the freedoms of access they desire, while ensuring access retains a degree of management and the opportunity for cavers to be informed of any important information during the booking process (e.g. preferred access routes). The system is open to anyone, with no restrictions about age or club versus individuals, although we do add that it is intended for non-commercial caving only. Commercial caving still requires bespoke agreement from the landowner.

The Online Booking System has been a tremendous success, with nearly 500 registered users, and by the time this newsletter is published, we expect over 1000 access bookings to have been made since it was launched on the 1st November 2018 (at least 15/week). Feedback has been very positive.

And Casterton Fell too...

In more breaking news, we are delighted to announce that since the 10th of February 2020, the caves of Casterton Fell (i.e. Ease Gill Caverns) are also part of the Online



The Palace, Ease Gill Caverns. Photo: Gary Douthwaite

Booking System, ending the permit system that has existed in various incarnations for over 50 years.

This means that for the first time, non-club cavers can gain landowner-consented access to the caves of Ease Gill. This follows months of discussions with the Estate by our Access Officer, Tim Allen. They were clearly encouraged by the successful implementation on Leck Fell and Ingleborough so thank you to all northern cavers for helping to make this work.

Unlike other areas, bookings for Casterton Fell are transferrable on the day to other entrances, although we do encourage this flexibility to be used only for the less-SRT orientated routes (County Pot, Wretched Rabbit, and to a degree, Lancaster Hole) to avoid congestion at the more vertical or narrower routes (Sylvester Pot, Cow Pot, Top Sink, Pool Sink). Two bookings per day are available for County, Wretched and Lancaster in-fitting with typical prior permit usage, and one booking per day for Sylvester, Cow, Top and Pool, with one booking to cover all other entrances.

The online booking system has so far been embraced by many cavers, who use it out of respect for the landowners for who this is a condition of access, but also for the secondary benefit that it helps cavers to manage their own traffic and avoid congestion, with conservation benefits. We continue to urge cavers to only book what you know you plan to use (please don't book 'just in case') as last minute bookings on the day of your trip are always available.

Finally, Aygill Caverns, which lies outside of Casterton Fell has been removed from all permit and booking systems in line with the caves of nearby Barbondale.

Conservation

Conservation projects have continued over winter, with a cleanup at Stump Cross Caverns, Lancaster Hole, some fencing work at Sell Gill Holes, restoration of the stiles on the route to Tatham Wife Hole, and some surface restoration work on Casterton Fell near Lancaster Hole, following rescue vehicle access during the tragic incident that occurred there in January.

New Officers

We are expecting to welcome some new faces to the CNCC Officers team at our AGM on 7th March (Hellifield Village Institute, all welcome, 10am). Matt Ewles and Pete Bann are standing down after serving six and five years as Secretary and Treasurer, respectively. We have keen replacements for both positions lined up, as well as a potential new Training Officer. Great news all round!

Matt Ewles, CNCC Secretary

Emergency Help for Cave Conservation

by Jenny Potts (BCRA Representative)

The aim of the UK Cave Conservation Emergency Fund (UKCCEF) is to support, by loan or grant, projects that further the conservation of caves and cave features, bearing in mind that references to a cave or cave feature are intended to include historic mines, caves and other places of speleological interest within the United Kingdom.

The Fund exists to be called upon where urgent action is required to protect a cave or cave feature such that waiting for funding to be raised through other avenues would be too slow.

In order not to deplete the Fund too quickly, loans are the preferred methods of assistance, with repayment made (with optional interest) as soon as sufficient cash has been raised by other means.

The amount in the Fund is increased through donations, bank interest and by any interest raised on loans made and at present the total stands at £20,921. In any one year a loan of up to 15% of the capital may be made for any one project (so currently approximately £3,178 maximum), whereas the maximum grant available is 5% of the capital, so about £1,046. Groups or individuals who call on the Fund are expected to produce a brief report for publication afterwards detailing how the money has been used.

Recommendations on applications to the Fund are dealt with by a panel of six people consulting by email: Five individuals nominated by four of the Regional Councils plus the Forest of Dean Conservation and Access Group and one individual nominated by the BCRA (who acts as the 'secretary'

for the Panel); each serving for a 5-year term. BCRA's Treasurer acts as the Fund's Treasurer.

Applications for funding can be made via any of the regional representatives or direct to the 'Secretary'.

As it is an 'emergency fund', UKCCEF is rarely called upon for assistance but remains in the background in case cash is needed urgently. The most recent approach to the Fund was from Northern Ireland in 2014, however no formal application was made and the problem was resolved without the need to call upon the Fund. There have been no enquiries since then.

Further information is available from the website:

www.ukccef.org.uk

British Caving Library



At the October BCA Council meeting, we voted to support a request from the British Caving Library for around £9000 of additional funding to employ extra support for processing all the donated materials. The following report from the BCL Coordinator, Jenny Potts, tells us a bit about what has been going on.

In early November the Library hosted the Cave Surveying Group's training session for the second year running. This time they took over the Library facilities for 3 days and 13 members of the group packed round the tables to swap information on modern surveying methods. They are just some of the 90+ cavers who have visited the Library to make use of our facilities in 2019.

Thanks to the BCA's increased funding we have been able to appoint a Library Assistant, Katie Eavis, who started work for us on 6th November. Katie is a keen caver (Secretary of Eldon P.C.) who lives locally

and has three young children, so she's implementing flexible working, partly in the Library and partly from home, taking a box of publications away with her to work on each week. Katie has already begun to make a real difference in tackling the backlog of cataloguing.

Our two volunteers, Martin and Shirley, have made huge inroads on the hundreds of Peak District surveys stored in tubes as part of the John Beck Legacy. They have already

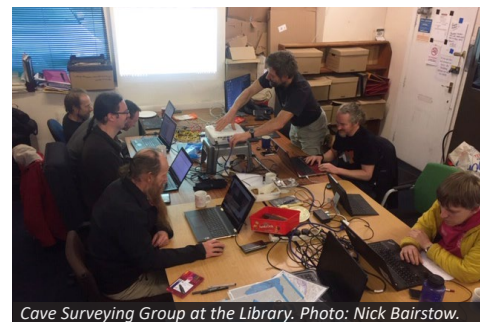


dealt with 98 of the 133 tubes and we have been able to supply DCA with a spreadsheet detailing the 316 surveys and maps identified so far - the aim being to put the most recent on the DCA website available for everyone.

Causing interest among those keen on the history of caving in Britain is a donated photo album of exploits in Yorkshire caves created by a caving couple in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The photo album and an associated press cutting about the couple's rescue from a flooded Alum Pot in September 1948 have already been put online in the BCRA Archives. Speculation is rife on UKcaving.com as to which club they were members of in 1948.

We don't charge BCA members for use of the facilities but many of our visitors make donations and of course there are the donations for our Lucky Dip stand at Hidden Earth where we pass on duplicate publications to other cavers. In addition to the Hidden Earth Lucky Dip, we also pass on runs of duplicate periodicals to help to complete collections held by clubs around the country. We want to encourage caving libraries in general and ensure that they communicate with us and with each other.

Jenny Potts, British Caving Library Coordinator.



Adventure Academy

At the January BCA meeting, our Youth and Development Officer put forward a proposal for BCA funding to support a youth caving initiative called Adventure Academy.

Adventure Academy is aimed at those between 12-21 who live in a commutable distance of the Ingleborough area. It aims to provide educational sessions, training and trips on a weekly basis (at least) between March and November, delivered by the Yorkshire Dales Guides.

The initiative was presented to the BCA having already been granted funding from the Stories in Stone initiative, which has, to date, funded a significant amount of cave conservation work in the Ingleborough Area. The requirement to unlock the ~£7000 in

funding from Stories in Stone was for this to be match-funded with an additional ~£5600 as a one-off cost.

The BCA Council gave careful thought to this opportunity, conscious that the Yorkshire Dales Guides is a commercial entity. However, it was reassuring to hear from others in similar positions that the commercial interests behind this are likely matched, or even outweighed by passion to get more youngsters involved in caving, something the BCA certainly supports.

It was acknowledged that this was a speculative startup venture, but one that had already been deemed worthwhile of a significant investment by Stories in Stone, who will have reviewed this in considerable detail.

With that in mind, BCA Council decided that investing in this was the right thing to do, on the proviso that Adventure Academy make regular contributions to this newsletter so we can all see how things are progressing, and that if the initiative does not progress then equipment purchased (estimated value £3800) is given to the BCA for redistribution.

We are looking forward to seeing how this initiative evolves, because if successful it could provide a valuable route for youngsters to get involved in caving in the Ingleborough area and could provide a template for other regions to consider.

The Ghar Parau Foundation 2019-2020

GPF Expedition Science Weekend - 28-29th March 2020

The Ghar Parau Foundation are pleased to announce that, in conjunction with BCRA, we are running an expedition science weekend to encourage expeditions to undertake a more scientific approach, and help further the knowledge about speleology for both the general public and the expedition participants themselves. The weekend will consist of a number of lectures and practicals on various scientific aspects.

The programme is near finalised and currently included topics such as:

- Hydrology on caving expeditions - John Gunn
- Basic cave geology and geomorphology for expeditions - Andrew Farrant
- Hypogenic caves and their understanding of - John Dale

- Basic Bat Identification - Jessica Eades
- Bones in Caves and their identification - Andrew Chamberlain
- Scientific cave surveying and documentation - Madphil Rowsell

It is also planned to have a practical workshop on the Cave Link systems that many of the UK expeditions are now using.

This is planned for the weekend of the 28-29th March at the TSG in Derbyshire which has been booked by GPF for the whole weekend.

To attend the weekend is free, however food and TSG hut fees are the responsibility of the participants. To help planning and ensure participants are serious about attending, we are trying a novel approach of asking for a £10 deposit to secure a place, refundable on attendance, but forfeited to GPF for no-shows. GPF's aim is not to make money from this event but encourage expe-

ditions to partake in more science!

More information about the weekend can be found on the GPF website:

www.gharparau.org.uk/science-weekend

This includes details about the weekend, how to register and how to contact GPF for those with any questions.

GPF really encourages people to attend this weekend and learn some interesting scientific things that cavers can do on their expeditions.

Independent Charity Status

On 18th September 2019 the Ghar Parau Foundation was granted charity status. GPF had originally been a sub-charity of BCRA, but due to increasing problems with financial regulations, GPF decided to separate from BCRA and form a completely separate charity. A big thanks to all those who helped in this process.

Ghar Parau Expedition Funding Summary

The Ghar Parau Foundation met on the 31st March 2019 and the 29th September 2019 and considered all applications. Over the year, GPF distributed a total of £7175, of which £6300 came from BCA and £875 from GPF (which includes five Alex Pitcher awards totalling £375). The allocations and the committee feedback are given in the following table (AP = Alex Pitcher, CC = China Caves):

Expedition	Feedback	BCA	GPF	CC	AP	Total
Croatia Cave Diving Expedition 2019 (Izvor Licanke), Croatia	Good team returning to a diving project started last year. Results from the last expedition require even more sophisticated diving equipment and capable divers. In a drive by GPF to see more science being conducted in expeditions, the committee would love to see some more explanation of the hydrological/geomorphological context of this cave in the wider region.	£350				£350
Mulu 19, Malaysia	An expedition primarily to try and connect a number of known caves into the Clearwater cave system and extend its length, with some additional bolt climbing objectives. Good application, highlighting the participation of Hazel Barton in an initial recce into the microbiology of the area.		£200		£75	£275
Overlooked Armenia, Armenia	Small team going to recce a new area. The team has done their homework (as shown by a good application), both identifying the area they want to look at as well as communicating with the local cavers.		£300			£300
Albnia Kelmend, Albania	A return to previously visited area on several occasions. A poor application making judgement on objectives, expedition costs, personnel etc. Very difficult. It is hoped this year things will change. Grant allocation reflects this unsatisfactory application and the hope that better documentation and science is undertaken during this year's application.	£200				£200
Dachstein Expedition, Austria	Longstanding project from a dedicated and tenacious team with a long record of exploration. Achieved a long sought-after goal of connecting the Dachstein plateau to the Hirlatz system making a 1560m deep cave. Traditionally this expo has had large numbers of students and younger cavers though it is led and organised by cavers who have been involved for many years. The expedition could benefit from some more documentation and publications especially considering the great surveying that is being undertaken. This grant allocation has been loaded to help buy a Cave Link system (£1000 - earmarked by GPF for one unit) as the caves in the region can flash flood with freak thunderstorms and deep camping is generally undertaken.	£1200				£1200
Anglo-Malaysian Mulu Caves October 2019, Malaysia	2nd expedition to Mulu to continue exploration of a different part of the national park, Whiterock. Good application but objectives a bit lost in historical prose. Team members indicated to be a mixture of young and old, some of which know the area well; the younger members will definitely benefit from the older experience. Documentation from the group has always been very good and hopefully will continue to include some scientific studies.	£500				£500

Expedition	Feedback	BCA	GPF	CC	AP	Total
Redcoats and Rednecks Tennessee Expedition, United States	After an initial small man recce building good relationship with the local US cavers, they are return to this caving area with a larger team. Good application with clear objectives (including cave diving) focused on high quality surveying. Hopefully this might be extended to include other forms of cave science such as biology, hydrology etc.	£600				£600
Dark side of the moon, Slovenia	Established expedition with good reputation for documentation, excellent training for cavers new to expedition. Good prospects for significant new finds.	£1000			£150	£1150
CUCC Austria Expedition 2019, Austria	Another longstanding project with a strong, tenacious team and an excellent record of achievements over time. Good prospects for significant new finds in the system including deep leads involving camping but also with surface prospecting and easier, shallower caves. This grant allocation has also been loaded to help buy a Cave link system (£1000 - ear marked by GPF for one unit) in an identical way to the Dachstein Expedition as the caves in the region can flash flood with freak thunderstorms and deep camping is generally undertaken. It is requested that collaboration with other expeditions (such as the Dachstein - also subject to this benefit) to share units. It is also hoped that the units will be made available to other UK expeds if not being used by the CUCC Team.	£1400			£75	£1475
Mulu Caves 2020, Malaysia	The committee felt that the application was lacking in a lot of detail, with the objectives very basic. Rather than supplying the required information, a reference to the website was given. While this may contain a wealth of information about Mulu expeditions, it requires each of the GPF committee members to search for themselves. This information should be provided in the application.	£750				£750
Northern Thailand 2019, Thailand	Due to Chinese visa problems occurring the Napo China 2019 expedition, ultimately resulting in the withdraw of this expedition, the GPF committee agreed that on submission of a new application, with objectives, personnel and expenditure, GPF would allocate funds to this application. At short notice this application has been done and is well presented with clear objectives' personnel and finance. The team will hopefully still have some good expedition caving to go at despite the change of location at the last minute. An Alex Pitcher award was also awarded and GPF hope that Josh will enjoy his first expedition despite all the initial set backs.	£300			£75	£375
	Totals:	£6300	£500	£0	£375	£7175

CaveFest 2020

By CaveFest 2020 Organisers

Here we go again - Cavefest 2020 in the Mendip Hills.

27-31st August 2020, Ebborways Farm, Priddy, BA53BA

Another chance to meet up with friends and have fun caving. With so much more happening in 2020, this festival of caving promises to be our best event yet. With huge changes made, the team have come together and created an event for everyone to enjoy. Everything a caver could want or need. From the absolute beginners and family fun seekers, to the experienced highly skilled cavers, we have something for you all.

A good selection of caves will also be pre-rigged including SRT routes in some of the more challenging caves such as High Atlas in Thrupe Lane Swallet to the multi pitched wonder that is Rhino Rift. Leaders have been arranged to enable access to classic caves such as Upper Flood Swallet, Reservoir Hole and many others. In short, there isn't a caver among you we haven't thought of. We've got it covered.

The pleasant atmosphere that a festival brings combined with a range of activities above ground will provide a long weekend of thrills and giggles. Live music, workshops, demonstrations, equipment stalls and information stands will be available and much more. Onsite bars and a range of food vendors will offer choice and value while the games and competitions will provide extra challenges to enjoy. The fun just keeps coming.

Cavefestuk

27th - 31st August

2020 Ebborways farm BA5 3BA

Whats on this year?

Lots of caving....

Live music, Competitions, Information displays, Workshops, Archery, Bushcraft, Slacklining, Food vendors and onsite bar and of course, a great atmosphere

Tickets on sale at;

www.cavefestuk.co.uk

6th EuroSpeleo Protection Symposium and 14th EuroSpeleo Forum 2020

6th EuroSpeleo Protection Symposium:

Assessing, monitoring and protecting cave biotopes and geotopes through Natura 2000 or similar programs in Europe

22 - 26 September 2020

Organized jointly by the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN) and the European Cave Protection Commission (ECPC) of the European Speleological Federation (FSE) at the BFN-International Academy for Nature Conservation, Isle of Vilm, Germany

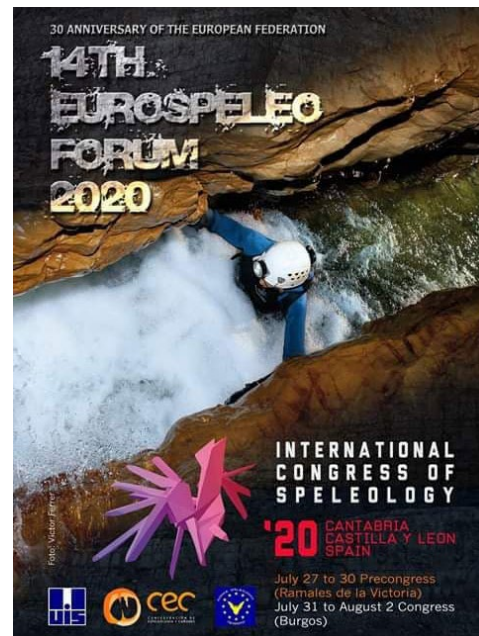
The Symposium will provide a platform for scientists, speleologists and authorities active in the domain of cave and karst

monitoring and conservation. It should give an overview about Natura 2000 type 8310 "habitat caves not open to public" monitoring procedures in EU member states and similar programs in non-EU countries. Main aspects will be monitoring, evaluation and cooperation through borders. It will address appropriate management measures to restore or maintain a favourable conservation status.

14th EuroSpeleo Forum 2020

See the adjacent poster; this excellent event will take place in Cantabria, northern Spain, a caving heaven, starting 27th July.

Registration: www.eurospeleo.eu



Radon Monitoring: Helping to Build the Bigger Picture



Radon detectors. Photo: Gethin Thomas.

Most cavers are likely to be aware of the problem of radon underground. For those wanting to know more about the hazards of radon, BCA's Radon Working Party produced and updated the document Radon Underground:

www.tinyurl.com/radon-underground

In January 2018 the regulations regarding radon were updated. The Working Party has been reformed and work is underway to revise the Radon Underground document (last revised in 2012). The revision will reflect the changes and the greater understanding of radon as a hazard (radon is now recognized as being the second largest cause of lung cancer after smoking) as well providing more advice.

One of the key revisions in the 2018 regulations was a reduction in the action level at which the Health and Safety Executive must be notified from 400bqm⁻³ in a day to 300bqm⁻³ over one year. Radon is known to fluctuate over the day/year and so the revision make sense. That said it's now necessary to try to build up an idea of the annual concentration of radon by conducting a number of surveys over a year.

During the summer of 2019, volunteers largely made up of those who lead groups underground within the Local Cave & Mine

Leader Award & Cave Instructor Certificate schemes (part of the BCAs Qualification and Management Committee) placed and recovered radon dosimeters in over 30 different cave and mine systems around the UK. Funding for these dosimeters came from the MoD, Outdoor Education industry and the BCA.

In October, BCA Council agreed to fund over £4000 for a further three rounds of sampling to build up an annual picture of the levels of radon within these caves/mines.

The information gathered from this sampling will be key to updating the Radon Underground document to help all cave/mine explorers understand the hazards of radon underground and make appropriate decisions regarding the risk/benefit of our activities.

Gethin Thomas, BCA Radon Working Party

The Merdeka Award

Monies from the Merdeka Award, which was granted for "Contribution to the People of Malaysia," are being gift-aided into the Ghar Parau Foundation.

The Merdeka Award was established in 2007 to recognise and reward excellent individuals and organisations whose works and achievements have not only contributed to the nation's growth but have also inspired greatness in the people of Malaysia. The word Merdeka comes from the Indonesian

and Malay languages and means independent or free. This is a prestigious award that honours the recipient's outstanding effort and role in living the 'Merdeka' spirit.

Forty-two years on from the discoveries which astounded the caving world, Mulu continues to be a focus for challenging exploration and scientific study. The Clearwater System is the 9th longest cave in the world, and arguably the largest (by volume), with all the signs it can be much longer.

Nearby cave systems, immense in their own right, come within a few meters of Clearwater, and a new expedition is being planned for the autumn in an attempt to make one of these significant connections. The new funding could enable expeditions to lower their costs and attract new members to this world class caving area.

For more information on the Mulu Caves Project, visit www.mulucaves.org



A busy and positive AGM

by David Botcherby (BCA CHECC rep)

The 2019 CHECC event was one for the books to be sure. There's nothing like a good dose of November Welsh weather to get you going. Dolygaer Outdoor Education Centre was a near perfect venue, with well-equipped kitchens, just enough indoor space, and lots of bed spaces for helpers and some lucky club members. The main issue was with parking, with cars and minibuses blocking each other in and hindering caving attempts in the morning - a situation not helped by the breakdown of the Imperial College Caving Club minibus halfway through the weekend!

We thought that the 150-person limit on the weekend was going to mean a toned-down event, but with the energy that everyone brought it felt like there were almost twice as many attendees. Representatives from 19 British and 3 Irish clubs really made the collaborative spirit shine. Trips were taken down Agen Allwedd, Daren Cilau, Draenen, OFD and many more (taking care in the high water of course).

As well as the usual stomp, this year was the first that we've had a chill out room/safe space. This idea came from our fantastic club delegates, who asked that there be a room with no alcohol and calm people for anyone in trouble or wanting a break. It may be hard to believe for some of us, but late night at CHECC can be a bit much for many people. This room was staffed by our new team of 'blue shirts' - volunteers who gave up some of their time in return for a free t-shirt and discounted ticket. I put a couple shifts in myself, but I was hardly needed at all; there were more than enough friendly faces to keep things running.

With the safe space underway, the committee decided that this year would be Safe CHECC. Footwear was again discouraged on the carpeted surfaces and on the dance floor. Attendees were also asked not to bring glass bottles. While we can't pretend this wasn't mostly about the faff of recycling them, I think it did help to contribute to fewer injuries this year. To my knowledge there was only one black eye (caused by a coconut no less), and the

recipient walked it off like a champ.

All in all, we had a great time, with caving and training in the day and talks and competitions in the evening. SRT training was busy as always, and the new leadership skills sharing was an opportunity for clubs to learn how others do things. Expedition talks in the evening have encouraged a new wave of keenness for this summer's excursions. A brief shout out to the Irish Student Caving Forum over Easter has encouraged many clubs to organise a trip this year (as a long-term attendee I can highly recommend). The treasure hunt proved particularly popular this year.

The weekend was finished off by record attendance at the AGM, where we elected a new treasurer (NUCC's Laura Harrison) and training officer (Rob Watson) to replace stalwart committee members Brendan Hall and Josh Bratchley. We also elected some new committee positions: a Welfare Officer (Lisa Crow), Web Officer (Tom Crossley), and Sponsorship and Competitions Officer (Todd Rye). We're looking forward to another great year of student caving.

If you'd like to get involved, Northern and Southern CHECCs for 2020 are coming up on the 6-8th March at Bull Pot Farm and the 27-29th March at the BEC/Shepton Mallet respectively. They should be another two weekends of training, caving, and fun, so hope to see many people there.



SRT Training at the Summit Centre

by Tim Allen

Ukcaving.com, the cavers' forum (UKC) has been pleased to support the British Caving Association for many years now by providing a dedicated BCA board and welcoming posts from BCA council members. UKC also supports BCA constituent bodies and regional councils in the same way. This service is of course free of charge.

UKC is widely viewed by British (and international!) cavers and is a great way to highlight caving news and events and to find out what fellow cavers really think about a whole host of issues. With over 4,000 registered users and an average of 750 cavers viewing the forum each day, the site is busy and popular. If you can't beat them - The forum is complimented by a Facebook page which has over 3,300 followers and is used to direct Facebook caving fans towards the more substantial information found on the forum.

UKC was founded in January 2003 and is now 17 years old. It is a fantastic cavers' resource as everything on it is searchable or if you have a query someone will usually soon get back to you with an answer - there's a wealth of combined caver knowledge available, just ask!

The forum has had three owners over the years and is currently managed by myself and Jane Allen. It was the brainchild of 'Bubba', who also started UKbouldering.com which is also still going strong. When Bubba had to sell the forums, they were bought by two climbers who only really wanted UKB but bought UKC as part of a combined package. This left UKC without much love or attention for years and it began to go downhill. We thought a caving forum should be in the hands of cavers and that its reputation needed to be restored and its value as a useful resource for cavers be re-established so purchased UKC in September 2014.

A new logo soon followed together with an increased presence at various caving events, however the main focus was on improving the atmosphere on UKC - this we believe has been successful and the forum is now a welcoming online platform where cavers can exchange views (but keep it polite!), hear the latest news, maybe even win a prize in one of the varied competitions or be entertained by the various ongoing threads - Wezzit for example - how do cavers recognise those various locations??

UKC generates some income from advertising (thank you Inglesport, SpanSet, Starless River, and Warmbac) but is run on a strictly not for profit basis. Revenue is put towards hosting the site, technical support and keeping it all safe. What is left over goes back into caving, mostly at the younger end of the caving spectrum for example supporting CHECC with the 'Grand Prize' and sponsoring student caving expeditions with kilometres of rope - UKC has given away in

excess of 5km of rope since we took over, that's a lot of pitches rigged.

Jane makes the most of her contacts with outdoor companies persuading them to donate a wide range of prizes some of which are used to sponsor the Hidden Earth SRT competitions - When we started doing this Mark Wright and chums, who run the SRT competitions, noticed a threefold increase in participation – excellent.

UKC have encouraged conservation with the 'Cave Conservation Rewards' which has helped with the clean-up of a number of classic caves and potholes. Under the UKC banner we also volunteer for the Kendal Mountain Festival, programming the Underground Session to better promote caving and this has grown in stature over the last few years.

Over the years the forum has dealt with several controversial topics often concerning access to caves. It holds a mirror up to all of us and can occasionally get quite heated. This is where our team of moderators come in to stop things getting out of hand. Our six volunteer moderators support our three admins and come from each of the main caving regions. We all try hard to 'please all of the cavers all of the time', however it is not always that easy. These days fortunately the Moderation Team are much less busy, mainly dealing with day to day tasks rather than moderating major fall outs. Since UKC started there have been 304,000 posts on 23,500 topics so it is quite a task. Very few posts get heated although 'concreting Drws Cefn' generated 194,000 views – so someone was interested. On the upside 'Reservoir Hole stuff' saw 219,000 views, but way, way ahead of them is a bit of fun with our 'Wezzit' and 'Friday Joke' topics accounting for over 1.2 million views EACH!

Many cavers use Facebook, and all social media platforms have their place however please do remember Facebook is owned by billionaires, run for profit, doesn't give a stuff about caving or cavers and uses your personal data for targeted advertising and worse, much worse. By contrast UKC is owned by cavers who really do care and put time and effort into the site for free, is run on a not for profit basis and we don't do anything with your data except protect it and our dedicated volunteer moderation team do their best to keep everyone well behaved.

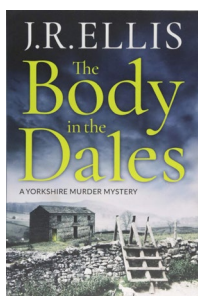
Why do we do it? Not for the income, that's for sure. We met through caving, live in the beautiful Yorkshire Dales because of the sport, many of our friends are cavers and we have both travelled widely to some fantastic locations on caving expeditions – running UKC on behalf of all cavers is a great way to give something back to a sport we both love.

Please support UKC as it continues to support BCA, CNCC, GPF, etc in their continuing efforts to support cavers and caving, thank you!

See the forum at www.ukcaving.com

Book Review

The Body in the Dales



JR Ellis
Thomas and Mercer
9 August 2018
ISBN-10: 1503903117
ISBN-13: 978-1503903111
319 pages

Yorkshire copper DCI Jim Oldroyd gets caught up in the mystery of a body found down a well-known cave. There's certainly no shortage of suspects as he tries to unravel a complex web of lies and distrust.

JR Ellis is the author of several murder mystery stories set in the Yorkshire Dales. *The Body in the Dales* was originally self-published, but was subsequently picked up by Thomas and Mercer, one of the publishing arms of Amazon.

The books are styled the Yorkshire murders, and Ellis delivers a book that is recognisably set in the varied, changeable and beautiful countryside of the Dales, but here, he turns his hand to something that's recognisably out of his comfort zone. His series lead, the somewhat lugubrious DCI Jim Oldroyd becomes embroiled in the very different world of caving.

When a body is found underground in a popular cave in the Dales, there's no shortage of suspects as the murdered man, Dave Atkins, wouldn't have won any popularity contents in the pub or anywhere else for that matter. Just about anyone on the rescue team who brought him to the surface could have been responsible for bumping him off, and Oldroyd and his new sidekick are at the sharp end of a particularly steep learning curve. The fresh-faced and occasionally bemused DS Carter is a copper up from London who provides another outsider's point of view as the book progresses.

Oldroyd and Carter have to get to grips with the very different world of caves, cavers and caving, where apparently sworn enemies will still risk their lives to haul one of their own out of a hole in the ground. Ellis acknowledges the help he received from a member of the Upper Wharfedale Rescue team, who has clearly taken him through a lot of what goes on when there's a rescue call out, but it's also clear that he lacks the lived experience of a caver. Holes in the ground are presented as dark and dangerous, where the unwary fear to tread, rather than places to be explored, surveyed and talked about in the pub. In that respect, DS Carter isn't the only one who brings an outsider's perspective to bear on the murder.

The caves are well described up to a point, but the frequent divergences from reality are enough to throw any caver out of the story at regular intervals, for instance, wall

aren't known for conveniently collapsing (unless chemical persuasion is involved) and it's a strange world where it's possible to stop at a fish and chip shop at "Stump Cross on the way out of Halifax". The shaky grasp of geography is compounded by the odd decision to use the name Jingling Pot for the star of the show just because he liked the name, regardless of the fact that there's a real Jingling Pot which bears (in my very limited knowledge of Dales' caves) little or no relationship to the fictional one presented in *The Body in the Dales*, where it is described as connecting to Mossy Bottom Cave as well as Wether Ridge Hole system. This is a subject where opinion will no doubt differ, but in my view, although taking liberties with geography and reality is not uncommon in fiction, it's often safest to take either the fully accurate route or the fictional one, rather than a hybrid that runs the risk of pleasing no one.

Where Ellis scores is in pulling off the difficult trick of even attempting to write about a relatively close-knit community with both affection and some understanding. He manages to capture something of the essence of the caving world in a way that I think will appeal to people who know little or nothing about caves as well as giving cavers enough to get their teeth into, even if it's only discussing the inaccuracies in the pub. He would have been well advised to stay away from any attempt at rendering local speech patterns and dialect phonetically, as that never ends well, but his brand of knowing locals does score a few hits.

I gave up trying to work out which of his 'facts' were real and which were inventions as I'm not well-versed enough in some of the history of exploration in the Dales to be sure without a lot of laborious checking, but those who know more can pass the time at the top or bottom of a pitch by trying to work this out. For starters, Bernie's Café becomes Johnny's Cafe, run by the head of Wharfedale Cave Rescue, which will no doubt lead to a few smiles from anyone who has caved in the Dales.

The writing is a tad clunky at times, but I've certainly known worse and both outsiders and cavers alike will find aspects to like and things to pick holes with, but then that's part of the fun of a book like this, and Ellis gets high marks for engaging with the caving world in this way and I doubt it will do our image any harm as we're generally regarded as a breed apart, anyway!

Thanks to Bob Mehew for letting me know about the book and for drawing some of its oddities to my attention. This is an entertaining addition to the section of anyone's bookshelf reserved for novels that feature caving even though it will raise a few eyebrows amongst those in the know.

by Linda Wilson

| The Dig Illusion

A philosophic essay by Frank Pearson

I have certainly experienced this feeling lately, both personally and on a global scale: something is about to happen and you imagine, reasonably, the outcome, it isn't what you expected at all; you then perceive and experience the unexpected outcome and think you have understood it; what you have understood then appears peripheral, incidental, a minor part of something much greater. You have been in the midst of it, but you have missed it. Perhaps it is too big, perhaps your imagination has failed you, perhaps you have not been paying attention and have let the signs slip you by; signs that exist in space and time, space and time other than yours. If you go digging in search of caves then you will certainly have experienced this as you plunge unfathomably into dynamic landscapes that roll through geological time, asking yourself those essential questions: where am I, what am I doing here?

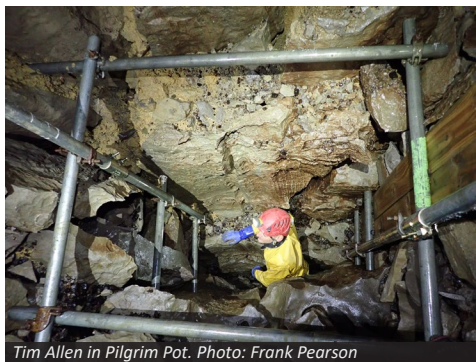
As we all know, though I never tire of thinking on it, limestone caves are found on every continent, up hill and down dale, and when we find the rock, we look for holes. Was ever a search more beguiling? Wherever we find the rock, we hope that water has found it first, has found its fragility, its flaws and has wormed its way in, dissolving the rock back into the fluid it once was. Following the angular joints wherever they may go, the water flows and percolates and fluctuates; the joint becomes a crack, a fissure, a hole in the rock, a cave; the cave is filled with its own debris, washes it out and is filled with more, is locked and abandoned and is filled furthermore as it drips in on itself and then invaded and opened by other waters, repeatedly, time and time again. The gap in the rock may have spread out and poured into other passages, and more, into a labyrinthine vanishing act. In the meantime, tectonic plates flex and unwind, glaciers wax and wane and the rain, though it rains



Geoff Crossley in Perilous Pot. Photo: Frank Pearson



Simon Cornhill in Skylark Pot. Photo: Frank Pearson



Tim Allen in Pilgrim Pot. Photo: Frank Pearson

everyday, moves on. Beneath the surface the ruptured horizons gape wide open, unseen. Above, we drop to our knees, as if sightless, groping and feeling our way into that gap, that space.

We read the surface landscape looking for clues as to what lies hidden below, knowing all along that the landscape we are searching is not necessarily the landscape that helped shape the cave. The features above could easily lead you awry, into deceptive slumps or into passages where time is left congealed in mud and calcite. We look for signs of life, of a breath of air. Find where the earth is breathing and you are in with a chance. Does the grass waver, the weed quiver? Is the bottom of that shakehole free of snow when all around it lies crisp and even? Can you feel the draught? Can you ... really? Who in their desperation has not been deceived by a faint touch to the cheek, a whisper in the ear? We can be easily led.

Where does the water go? Following the water is a start but you need to know if it is old water. Is it fresh, up-start water? How can you tell old water from new? How deep is the channel? How round are the cobbles? How big and heavy is the bog? And if the cave is old, is the sump perched? Are you near a fault and has the rock metamorphosed into something else? Find your catchment and watershed, your sinks and your risings. What happens in flood? What happens in drought? In the eighteenth century, washing filthy sheep in a stream revealed the rising to be across from where it was assumed to be. Surface streams can flow over drift deposits above caves and not drain into them. Things are rarely as they seem.

Where there is no draught or water, we look for fresh slumps where sediment has given way or a roof has collapsed. Are you in a shakehole? And are you in the right place in the shakehole? Perhaps you shouldn't be at the bottom? Are you near the bedrock or are you stood on thick layers of drift? How far down must you dig? How many buckets are you prepared to haul? How many days of your life are you willing to hand over to burdensome hard labour?

Are you descending with steel scaffolding poles, steel rebar, single, double and swivel clamps, extension sleeves and tanalized wooden planks to hold back the lost glacier's deposits? Rigging, rope, pulley and bucket above? Drill, caps, rod and hammer below? Do not descend below the shuttering, don't drop the bucket. And don't be fooled, the deceptive properties of solidity and security can give way in floods to a twisted and torn

mess. With luck, they don't and you descend ever deeper down. How close can the two worlds get?

You will have read all the guides, read all the maps, followed all the known caves, walked the hillsides, listened to all the stories, tall and short ones, and will have absorbed the possibilities. All things are possible. Once you have absorbed all there is to know, you are then left with your imagination. The process of exploration is shaped by your imagination. Though the possibility of caves stretches away concealed beneath the surface landscape, your creative imagination reveals them all in their mysterious complexity. Unlike the seventeenth century philosopher, Thomas Hobbes, you do not see your imagination as a feeble form of memory but as a dynamic glimpse of meandering caves that snake across that intolerable blank on the map. Your mind conjurs the dark introuvable worlds below. Poets like Wordsworth and Shelley even went so far as to metaphorically shape the imagination on the bewildering complexity of caves. For Wordsworth the imagination was comparable to the Weathercote Cave system in Chapel-dale, Yorkshire, where the waters rose in Gatekirk Cave to sink and vanish from sight further down the valley, to appear and vanish again in Weathercote Cave, Jingle Pot and Hurtle Pot. He argues that our grasp of what we imagine is always incomplete, or partly submerged in dark waters. Shelley, like Wordsworth, sees the mind as a cavern filled with shadows and obscurity, with bright light at the entrances though nothing shining beyond the portals. Some see mountains of the mind, others see caverns of the mind, others still see incessant digs of the mind, shored up to avoid collapse. Don't imagine below the shuttering.

And so, what you are experiencing is not what you imagined, what you are perceiving is only partially what is happening, what is really happening is probably beyond you – just beyond you, perhaps waiting for you to catch up as you stretch again, and again, and reach relentlessly back into the past.



Geoff Yeadon in Long Kin West. Photo: Frank Pearson

Feature Article: The P40 - Then and Now

An article for the BCA Newsletter by Andy Sparrow, providing an interesting history of the Dent de Crolles region of France, and some inspirational reading on a recent trip. Anyone looking for some holiday inspiration may need to look no further!



P40 Entrance. Photo: Andy Sparrow.

Looking up the Isère valley from Grenoble, the Dent de Crolles, the tooth of Crolles, is unmistakable; a huge molar thrusting up from the gentler alpine foothills of the Chartreuse massif. At the base of the cliffs on the eastern side and overlooking the valley are two caves, the Grotte Chevalier and the Grotte Annette Bouchacourt. On the western side, also at the base of the cliffs, is the cavernous Trou de Glaz, and some way below that, concealed in the forest, is the resurgence entrance of the Guiers Mort. Other entrances are to be found on the high plateau that crowns the mountain, the best known of which is the P40.

The Dent de Crolles cave system, the Gouffre Berger and Pierre Saint Martin (PSM) are traditionally the three most popular French cave systems for visiting UK clubs. It's no coincidence that each was the subject of books that were highly influential to previous generations of British cavers. Cadoux and Casteret vividly described the Berger and PSM respectively; huge awe-inspiring vaults with an immediate and obvious attraction.

Chevalier's 'Subterranean Climbers', the history of the exploration of the Dent de Crolles, had a slightly different appeal. This was a story of adventure, of gritty determination and comradeship prevailing over immense physical challenges. It was a tale that resonated with the cave explorer; a book regarded by many as the greatest ever written about our sport.

There are half a dozen French cave systems that exceed in length the Dent de Crolles; systems that boast superior formations, larger chambers and more exhilarating streamways. And yet it is the Dent de Crolles that endures as a top three choice for UK cavers, even though the book that inspired this relationship now gathers dust in club libraries. I find it rather sad that many cavers visiting the Dent de Crolles have not read Chevalier's classic work. Quite apart from the fact it is an excellent read, being familiar with the story adds a whole dimension of interest when caving in the heart of this iconic mountain.

The driving force behind the exploration of the Dent de Crolles was Pierre Chevalier and Fernand Petzl (who later founded the Petzl company which is still based in the village of Crolles beneath the mountain). Their campaign began in 1935, the initial objective

being the connection of the Trou de Glaz (alt. 1697m) to the Guiers Mort (alt. 1311m). The successful liaison of these caves in 1941 was the culmination of an epic story that is the focus of the opening chapters of 'Subterranean Climbers'. During the connection trip, which lasted 29 hours, Petzl took a serious fall when a ladder belay failed. Badly bruised and shaken he endured a grueling exit.

Having forged this link, the explorers took on a new challenge – to connect the 'Glaz' to the P40, the latter being an open pot on the plateau of the Dent de Crolles (alt. 1969m). The P40 was choked at the bottom so the team resorted to techniques familiar to British cavers – they dug!

In Chevalier's own words:

".. the loamy earth was coming away in great slices and we uncovered a horizontal vault; we imagined that this must be a siphoning passage, and that a gallery no doubt lay beyond. But at that day's end water burst in and flooded our workings... we had to break off just when we had high hopes..."

This was 1942 and life in occupied France was becoming progressively more difficult. Petrol was almost unobtainable and to make matters worse, some members of the team, including Petzl, were laying low from the occupying Germans (young Frenchmen were being sent to Germany to do compulsory labour). None of these difficulties were sufficient to deter the team...

"... If we took the train from Lyons on Saturday morning we somehow managed to reach the Glaz at the day's end. Thereafter we could devote the next eighteen or twenty hours to the job... Sleep had to be dispensed with..."

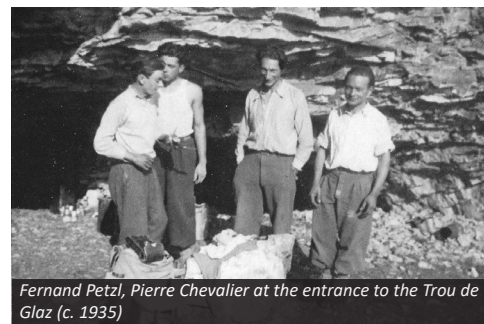
The digging operation at the P40 was not neglected...

"...On the 1st of November 1942 eight of us went up to the plateau through driving snow, and we had foreseen that we had to work in relays all through the night, as we had brought only one small tent. But none of us had the hardihood to pitch it outside in the teeth of the storm, so all went down the shaft when night fell; there we were at least out of the reach of wind and piercing cold..."

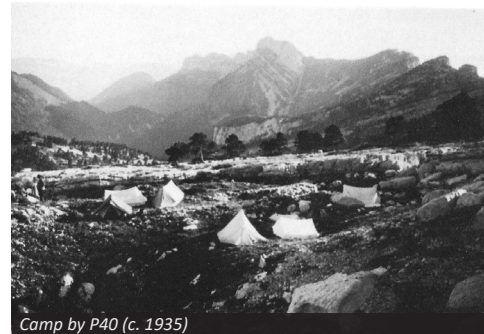
At the bottom of the shaft, the tent, which only slept two, was erected on a rubble slope. It was a miserable, long and cold night. In an attempt to keep warm some of the team tried a new dig site and worked feverishly when a hole was opened. They found themselves peering through a crevice

too tight to penetrate and gave it up as a hopeless job. After logging a hundred hours of work in the P40 the dig was abandoned and the team tried a new approach to their problem. One branch of the great fossil gallery of the Glaz ended below high avens where water cascaded down from far above. The team set about scaling these formidable shafts by designing and building a scaling pole.

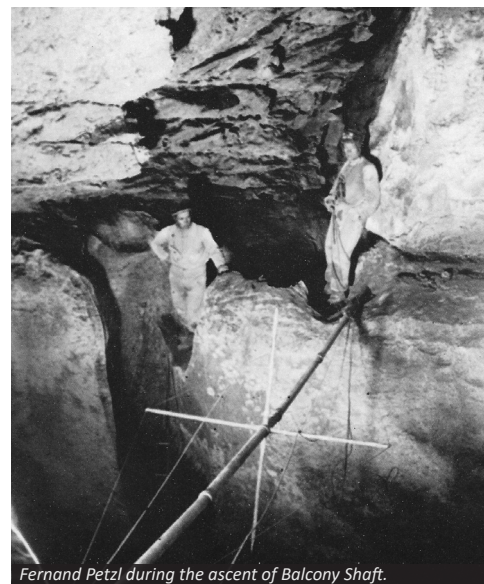
In the course of several overnight expeditions the team completed a series of precarious maneuvers, bridging the 60m Balcony Shaft from ledge to ledge, and finally entering a tight and winding meander. This difficult passage was explored for 200m before, cold and exhaustion forced a retreat, the team emerging after 28 hours underground. The next pushing trip lasted 29 hours and saw the team pass the sinuous meanders to reach a ledge partway down a wide and well-watered shaft (The Three



Fernand Petzl, Pierre Chevalier at the entrance to the Trou de Glaz (c. 1935)



Camp by P40 (c. 1935)



Fernand Petzl during the ascent of Balcony Shaft.



Glaz entrance – entering the Trou de Glaz.

Sisters Shaft).

The heavy sections of the scaling pole, dragged and manhandled laboriously through the meanders, were assembled and an ascent made into a wider gallery. This was pushed to a conclusion during the course of the next 35 hour expedition. The team, now tantalisingly close to the plateau, and 21 hours into the trip, began digging at the terminal boulder choke, while Charles Petit-Didier forced a narrow chimney.

“... The two teams were working quite a distance apart and we had to yell if we wanted to be heard, as words carried poorly. Suddenly a shout reached us;

“Daylight! I see daylight!” Unbelieving we chaffed Charley about his visions he was seeing.

“No I’ve put my lamp out, and it still looks the same. Just ahead there’s a narrowing... then it gets wider. I’m going to break some of it away with the hammer.”

But time slipped away, the rock was unyielding and only splinters were coming away now. Charley had to admit defeat and give up his scheme forever. But before he left the fissure he wrapped a pebble in his handkerchief and cast it upwards to be his witness later.

Hopes were high but when the bottom of the P40 was searched there was no sign of the handkerchief at the shaft bottom. It would take another 29 hour expedition before the matter was resolved, and this time a mining bar was cast through the daylight fissure. Another examination of the P40 followed; this time the narrow crevice opened on the stormy night in 1942 was included in the search, and the bar was found. The link was made, the connection forged, and the Dent de Crolles system became the deepest in the world.

Please do note that this brief summary of events is a very poor substitute for the original. ‘Subterranean Climbers’ is superbly written with a delightfully quirky translation that may have you occasionally reaching for a dictionary. For all that it’s an easy read, and a great story well told.

So, moving on to the 5th September 2014, and my visit to the cave in the company of Wessex Cave Club members Thomas, Niknak, and Clive. It was a fine day as we slogged our way up the long meandering path leading to the summit of the Dent de Crolles. It didn’t take long to find the P40, and the rope was quickly rigged. It’s a

beautiful shaft, clean and fluted, tapering out to leave you dangling in space. I can only assume that the ‘40’ refers to the original depth of the cave, as the pitch is a little under 30m. Hidden away in a corner is the 1942 crevice. It’s an ample size now, but the narrow chimney first ascended by Charles Petit-Didier remains unmodified. My first attempt to descend this in complete SRT kit proved optimistic, and removing my descender didn’t help much, so off it all came, and down I slid.

Here’s a top tip if you have any porkers in your team – make sure they fit down this hole before you pull the rope down! The way on is through some low beddings and up a short fixed rope to enter the York Gallery. Chevalier explains that the entire population of Lyons existed on tins of ‘York’, an imported American spam, during the winter of 1945/46.

The trip was not entirely without incident. Niknak had also been obliged to take off his SRT kit for the squeeze and now, halfway through York gallery, realised that his descender still resided there. While he beat a hasty retreat to retrieve it we came to the brink on Three Sisters Shaft and rigged a rope, double for pull-through. The anchors were well set back, so much so that I, descending first, ran out of rope 3m above the floor.

A quick change-over and I was on my way back up. A convenient ledge offered a temporary refuge to myself and Clive while we waited for Niknak to come back and save the day, which he duly did, and then Thomas and I were off into the meanders. We squirmed along for 20m or so, and then heard Niknak shouting. The shrink-wrap tag on the Three Sisters Shaft rope had jammed in a crevice and was irretrievably stuck. He needed a knife, which Clive provided, and the rope, now a little shorter, was recovered.

This first set of meanders snake along and don’t offer too much resistance, but spare a thought for the original explorers carrying a mountain of kit and a section of cast iron scaling pole each. They had to pass the constrictions heavily laden in both directions, while we were on a one way journey and lightly burdened. We came to a short pitch, The Fireman’s Shaft, where we regrouped before engaging the next set of meanders. The shaft was named after ‘The Fireman’s Song’, sung here, according to Chevalier, to raise the spirits of a weary team as they passed by at three in the morning.

Now the ‘fun’ really began. We were struggling along the top of a deep canyon, never quite sure if we had the optimum level. Shifting up or down wasn’t easy in the tight rift, and a good deal of effort was required to gain new routes, which usually proved to be less desirable than the original. After a good deal of struggling, cursing and sweating we were able to drop down to the lowest level and make easier progress. We came to another short pitch and it was Clive’s turn to realise that his descender was missing. For-



Guiers Mort. Photo: Martin Hoff.



P45.



Guiers Mort. Photo: Martin Hoff.

unately it was soon found, having detached while we were at floor level, and had not dropped down some impossible fissure.

Finally we were on the brink of the mighty Balcony Shaft, which was descended in three sections. It defies imagination that this great 60m gun barrel had been beaten into submission on those epic all night trips using a 10m scaling pole. There are a few rusting pitons scattered through the cave, still wedged firmly in their cracks, the only evidence of those pioneer days.

One more 20m abseil down a conveniently fixed rope brought us to the galleries of the Glaz. It’s actually quite low-roofed in this area and rather stoopy until you meet the junction with the main gallery. A quarter of an hour later we strolled out of the Glaz into warm sunshine. It’s a splendid panorama that greets you as you step out, a welcome sight after our six hours; it must have been like re-birth to Chevalier and his team staggering out after one of their 30+ hour epics.

The P40 to Glaz traverse is harder work than the other through trips, and there is little to



Lantern Pitch. Photo: Martin Hoff.

see along the way, but it is a sporting trip through territory hard-won all those years ago by a determined and resourceful team.

This was to be our last trip in the Glaz before the camp broke and we went our separate ways. It brought to mind Chevaliers final words as he brought his own story to a close:

"It was time to switch our attention to other chasms, for we were not ready to bid a final farewell to subterranean exploration, sometimes so agonizing, but so rich in happy memories, so productive in firm friendships... But whatever came our way, we should not live again those superb hours we had passed far under the Dent de Crolles, and which we shall always treasure as amongst the most wonderful of our lives!"

I hope that reading this article will encourage some of you to do two things – read the book, and visit the caves! Here's some useful information, trip descriptions, and references...

Weather

Most of the popular routes are in fossil passages and unaffected by rainfall. The mountain is usually snow covered during the winter months making the access paths extremely dangerous.

Fixed aids

Traverse lines, fixed ropes and pull-through anchors are comprehensive and well maintained at the time of writing.

Signage

The popular routes are well route-marked but it is a complex system and a survey is very wise precaution.

Logistics

Cars are parked at the Col de Coq. From here it's about a 45 minute walk up to the Glaz on good paths, or just over an hour up to the P40. The return walk from the Annette or Chevalier takes about the same time. Car shuffles are not required unless you exit via the Guiers Mort. I believe the direct footpath from the Guiers to the Glaz is now closed.

It's a huge system offering many options and combinations. These are just the most popular trips:

1. Trou de Glaz to Grotte Annette Bouchacourt (3-5 hours)

A splendid journey through the heart of the Dent de Crolles. From the large Portal of the Trou de Glaz a spacious gallery leads to the top of the Lantern Pitches, a series of short (c15m) descents.

After a low section the route enlarges into an impressive trunk passage. There are airy rigged traverses around a couple of gaping shafts before the top of the 25m Fernand Shaft is reached. From the bottom a long and imposing traverse leads into an area of narrow passages terminating at the head of a deep narrow rift. A confined abseil and a short crawl lead into Gallery 43.

There are more rigged traverses and a short upward pitch to punctuate progress along this natural subway. The last pitch is the deepest at 30m.

From there it's a rather nondescript slog through bouldery chambers with the odd crawl until you emerge at the Grotte Annette Bouchacourt, with its wonderful alpine panorama.

2. Trou de Glaz to Grotte Chevalier (4-6 hours)

The route is the same as for the Grotte Annette Bouchacourt until you get to Gallery 43. A well route-marked pit in the floor is the

start of a narrow passage and then a short upward pitch leads to the head of a spectacular 58m shaft.

More pitches follow until the huge gallery of the Grotte Chevalier is reached. A long trek over breakdown follows and a junction leading to the exit is easily missed. The cave emerges very close to the Grotte Annette Bouchacourt.

3. Trou de Glaz to Guiers Mort (5-7 hours)

This is the deepest and most popular through trip. At the bottom of the Lantern Pitches is the head of the P36 with the sound of water rumbling below. The 36m abseil leads into a short section of active streamway until a traverse is followed into fossil passage.

A short pitch drops into a complex network of large phreatic passages. The route is well signed but having a survey is a wise precaution. This is a big system with more difficult routes branching off towards the Guiers Mort so it's important to stay on track.

At the bottom of the final pitch the character changes and a section of low passage leads to the entrance chamber of the Guiers Mort.

4. P40 (4-6 hours)

The P40 route described in the preceding article drops into the Glaz near the Lantern Pitches. If you want to extend any of the described routes it's a 'bolt on' option.

References

Subterranean Climbers by Pierre Chevalier (1951). ISBN 0-914264-14-1

A travers le Karst: les traversées Spéléologiques Françaises by Patrice Tordjman ISBN: 9782915166002

La Dent de Crolles et son Réseau Souterrain by Comité départemental de speleologie de l'Isère. [Google this and you should find a PDF version online. Includes surveys]

BCA Contacts

Chair - Les Williams - chair@british-caving.org.uk

Secretary - Matt Ewles - secretary@british-caving.org.uk

Treasurer - Howard Jones - treasurer@british-caving.org.uk

Membership - Wendy Williams - membership@british-caving.org.uk

Conservation & Access - Claire Ross - conservation@british-caving.org.uk

Insurance Manager - Howard Jones - insurance@british-caving.org.uk

Equipment & Techniques - Mark Sims - equipment@british-caving.org.uk

Publications & Information - Jane Allen - pandi@british-caving.org.uk

Training Qualifications - Juliet Parker-Smith - chair.qmc@british-caving.org.uk

Training Officer - Nigel Atkins - training@british-caving.org.uk

Training Administrator - Mary Wilde - trainadmin@british-caving.org.uk

Newsletter Editor - David Rose - newsletter@british-caving.org.uk

Cave Registry - David Cooke - registry@british-caving.org.uk

Webmaster - Gary Douthwaite - webmaster@british-caving.org.uk

Web Services - David Cooke - webservices@british-caving.org.uk

IT Working Party - Gary Douthwaite - it@british-caving.org.uk

Youth & Development - Rostam Namaghi - youth@british-caving.org.uk

Rope Testing - Bob Mehew - rope@british-caving.org.uk

Safeguarding - Chris Boardman - safeguarding@british-caving.org.uk

Media Enquiries - Andy Eavis - media@british-caving.org.uk