



British Caving Association
Conservation and Access Committee
Minutes of Meeting, Saturday March 17th 2007

1 Attendance...

Present... Steve Holding, John Hine, Dave Webb, Linda Wilson, David Judson, Elsie Little.
Apologies... George Price, Peter Claughton, Chris Binding, Marion Dunn, Maurice Febry.

2 Introductory remarks...

All welcomed and all present remarked how pleased we were to see NAMHO and the Regional Councils equally involved in the Committee now.

It was suggested that the strongest of links would be mutually beneficial as we look to the future and that all organisations might consider the possibility of ensuring their documentation allows for the involvement of both branches of underground exploration.

3 Funding...

It is our understanding that the Regional Treasurers Meeting arranged for C&A expenses up to £100 to be authorised within the regions but that larger spends should be sanctioned centrally.

We agreed to request this be raised to £250 as that sum would cover the replacement cost of many essential regular works (eg. a lid, a supply of tape).

4 Access to the coast....

This is proceeding well in England but despite all requests from us and on our behalf there will be no more rights given to us than under CROW Part1. We will only have access to the coastal strip's surface and will need to make sure access to the underground is covered by agreements as currently.

It was felt this is not really undesirable as we see access agreements as a way of ensuring proper conservation rather than everyone having automatic rights of access.

In Wales we are not so fortunate as we are only to have a coastal path, not a coastal strip.

Access to inland water will be on the agenda in hot pursuit. It seems the same thinking from the authorities will apply. All are advised to attend Environment Agency workshops and other meetings, such as those concerning Environmental Change, where we can make clear that we do have an interest as being sporting users of water.

5 Consultation on Road Traffic Orders in National Parks...

This document is directed only to National Parks in England and is part of the effort to preserve the environment from the wear of illegal off road motoring (2 & 4 wheel).

It aims to bring in the same powers already held in Welsh National Parks.

It may cause an inconvenience to us in a few sites but we believe there will still be opportunity to drive along these routes with a special permission from the owner. We will seek that re-assurance but accept the restrictions in the interest of the greater number.

A copy of our response to be sent to the LAF's concerned in caving National Park areas to keep them informed.

6 Bat Workers Manual...

Many of us who have been involved with the subject of bats in the underground were very concerned by the draft of advice to be given to workers who may go into mines and caves to check on bats.

It was generally deemed inadequate on safety and access grounds. We have all stressed the need for consultation and in particular were annoyed that the Bat Conservation Trust has not put this document

to the Underground Focus Group set up with BCA and others to deal with such matters.

The Trust has now agreed to engage in a re-write and to make proper consultation.

On the positive side, however, it was stressed that in most regions the relationships on the ground between Miners, Cavers and Bat Workers are healthy.

7 National Trust...

The group considered the draft protocol for access to mines and caves on NT property as has been recently re-drafted by Jo Burgon.

The document was amended with care and brought up-to-date, removing a lot of the negativity of past ages.

A copy of our corrections is appended. (Thanks to Linda, who agreed to check these before they are sent and to enter into conversation with the NT legal personnel if needed.)

8 Minimum Impact Caving Code/Ethical Caving Code...

Again we concurred that there is an excess of codes to do with conservation and access. We feel the short code and only one other will have greater impact.

We agreed to move away from the title "code" and suggest the title "**Good Caving Practice**".

It was agreed we should follow a positive tone and the pattern of using a definite clause later qualified by the subordinate.

The format is to be aimed at being web-appropriate, succinct but explanatory and downloadable for printing. This is to avoid the holding of large stock which risks being out-dated.

We aim at a statement (about 12 in all) and subsequent bullet point format with some pictures included into the text to demonstrate points of note.

The 2 existing codes were considered and duplications identified, statements that were no longer appropriate were identified for removal, inappropriate tone was identified and a few extra points we would expect to insert also identified.

E.L. will write up a draft for working up and correcting by the Committee prior to presenting it to Council at the first full length meeting in the new BCA year.

(It was felt better not to drop this incomplete work on the new Conservation Officer, but to see it through with the personnel already involved.)

After the draft has been produced we will look at it to see if "cave" should be changed for some other term to embrace other underground sites or whether these should have a different type of document or a "codicil".

Thanks are given to Dave Webb whose initial draft is helpful in showing the way forward.

9 AOB...

a) Conservation leaflets...

It is to be recommended to the incoming Conservation Officer to consider if there is a need for one glossy leaflet to be printed for handing out. All other documents we would like to see web-based so that they can be readily updated and printed as needed.

We are unsure if The Disappearing Caves is BCA stock but would see DVD production as a possible way forward.

b) Caver Counters...

Chris Binding has found a source of cheap basic data loggers. These count light flashes, have a battery life of about 12 months but are not waterproof. They cost £20 per item. Contact details are available from Chris or Linda. They are to be trialled in Charterhouse and it is felt they will prove of wide use in monitoring delicate sites.

c) Cwm Ystwydd

John Hine reports he is hoping to meet with the Crown Agents with a view to attempting access arrangements for **Cwm Ystwydd**.

There has also been a threat to access to **Pandora Mine**. It is currently closed but he has established that the closure is not NFUW policy as was feared at first.

He thanked BCA for sorting out FODCAG's insurance difficulties but pointed out that the published FAQ's are no longer correct and do lead to confusion.

d) Conservation Roadshow

Dave Webb is considering a **Conservation Roadshow** and seeks advice about what he should take on it and whether we believe it would succeed. Perhaps we should develop an inter regional resource pack..

This item is to be recommended to the next Conservation Officer.

Date of next meeting... to be arranged.