

BCA Newsletter No 23

October 2015

Edited by Robin Weare



Chairman's Introduction

This note comes to you from the Mulu National Park where we are continuing the exploration of the amazing caves. I could very easily turn this into an expedition report but for many reasons that would not be appropriate. It is sufficient to say that Colin Boothroyd survived and is back home recovering and that several more fantastic caves have been discovered and exploration is continuing. Laser scanning of Api Chamber starts tomorrow.

Hidden Earth was again a great event and thanks to Les Williams and his team for all their hard work. The organisation of Eurospeleo 2016 is progressing very well and the registration numbers are very encouraging. Please put 13-20 August in your diaries and, if you haven't yet registered, I urge you to do so soon – the sooner you do so, the more money you are likely to save!!

The Ghar Parau applications were very good for this autumn. I look forward to hearing the results of some excellent trips. Please apply for next year's grants and keep British caving at the forefront of world caving.

I hope you all have a great Christmas and New Year.

Andy Eavis (Mulu)

New BCA Paid Role

BCA's Executive is made up of its Chairman, Treasurer and Secretary and, although the majority of BCA's decisions are taken at Council, much of the legwork associated with putting these into place falls to Executive. Over the years since BCA's inception the workload resulting from this has increased considerably and much of it is administrative. BCA Council is concerned that BCA is too heavily reliant on its volunteer Executive, two of whom are wanting to step down but have so far been unable to find replacement volunteers. With this in mind, the October Council Meeting decided to advertise for the paid role of "Clerk to BCA Executive". The job description is being developed at the moment and the role will be advertised in the coming weeks. Anybody reading this who thinks they may be interested, should keep their eyes on the BCA website and UKCaving forum.

Eurospeleo 2016 Update

A lot has been happening since the last newsletter:

- Over 600 people have now booked;
- The rigging of well over 30 entrances has been arranged ;
- Catering has been set up and the conference banquet organised;
- Pre- or post- event camps have been arranged in Derbyshire, the Mendips, South Wales and, for mine enthusiasts, at Nenthead;
- The Gaping Gill winch has been arranged;
- The La Salle 3D Team have been booked.

Bookings began in August but really took off in the run up to and during Hidden Earth, when over 200 bookings were taken. Two prize draws also took place, one for the first 100 bookings, which was won by James Collings and the second, for all the bookings taken up to and including Hidden Earth, was won by Steven Lloyd. Both receive a free ticket to EuroSpeleo 2016.

For those who book by February 2016, there is a discount still available - don't wait [book now](#).

Pre-Rigged Caves: all the best caves in the Dales will be pre rigged for the whole week. Many thanks to the clubs and individuals who have agreed to do the rigging. The current list of caves is [here](#) but there may be even more.

Catering will be by a local specialist caterer who is well used to catering for such events.

Caving Camps have been arranged for the weeks before and after the congress in Wales (Swansea valley & Llangattock), the Mendips, Derbyshire and at Nenthead. Full details will appear on the website very soon.

Craven Pothole Club Ltd will be operating their Gaping Gill winch throughout the congress at heavily discounted rates for attendees.

The La Salle 3D Team - experts in 3D photography - are confirmed for EuroSpeleo. They will be bringing all their kit and some truly stunning caving films presented in a totally new way.

Community Amateur Sports Clubs

A legislation change from last April requires action before 5th April 2016 from clubs it affects. Our Secretary, Damian Weare, has contacted all member clubs he knows to be in this category and is helping them through this change. If your club is a CASC and you've not already done so, please let Damian know.

BCA Membership Rates for 2016

BCA membership rates for 2016 remain unchanged for all categories except Direct Individual Members and CIM Plus Members who receive a £10 reduction on 2015 rates. This reduction reflects a change in the services received now that Speleology has ceased production and newsletters are switching to online/e-mail versions.

Full details of all 2016 rates are to be found on the [Subscriptions](#) Pages.

Rates for [Clubs](#) and [Access Controlling Bodies](#) are also unchanged, while [Associate Members](#) enjoy a £5 reduction to reflect the fact that Speleology has now ceased production.

BCA Reaction to "Britain's Biggest Adventures"

BCA has released a response to the recent item. This is published on the website and has been sent to ITV, the production company and the Scout Association. The text follows:

Caving is an exciting, challenging and rewarding sport suitable for most fitness levels and giving the average person the opportunity to see things that few others have experienced. We are extremely lucky to have world-class caves on our doorstep and anything that might encourage newcomers to try the sport, or that simply improves public awareness of what is beneath our feet, is to be encouraged.

Unfortunately the recent ITV series "Britain's Biggest Adventures" falls badly short of the mark. Not only was Bear Grylls, the show's presenter, very poorly equipped, but he also apparently set off underground knowing that water levels were very high and likely to rise further.

By its nature caving has its hazards, but enjoyed responsibly has a superb safety record. Every week across the UK hundreds of people venture underground for the first time and for some of these a lifelong passion is awoken. The British Caving Association would like to take the opportunity to encourage everyone to experience the unique underground environment for themselves, but to do so with due care and common sense.

Anchors

The NCA / BCA anchor scheme has now been going for over 20 years with the first anchors being placed back in 1992 in the Dales by Les Sykes, Glenn Jones and others in what became the CNCC Technical Group. The UIAA (International Climbing and Mountaineering Federation) has recently started work on looking at the life expectancy of the resin used in resin based anchors. There has been the occasional report of a loose anchor and it is thought that only a few tens of anchors out of well in excess of 5,000 have been replaced over the life time of the scheme across the UK. E&T are considering delving into the records to see what the status is and whether some useful information can be extracted to help the UIAA's work.

BCA Online & the BCA Newsletter

This edition of the newsletter will be distributed as an email attachment to those members who have registered to receive it.

By supplying BCA with an email address, members can receive administrative email that is necessary to run BCA/BCRA, for example renewal notices. But to receive other more promotional material, such as the Newsletter, members must also register with BCA Online and update their email preferences accordingly. This slightly frustrating way of working is as a result of the Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations 2003 (PECR), an act passed with the laudable but vain attempt to protect us from spam.

Of the 6,022 member records 3,795 have email addresses (63%), 478 have opted in for the Newsletter (8%) but only 124 (2%) have registered online.

Hopefully more members will opt in as time passes. The process isn't difficult – go to the main website (www.british-caving.org.uk) and click on the “BCA Online” option top right hand side. Then click on “Request Login Details”, fill in your email address and click the green submit button. If your email address is found, the system will send you an email with a link to allow you to set your password and log in. If your email address isn't found please follow the instructions on the screen.

Once you have logged in you can click on “Email Preferences” to opt-in and receive the BCA Newsletter direct to your inbox. **Please note you can opt-out of email communication at any time by using the same screen.**

Whilst there you can also quickly click on “Your Profile” to check that BCA has your correct contact and insurance details.

British Cave Rescue Council Raffle

The British Cave Rescue Council (BCRC) is the representative body for voluntary underground rescue in the British Isles and is one of BCA's Constituent Bodies.

BCRC Secretary, Emma Porter, reports that the raffle at Hidden Earth, including the silent auction for the two peli cases, made £665.50 and thanks all who supported it.

Guidelines for Technical Advisors

Those for whom it is relevant are reminded that BCA has issued recommended guidelines for technical advisors. A copy of the document is available on the BCA website and can be downloaded [here](#).

Scout Caving

Idris Williams, Chairman of the Association of Scout Caving Teams, updates us on recent events in the world of Scout Caving.

In spite of the example recently shown to us by The Chief Scout on television, Scout Caving continues to work within Scout Association rules and BCA best practice.

Once again we had a stand at Hidden Earth; the stand had a major re-vamp this year, thanks to Paul Wilman. The stand attracted lots of interest and hopefully some new cave leaders. We always struggle to man the stand at all times throughout the weekend, but when you consider the numbers of Scout Team members working for the Hidden Earth organisation team and the fact that other volunteers wished to attend lectures etc. we did not do too badly. Thanks again to Paul for his preparation work on the stall. Mike Pantrey of Surrey Scout Caving Team gave an interesting talk about the straw bale cave they build for a big Scout Camp held on a three year cycle. Their cave includes a small pitch and even a sump! Very impressive.

During the weekend of 31st October-1st November ASCT is organising a Local Cave Leader Training session, thanks to Nigel Ball who will be our Trainer. Although this BCA qualification is not needed to lead Scouts underground, having the qualification allows the Scout Cave Leader to assess other Scout Leaders in Cave Leading.

Following on from successful workshops in Yorkshire 2015 and the Peak District 2014, another Scout Cave Leader Workshop is planned. It is hoped that this will take place January 15th-17th; it will be based in Mendip this year, split between Wells Scout Hut and the Wessex Cave Club. Dates & booking for this have now been confirmed and the ASCT AGM will be added in to the weekend's excitement.

For Euro Speleo 2016 we intend to have a major presence involving, hopefully, a number of young people selected from our more experienced Scouts & Explorer Scouts.

Ghar Parau Foundation Grants

Grants, allocated by the Ghar Parau Foundation Funds Committee meeting on 27th September were to the following expeditions:

Mulu funds	£200 from GPF funds plus £300 from BCA
China Caves – Doshan	£575 from China Caves project funds plus Alex Pitcher awards of £75 Rachel Findlay and Thomas Hughes
Southern Shan State, Myanmar	£400 from BCA funds
Nan funds	£275 from GPF funds plus £250 from BCA
Caves of the Kosua	£450 from BCA funds

A proposal to designate England's first Cave National Nature Reserve

This is a personal project of Andrew Hinde, the BCA Conservation and Access Officer which Andrew is pitching to Natural England and Cavers simultaneously.

National Nature Reserves (NNRs) were established to protect some of our most important habitats, species and geology, and to provide 'outdoor laboratories' for research. There are currently 224 NNRs in England with a total area of over 94,400 hectares but only 5 have been declared primarily for their geodiversity. Currently, there are over 1200 SSSIs notified wholly, or in part, for their geodiversity - of which 48 are cave sites.

Caves are an incredible natural resource for our Landscape and Climate history. They are a part of our shared heritage and deserve statutory protection at the highest level. The public should be made aware that geodiversity is every bit as important as the more familiar concept of biodiversity. The statistics show that there is a long way to go in achieving this. Statutory bodies are starting to realise that they too have been slow to respond.

Natural England's New Strategic Direction states that they will:

- Increase the number of nationally important geological and geomorphological sites notified as SSSIs and NNRs
- Build a broader recognition of the value and contribution of geodiversity to the natural environment.

Now is an opportune time to push for a cave NNR where the public can safely visit a cave dedicated for them to enjoy and learn about cave conservation in a real, wild cave environment. This is not a visitor attraction so much as a public "Cave Lab".

Scoska Cave is located 70m above the south bank of River Skirfare between Arncliffe and Litton. It lies within the Scoska Wood SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest); it is overlooked by the GCR but has fine exposure of Porcellaneous Band and geological control of passages. It is the cave with the finest biological record in England. There are over 50 species of plants as well as several species of birds, mammals and invertebrates. Human remains have been recorded and there is a long record of scientific research. It is located far enough from the road head to avoid casual vandalism and there is good access to a comparatively safe cave which has no vertical drops and no flood risk. Access is via a Public Right of Way and there is only one landowner to negotiate with, who has shown interest in this proposal.

We have an opportunity, as cavers, to enthuse the public about the uniqueness of the cave environment we enjoy and why it should be protected. We can do this on our own terms and can work in partnership with the statutory bodies to ensure they get this right.

Theft from Devon Cave

Alan Finch, the Secretary of the William Pengelly Cave Studies Trust, asks for our help

Joint Mitnor Cave at Buckfastleigh in South Devon contains an internationally recognised deposit of animal bones from the warm-climate period between the last two ice ages.

The bones are from animals such as elephant, hippopotamus, lion, bear, hyena, bison and deer that roamed the area between 120,000 and 80,000 years ago. The cave is part of a Site of Special Scientific Interest and was excavated in the 1940s and 50s and is now the central feature in a nature reserve where researchers, students and members of the public can see many of the bones in situ, just as they were discovered.

The most notable part of the deposit includes the tooth of a juvenile straight-tusked elephant; the animal was about 4 years old when it fell into the cave.

At some time between 3rd and 12th September the cave, which is securely gated and locked, was broken into, and the elephant tooth and other artefacts stolen. Other bones were dislodged from the deposit and considerable damage done to the demonstration section in the cave.

The padlock on the steel door to the very well decorated Reeds Cave, also in the same reserve, was forced off but no apparent damage was done inside.

The elephant tooth is presumably regarded as a trophy. However, unless it is carefully handled it will quickly deteriorate as it dries out and it is likely to break up. Its loss is a serious blow to those who have been custodians for the site for over 50 years and to the general scientific community.

The whole deposit in this cave is also part of a wider number of cave sites in the South Devon area which have yielded precious information about the climatic conditions of the last half million years – an area of study in which Devon has led the way since around 1800 and continues to do so.

Any information that would lead to the recovery of the elephant tooth or any of the other bones would be welcomed.

It can be provided, in confidence if necessary, to the Trust Secretary, [Alan Finch](#).

CRow update

At the Council meeting which followed the AGM Tim Allen was appointed to the role of CRow liaison. He has been busy in the first few months:

It is accepted by DEFRA and Natural England that caving is not an activity which is excluded under the Act. Paul Johnson, the principal specialist in statutory access at Natural England, confirms that any member of the public, including cavers, may walk to a cave entrance across 'access land' without any sort of permission what so ever. They may also descend into the entrance for an indeterminate distance.

In Mr Johnson's view "a cave on a hill that faces out into the open air" is covered by CROW. But, he goes on, "the question in each case would then be how far inside a cave of this type, if it were deep, a member of the public would have to go before the rights ceased to apply because use no longer amounted to open-air recreation". Mr Johnson has suggested that this distance might be to the limit of daylight penetration.

Working within Council's remit to seek clarification of the DEFRA/NE interpretation of the existing legislation Tim has, in recent months, contacted a number of outdoor organisations and informed them of our position on CRow with a view to gaining their support. He has been in contact with several access officers of the BMC including Cath Flitcroft their main access lobbyist. The BMC is the secretariat for the All Party Parliamentary Group on Mountaineering which is considering widening its remit to cover more of the outdoors. He has also contacted the Outdoor Industries Association which is closely linked to the Sports and Recreational Alliance.

These groups are both active in Westminster promoting outdoor issues and events.

He has begun to lobby a number of our MPs as some have shown a keen interest in recreational activities and the outdoors. He has been introduced to the parliamentary under-secretary for DEFRA by his own MP, Julian Smith. They have both been members of the APPG for Mountaineering until promotion in the party caused them to stand aside.

He has also been put in touch with the senior Conservative MP, the Rt. Hon. David Davis, who has agreed to support our cause and make representations to the minister on our behalf. Mr Davis has stated that he remembers well the passage of the CRow Act through parliament and agrees with the opinion of Ms Rose.

The BCA recognise that there is much more work to be done and that patience will be required before a successful outcome can be achieved.

BCRA News

New publication - BCRA Annual Review

As reported recently, BCRA has ceased to publish Speleology magazine. Instead, Council has decided to replace it with a new publication, to be called the "BCRA Annual Review". This will be edited by Dave Lowe (who edits Cave & Karst Science). The first issue will be published in the third quarter of NEXT year, 2016. The Review will be published online as a free download, and will also be available on paper, for a fee, using a print-on-demand process. The thought behind this is that BCRA needs a medium for reporting its activities that can be referenced in papers and articles, as this cannot be achieved in an ephemeral newsletter. By adopting the format of C&KS for the Annual Review we think we can achieve this without the "overhead" that a publication such as Speleology requires. Precisely what the content will be is still open to discussion and will depend, to a large extent, on what is contributed. As a minimum it will include field meeting reports, officers' annual reports (currently not produced) and a copy of our annual "Report and Accounts" to the Charity Commission. The first issue will clear the backlog of meetings reports from the last couple of years.

Cumbrian Ring book now published

Phil Murphy's book, Exploring the Limestone Landscapes of the Cumbrian Ring (Cave Studies Series #20), has now been published, and can be [ordered](#), price £5 plus postage, with a 20% discount to BCRA members. This is a revision of the pre-publication draft that was issued at our field meeting back in April.

Reprint of Essential Sources in Cave Science

This booklet (Cave Studies Series #16) was first published in 2006 as an A4-sized booklet. We have now re-printed it in a smaller "trade paperback" format with, as they say "minor revisions". From 1st November it can be [ordered](#), price £5 plus postage, with a 20% discount to BCRA members. It is also available as a free download for BCRA members. (Non members can purchase a login ID for £8/month).

Cave Studies Booklets

We have revised the price of our Cave Studies booklets and started the process of putting some of them online. Most of the earlier booklets are now priced at just £3.00. By 1st November numbers 16 to 18 in the series (Essential Sources in Cave Science, Grotte Casteret and Eli Simpson & the BCA) will be available as free downloads to BCRA members. The printed versions are £5.00 and the A5 booklets are now £3.00 plus postage. Orders [here](#)

Council Election for 2016

- Welcoming Andy Farrant as a trustee
- Welcoming Dave Lowe as President for 2016-2018
- Thanking Dave Judson for his lengthy and valuable service

The BCRA Trustees (who are also its Council Members) for 2016 will be the same as those for 2015 with the following changes. After a very lengthy period of valuable service, Dave Judson is stepping down as a trustee. In his place will be Andy Farrant, who will - after a handover period - adopt the post of Treasurer, replacing the present treasurer Dave Gough, who will remain a trustee for 2016. As the number of nominations did not exceed the places available, we do not require a postal ballot of members. Council for 2016 therefore comprises John Gunn (chairman), Dave Gough (Treasurer), David Gibson (Secretary), Dave Checkley, Andy Farrant, Trevor Faulkner, Paul Hardwick, Ian Peachey, and Jenny Potts. In addition, Council has co-opted the BCA chairman Andy Eavis as a Council member for 2016, and has appointed Dave Lowe as President for the period 2016-18. Dave Lowe is therefore also a trustee and Council member.

Meetings Dates for 2016

28 Feb - Council Meeting #165
14-15 May - BCRA Field Meeting including flood pulse tests at Malham Cove
26 June - Council Meeting #166
6-13 August - EuroSpeleo 2016, including field meeting to Giggleswick Scar
22 October - BCRA Cave Science Symposium and AGM at Oxford
23 October - BCRA field meeting to Cotswolds gull caves

Membership Fees for 2016

BCA has reduced by £10 the component of its fees that relates to Direct Individual Membership. This is because none of the publications - newsletter, handbook, Speleology - are now provided on paper. This, of course, means that your BCRA membership fee is reduced accordingly. The new fees for 2016 are at <http://bcra.org.uk/fees> and, in summary are...

£44 for cavers (includes Cave & Karst Science on paper)
£33 for non-cavers and overseas cavers
£10 discount, if you do not wish to receive C&KS on paper.
£11 total fee for UK-based undergraduate students

CREG Journal 91 now published

Journal 91 of BCRA's Cave Radio & Electronics Group has now been [published](#)

Hidden Earth

Competition Results and Staff Credits for 2015 will be online [here](#) by the end of October.

Other news in brief

See <http://bcra.org.uk/forum>, or the recently issued paper newsletter <http://bcra.org.uk/news> for further details.

-- Back-issues of Speleology are now online

-- Speleology no longer published. As mentioned previously, BCRA Council has decided to cease to produce Speleology because of the difficulty of doing this using largely volunteer, part-time effort. BCRA will now start to investigate how BCRA's needs could be met in other ways – see note above on "BCRA Annual Review".

-- Cave & Karst Science: Charlie Self's Layman's Summaries are now all available online. The C&KS contents listing pages include links to the Summaries.

-- Job Vacancies for Cave Studies Editor, Publicity Manager, E-book Project Manager, Workshop 'Initiators'

-- Subterranean Biology: Graham Proudlove has placed the Hazelton Database on the BCA archive server

Cave Access Update

Change of Casterton Fell permit contact (Yorkshire)

From Saturday 12th September 2015, Hannah Walker took over from Alan Speight as the contact for Casterton Fell permits. Contact details on the CNCC website have been updated so please be sure to check before you request any permits.

Collapses in Knock Fell Caverns (Yorkshire)

Any cavers wishing to challenge their navigational skills in Knock Fell Caverns (an extremely extensive maze-cave near Brought) should be aware that the CNCC received reports in July 2015 of fresh collapses, particularly evident through the Southern Complex. Extra caution is required.

Ogof Daren Cilau (Wales)

New chain ladders have been installed in Daren Cilau at Frag Street and Eastern Flyover to replace life-expired electron ladders.

Ogof Capel (Wales)

Although construction work is not expected to commence this year, contractors are now actively working on the Clydach Gorge section of the A465 and access routes to some sites may be affected. Ogof Capel is expected to close for the duration of the construction phase.

Robinson's Pot (Yorkshire)

Robinson's Pot has always had an interesting access issue, the entrance being right underneath Darnbrook farm. Historically there have only been a limited number of permits available each year (most recently increased to five) with allocation being made by drawing lots at the CNCC AGM each year.

For 2016 the number of permits available will increase to eight, to include the first Saturday of May/June/July/August/September, and the third Saturday of May/July/September (winter month permits are not issued as the cave is often inaccessible).

It is anticipated that this supply of permits should meet with the demand and so there is no longer any need for the ballot; they will be issued on a first come first served basis.

Permit applications should be made to Ric Halliwell by post or email (see link on the CNCC website).

Robinson's Pot is often overlooked by many cavers. It is a fine trip with a great streamway and well worth a visit; and thanks to the increased number of permits it is hoped that opportunities to plan a trip over the summer months with far less advanced notice will be available.

Agen Allwedd (Wales)

At the recent meeting of the Mynydd Llangatwg Cave Management Advisory Committee it was agreed that permits would be issued to Direct Individual Members of BCA whether or not they are also club members. It was also agreed that it would no longer be necessary to apply directly to Natural Resources Wales for a permit to conduct training or assessment for the BCA award schemes. All other commercial use continues to require the direct approval of NRW (not the MLCMAC permit secretary) in advance of the trip.

Please note: The views expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and do not necessarily represent the formal view of the British Caving Association.