

# **COUNCIL OF NORTHERN CAVING CLUBS**

## **British Caving Association**

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### **Reports for 13<sup>th</sup> January 2018 Committee Meeting**

#### **Chairman's Report**

I would like to thank Tony Harrison for donating a substantial amount of money to the CNCC for use in all areas of its current work. Tony had been contracted by Natural England to undertake some work on the update of the Geological Conservation Review in the North Pennines. This is incredibly generous and could not come at a more vital time. The CNCC has made significant spending commitments in this financial year which can be mitigated by this generous personal contribution.

I am pleased to be able to announce that an agreement has been reached between Natural England and The Ingleborough Estate regarding exploratory cave digging. NE has signed a 5 year "General Consent" for cave digs on the Ingleborough Estate SSSI.

Previously, the Estate had to notify NE of each dig it wished to give permission for. This required lots of paperwork for both institutions. From now on Cavers will only have to seek permission to dig from the Estate (in the usual way). The Estate will ask cavers to follow the usual precautions regarding the safety of the public and livestock. They will also want to be sure that flora and fauna is protected. As always, they reserve the right to say no to any applicant.

With a straightforward process such as this there is no reason for any unauthorised digs on The Ingleborough Estate in the future. I hope the cave digging community will appreciate the trust that has been placed in them by NE and the Estate and continue to be considerate partners in the protection of this fantastic landscape we all appreciate for so many different reasons.

I hope that this "General Consent" for digs can be extended to Casterton Fell and Leck Fell in the near future.

If anyone wants further information, please contact me. Tel 015242 42021

I need to give advance warning that I will be unable to attend the CNCC AGM in March 2018. I will be attending a Cave Conservation Conference in France on the same date. I would like a deputy to come forward at this January meeting with an offer to Chair the AGM.

Finally, I would like to thank all of the officers and individuals who have contributed to the work of CNCC during the last year. The CNCC is a responsive and positive organisation who deliver tangible benefits to Northern Cavers. I hope we can continue to be more outward looking and influence other organisations who have an impact (sometimes unknowingly) on Northern Caving.

**Andrew Hinde – CNCC Chairman**

## Secretary's Report

Happy new year to you all!

Firstly, I would like to pay tribute to Tom Sykes, who passed away last year. Tom was the first Secretary of the CNCC (from 1963-1971), and presided over numerous access improvements over his several years in office, at a time when citing 'open access' was likely to see you at the wrong end of a gamekeeper's shotgun. I regret not having taken the opportunity to meet Tom in person.

It's been an eventful couple of months since the last meeting.

Clearly one of the biggest ongoing matters in the CNCC presently is that of the online cave booking system. Gary has built this, and I have been kept busy testing it and compiling a 'user guide' for the land agent. Tim's proactivity in working with Ingham and Yorke is keeping the momentum on this going and we are very hopeful for some encouraging feedback any week now.

The new CNCC anchor scheme has, it seems, been progressing, and I am aware of installations having occurred over the past few months. I'll leave it to Simon to update further. I have once again written to the BCA Equipment and Techniques group to enquire about the status of having Damian Weare recognised as a trainer, and having the cost of the anchors refunded entirely or in part. It transpires that the E&T has been rather dormant for some time, but a new convenor for the group has been found (Mark Sims, a fellow York caver). These matters are scheduled for discussion at the next meeting. Work to establish a systematic means of monitoring resin anchors is progressing slowly. Further progress needs Simon, Gary and I to discuss this in more detail when time allows, to decide what information needs to be collected. Unfortunately, everyone is currently extremely busy with other matters and so this is still an ongoing initiative.

One of the initiatives I have been focussing on over the past few months has been the content for the CNCC 'stall' or 'roadshow' which will hopefully be able to be taken to Hidden Earth in 2018 and perhaps CHECC. This is all part of the mission to engage with more cavers, and to promote the work the CNCC does. I envisage one of the centrepieces of this stall being a CNCC timeline discussing key achievements of the CNCC and milestones in northern caving access and conservation since the CNCC was founded in 1963. The history that is already on the website has provided a starting point, however, my research has been able to add to this significantly. Furthermore, while looking through a memory stick passed down to me by the previous Secretary I found reports and meeting minutes dating back to 1992, which were not on the website. I have now uploaded them.

Work on the next newsletter is planned for February/March, hopefully once we have more to report on the booking system and some more conservation news.

I have written a letter to the BCA regarding the possible appointment of Linda Wilson, an opponent of CRoW applying to caving, to a BCA legal advisory or facilitative role. The purpose of the letter is to urge upfront discussions prior to any such appointment and for both sides to be transparent in their expectations, to identify any potential conflicts of interest that could compromise the BCA or the CRoW campaign. I should emphasise that the letter does not bring into question anybody's integrity; nor does it urge against the appointment; it simply recommends that frank discussions are had to ensure all conflicts of interests are brought out into the open from the start.

I would like to thank Alan Jeffreys, who has been considering obtaining a regular article in a regional publication. Initially 'Dalesman' magazine was suggested, and Alan kindly did the legwork in trying to instigate this. This was rejected by Dalesman, but there was interest in a regular (quarterly) piece in the Craven Herald Dales Life supplement instead. Unfortunately, my workload for 2018 is already extremely full, with a newsletter to prepare over the coming months, and a Hidden Earth display to organise. Therefore, I am seeking a volunteer who is a regular CNCC contributor/attendee, ideally based in The Dales, with an engaging writing style, to take up this role. This is a great opportunity to get caving and the CNCC into the spotlight on a regular basis. Any volunteers?

I have written and added a new cave description (FOUL Pot) to the CNCC website. I suggested to Andrew and Kay that this would be a worthy target of some conservation works, given the entrance is a 4m walled shaft (a little loose), capped only loosely by rotten timbers and rusting metal sheets; it would be nice to make it a little more stock-proof. I also suggested Dale Head too, following reports of many carcasses at the bottom of the totally unfenced/uncapped surface shaft.

Gary has formatted and added several new topos to the website (FOUL Pot, Car Pot, Cupcake, and soon to be added, Birks Fell and New Rift Pot, Pippikin, Magnetometer and Large Pot Red Herring Series). My thanks to Sam Allshorn for providing these topos to the CNCC, and allowing us the freedom to edit them to standardise the formatting to match others already on the website.

I am encouraged by the work Maz has been doing as Training Officer; I would advise everyone to read her excellent report, assuming I have not yet sent you to sleep with mine.

Finally, the date of this meeting (13<sup>th</sup> January) also marks the deadline for submitting notification of your intention to stand as a CNCC Officer or for the Committee. This includes all current Officers and Committee wishing to restand. There has been no interest expressed in the Individual Caver role.

I welcome any agenda items for the AGM (submitted no later than 21<sup>st</sup> January please).

**Matt Ewles – CNCC Secretary**

## Treasurer's Report

### **Financial Status as of 5<sup>th</sup> January 2018:**

Business Current Account: £3644.84

Business Saver Account: £14,503.23

Since the October 2017 meeting, the following payments/receipts made:

£30.00 paid to the Hellifield Institute for the hire of the meeting hall.

Expenses payments of £55.65 made to Gary Douthwaite, for newsletter production and postage.

Travel expense payments for Great Douk Dig Capping totalling £260.55 have all been distributed. £233.50 received from Natural England and paid to Bradford Potholing Club for travel expenses incurred during GG track repair work carried out in February 2017.

£60 paid to Sam Allshorn for two copies of Northern Caves, now distributed to John Hanley (Kingsdale) and Alan Middleton (Leck Fell House), as a thank you for their good will towards cavers.

£2500 received from Natural England. This is a donation to the organisation from Tony Harrison who did some project work for Natural England and agreed that his fee should go to CNCC for 'good works'. This 'payment' may be liable to capital gains tax.

**Pete Bann – CNCC Treasurer**

### **Conservation Officer's Report**

A quiet period, with work on FOUL Pot needing to be postponed into the New Year. There are various projects in the pipeline, more details when we are in a position to start work.

New volunteers are always welcome, for weekend or weekday working parties. No specific skills are necessary, but if you have them, we will do our best to make use of them. On the job training is given as needed. Occasionally there may be the opportunity to attend a training course. Tools will be provided, but you are responsible for providing your own protective clothing - stout footwear, preferably with steel toe caps, stout gloves, weatherproof clothing, helmet. You will also need to provide your own packed lunch and hot drinks. If you'd like to be placed on the mailing list to be informed of future projects, please contact Kay Easton on [conservation@cncc.org.uk](mailto:conservation@cncc.org.uk)

**Kay Easton – CNCC Conservation Officer**

## Access Officer

Season's greetings to all. I hope to see you at the meeting. My report in no particular order;

### **Access related**

**BCA QMC.** I had written to QMC as requested some months ago basically stating that we are looking to improve access across the board but that this would take some time. I also explained that we were re-negotiating access across the major estates with a completely new approach but that in the first instance this, by necessity, would be for recreational caving. I explained that I would be happy to look at improved levels of instructed caver access when the new systems were up and running. However, in November BCA reported to me an issue on Leck Fell involving instructed caving. This appeared to be more of a disciplinary matter within QMC rather than any access incident reported by land management or CNCC. BCA later reported that the matter was resolved without disclosing the actual details.

The question arises – Should a perceived breach of access arrangements by the instructed sector be first brought to the attention of CNCC as the areas regional body or BCA/QMC as the authority over the training scheme. Personally I'm not fussed either way other than perhaps QMC should actually check the current status of access arrangements and the position of CNCC before proceeding further.

**Langcliffe Estate.** I wrote to Robert Bell four months ago outlining the changes which have occurred since the 1978 agreement. This includes the 'tax exempt heritage status' of the land and caves, the CRoW Act and changes to our own constitution amongst other details that mean the requirements of the agreement cannot be met. Out of good will we have been applying this old agreement as best we can which now only really affects access to Penyghent Pot and Dalehead. The letter made it clear that this situation could not go on much longer and suggested a deadline of our January meeting. In the week before Christmas I had a reply from a representative of the Marshfield Trust asking us to continue to comply with the full 1978 agreement. I am active on this and hope to have more information for the meeting but I recommend we still withdraw from the agreement if we have any hope of updating access.

**On-line cave booking system.** I have continued to work diligently on this project. Thanks to Gary and Matt, development of the system is now complete. I have shown the agents for Ingleborough and Leck the final version and they seem happy with the design. As far as I know at present the recommendation is to move forward towards a trial and full implementation. However, I am still awaiting the final authority to go ahead.

**Fairy Holes.** We need to finalise who will take charge of updating this arrangement.

**Meridian Pot.** I have met with Richard Bendall and looked at the state of this entrance. I felt it would be possible to descend and make a better assessment of the lined entrance shaft. I'll try to do this over the next month. I have made some recommendations as to how he should proceed on this and with other related matters.

**North Pennines Geo Park.** I mention this only as a prompt for Andrew to brief the meeting and in case there are any access issues to discuss.

### **Other matters**

**Yorkshire Dales Management Plan.** Following plenty of badgering from me and the results of the public consultation I am expecting an increased focus on caves and caving in the next five year plan. I attended the management forum on behalf of CNCC in November where the LAF stakeholder group recommend “raising the profile of the underground environment and encouraging participation”. Of course they may still drop this plan at the final stage but we shall see later in the year. I also participated in several ‘breakout sessions’ (yes, do ask), on a ‘flourishing local economy’ and a ‘welcoming place’. I pushed the natural resources and special qualities of the environment and promoted better interpretation and education to non-caving visitors and the welcome effect this can have on the local economy. Whatever your opinion of these fancy terms and ways it was a great opportunity to promote caves to influential local people in a very positive way.

**Interpretation boards for the Three Counties system.** This is still ongoing but with a revised plan following a meeting with Mark Allum in December. We are well over a year into this but suffice to say we are bogged down with a landowner reluctance for anything which is seen to promote public access to his land. The plan is still to have one board at Bull Pot Farm but with a second board now moved to the Masongill area. The NP have now decided to have one board made without final approval (Henry Bowring will only approve once he has seen the final version). With the location changes and some additional information insisted upon by the landowner I am in the process of redesigning the content.

**Kendal Mountain Festival.** As mentioned before I am now involved in organising the caving session at Kendal Mountain Festival. This has doubled in size and moved venue and received a very favourable response from both the event organisers and those who attended. It will continue next year. KMF is now the largest mountain festival in the world, overtaking Banff, according to the organisers. It also travels the country (and the world) with film programmes and speaking events. Across the four day event it receives some 12,000 visitors who are interested in the outdoors. Those who visit the festival cannot help but notice huge numbers of young people, male and female, who are interested in outdoor pursuits. As a major event on our doorstep it struck me that this could be a great opportunity to recruit new interest in caving both from a point of promoting our sport and encouraging new members to club caving. Whether CNCC or the larger clubs have any interest in this would be worth discussing.

**Promoting caving.** Through my other roles I managed to get an article in the Sunday Times. As well as the BCA campaign for access rights the article covered the Three Counties System and Wordsworth’s early caving visits to ‘Yorkshire’. I have also penned an article for the Yorkshire Dales Review, the magazine of the Yorkshire Dales Society/Friends of the Dales. The theme here was recognising the importance and potential of the underground environment and promoting it to the non-caving, and especially, local communities. I wrote a similar article for ‘Leck News’ to urge better interpretation of the caves in that area. I attended the CHECC Forum AGM event at Dalesbridge mainly to give away the competition prizes, however, I gave a plug for all the current good work the CNCC are involved with, particularly via the website etc.

## **Rights under CRoW and our areas caves.**

To be better prepared for the future and to inform for the present I recommend that some of the issues surrounding the CRoW Act should be addressed on our website. At present there is only a very brief mention of CNCC support for the BCA campaign but no information about the issue itself. I suggest three improvements we should make.

1. Where we identify a cave by name, i.e. in the 'cave list' a distinction should be made whether the entrance is on access land or not. This could be made by a simple colour variant (green/red?). It is not disputed that access can be made to the entrance only how far down a cave one may go. The major factor here is not to highlight which caves are on access land but more importantly to highlight which caves are not. Sam Allshorn (Northern Caves Guidebook project) has this information ready in his database.

2. Where we mention access arrangements and obtaining permission we should include a factual statement about the state of cave access under the CRoW Act. For example;

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 set into law public rights of access to the countryside and followed on from earlier legislation which established our National Parks. It is important to recognise that this right of access is only to designated land types, referred to as 'access land', and most commonly described as mountain, moor, heath, down and common land. The exact boundaries can be found on Natural England maps ([link](#)). The majority of caves in the Dales area are located on access land. The CNCC have highlighted which caves are and which caves are not, by use of 'our coded system'.

The big question, and one which has been argued over for a decade, is does the Act include caving as a permitted activity? Without question cavers, like all members of the public, have a right of access over the land to the entrance. You are also permitted to enter an open cave to an ill-defined point, suggested as being the limit of daylight by Natural England advisers. The Act excludes specific activities, but caving or potholing is not listed. However, the Act makes provision for 'open-air recreation' and Natural England do not recognise caving as such. Their view is that the Act does not apply to caving. They do however concede that their view is not definitive and that only a court can decide. In addition, the British Caving Association support the position that the Act does already apply to caving and an eminent public lawyer, Dinah Rose QC, validates this in a legal opinion.

The CNCC therefore do not act as an access controlling body for caves on this land type nor would be in favour of any unjustified restrictions. We have looked to provide a compromise solution where landowners wish to continue with managed access but strive to only support beneficial arrangements which satisfies cavers and landowners alike.

It should be noted that access under CRoW is for recreational caving only, digging will still require landowner permission. All visitors to the countryside should follow the countryside and caving codes.

3. Finally, a new approach is already being initiated where access is unknown, uncertain or restricted. Where there is no clear arrangement there should be a presumption of access rather than a presumption that access needs to be sought. Where there have been access problems or where

access is normally denied the basic facts should be given as to the problem. We should not simply state 'no access'. We should state that cavers be courteous and leave if asked. See the following examples of how the BMC record problem or no access areas. I suggest we follow their example on this.

*"...several attempts to arrange a meeting to discuss climbing access, nothing has been forthcoming so far. Climbing at Goblin Coombe is not allowed by the landowner, but if climbers do decide to visit the crag and are asked to leave by Groundworks staff, they should do so politely."*

*"The farmer at Heighley Farm continues to turn climbers away. Please leave if asked."*

*"The Willersley area is owned by the Arkwright Society. It is essential that climbers do not block gateways with parked cars and that disturbance is kept to a minimum. Access negotiations have been on-going between the BMC and the Arkwright Society, and climbers continue to access the crag. If you are asked to leave, please remain courteous and report the incident to the BMC."*

*"Was provisionally mapped as 'Open Access' but the landowner successfully appealed and it was removed from the definitive version. The BMC has lodged its dissatisfaction with the appeal decision and will continue to work on trying to resolve this issue."*

*"The landowner has recently informed the BMC and climbers on site that he does not allow climbing in the quarry. Several unsuccessful attempts have been made to meet with the landowner, but no response has been forthcoming so far. Anyone climbing the quarry may be asked to leave - if this happens, please do so politely."*

*"Please report any incidents or altercations to the BMC but also be prepared to be asked to leave if representatives of the owners are present."*

**Tim Allen – CNCC Access Officer**

## Training Officer

Since the last meeting, I have finalised the arrangements for two training events for early 2018.

Firstly we have a **First Aid for Cavers** course coming up in February. So far we have had three CNCC volunteers sign up and eight other individuals. Priority will be going to CNCC volunteers until the middle of January, but either way, it looks like this is a popular course and will have at least 11/12 places filled. This day long course is taking place at Austwick Village Hall and is being delivered by Sean Whittle. The syllabus has been agreed between us to cover both the requirements for a certificated course and so it caters to the needs of cavers and CNCC volunteers. Assuming this course goes well, it should now be a much simpler matter to re-run this course at regular intervals in future (I am currently thinking 2-3 times a year). This course should break even financially – the training fee is £250, the hall hire is £50, and certification for everyone is £96. These costs will be covered by a £250 training bursary from the BCA (which I am in the process of applying for) and a £15 charge for participants (registered CNCC volunteers will be funded through 'stories in stone'). This is slightly more than required in order that we could cover costs if attendance was poor. Given the popularity of this course, I plan to reduce the fees for the next event.

The other training course we are running is an **Introduction to Paperless Surveying**. This is being taught by Chris Fox and Nick Bairstow, who are kindly volunteering their time to plan and deliver this course for us. This is a three days course (spread over three months) at How Stean Gorge. It will be mostly classroom based, with a small portion of underground training. It is a new course that they have put together with assistance from a few other cavers. If it is a success, they are happy to re-run the course in the future. So far 5/10 places have been filled. As Chris and Nick are running this voluntarily, and sourcing the equipment required, the only cost is room hire at How Stean Gorge. I am currently trying to get the details for this, but it is expected to be well under the £250 grant available from the BCA, and will be funded through that, meaning that the course will be free to participants.

Arranging these courses has raised the problem of how to best collect money (fees and/ or deposits) from participants. The original plan was to request cheques in the post, but it seems that many people do not have access to a cheque book these days and are wanting to pay by bank transfer or Paypal. I am currently working with Pete (CNCC treasurer) and Gary (CNCC webmaster) to find a long-term solution to this.

The BCA training committee met back in December, although I was unable to attend. Nigel Atkins has now been voted in as BCA Training Officer and is working on redefining the role of the training committee now that it does not involve professional training. Regional level training courses are being encouraged (and I am in the process of making applications for the two courses I have organised), although the committee are considering reducing the amount regional councils can apply for to £150 per day. If this does eventually occur, it would increase the costs of running the first aid course to around £20 a head, which is still reasonably small to be covered by fees. Nigel Atkins is looking to create a club coaching scheme and training workshops in the BCAs name. The general sense is that the BCA training committee is looking to take a more active role in supporting the training of recreational cavers and as Training Officer it would be useful to know what form northern cavers would like this to take. Given the success of the previous training survey, I think producing another one on this topic may be worthwhile. In the meantime, if anyone has any thoughts on the

matter, please do get in touch via email. The next BCA training committee meeting is scheduled for 1<sup>st</sup> March.

Looking forward, now the planning and legwork is done for the above courses, they will be much easier to run in future. My next steps are to focus on arranging a similar, sustainable setup for SRT training and start to put together online resources for the website.

**Maz Holloway – CNCC Training Officer**

**Webmaster – Gary Douthwaite**

No report provided as much of the work of the webmaster over the past three months has been the development of the online cave booking system, which is already covered in the Secretary and Access Officer reports.

**Anchor Coordinator**

The batch of 650 anchors has been received and some have been given to installers.

Mark Sims has been trained as an installer.

Mark Sims has agreed to take on the role as the convenor of the BCA Equipment and Techniques Committee. A meeting is in the process of being arranged.

Several installation projects are being worked on.

**Simon Wilson – CNCC Anchor Coordinator**

**Meet's Secretary Reports**

**Ric Halliwell (Birks Fell, Robinson's Pot, Fairy Holes, Mongo Gill):**

Nothing to report about Birks Fell. Fairy Holes is beginning to fill up but there are still some vacancies. Only one Robinson's Pot permit has been issued so far (1<sup>st</sup> Sept), I should be grateful for more applications to take up the remaining 7 permits. Nobody seems to want to visit Mongo Gill which is sad as it is a fine through trip.

**Tony Brown (Bowland):**

No permit requests received for 2018. Only one permit was issued in 2017.

**All other areas:**

No issues reported for Ingleborough, Leck, Casterton, Excalibur or Penyghent.