

COUNCIL OF NORTHERN CAVING CLUBS

British Caving Association

Reports for 8th July 2017 Committee Meeting

Chairman's Report

Firstly I would like to pay tribute to my predecessor, Roy Holmes, who managed to steer the CNCC through a very turbulent time and emerge the other side with a much more inclusive and relaxed organisation. This has made our organisation more relevant and productive for all cavers.

The workload of some CNCC officers is still incredibly high and I would encourage any Northern Cavers to get involved and help out with any experience they have which their fellow cavers could benefit from. This could be writing or editing newsletter copy, writing cave route descriptions for the CNCC website, monitoring SSSI cave condition, helping with training courses, volunteering on cave conservation projects etc. You do not have to be a member of the CNCC Committee or a Club. You just have to be keen to contribute to a sustainable future for Northern Caves and Caving.

Anyone who feels they would like to “put something back” for all they have enjoyed and benefitted from Northern Caving, please contact me for further information at chair@cnc.org.uk

On a personal note – I feel very privileged to be elected chairman of the CNCC and follow in the footsteps of my Gritstone Club mentor, the late Roger Sutcliffe. When one looks at the list of past chairman and secretaries of CNCC it is a humbling, if not disconcerting, experience. Expectations may be unreasonably high.

Andrew Hinde – CNCC Chairman

Secretary's Report

Our AGM in March was probably one of the most encouraging ever; three new faces joining the Officers team and three new clubs joining the Committee. It's extremely pleasing to see that, despite the turbulent world that caving politics can be (as shown by the recent BCA activities), there remains positivity about what organisations such as the CNCC can give to northern caving, and there are individuals and clubs are keen to be part of that.

Since the last meeting I have continued to add some further cave descriptions to the website, including Grange Rigg Pot and Christmas Pot, Hagg Gill Pot, Washfold Pot and Hensler's Pot. The number of people submitting descriptions has been extremely low indeed; just one person other than myself; but I will continue to add to these as I personally visit more and more of the caves currently not covered by a CNCC description. Feedback on these has been positive and as you will see from the statistics in our Webmaster's report, usage is extremely high!

Following the AGM, I have been working with the BCA E&T group to investigate exactly what is required for us to confidently say that the CNCC are protected from liability claims for the purposes of running the proposed resin anchor scheme. The feedback was that ensuring compliance with BCA anchor policy was necessary. Following this I worked with Simon Wilson (CNCC anchor coordinator) to put together a document setting out how the CNCC anchor scheme would work and how it will be compliant with BCA anchor policy. This document was circulated to the Committee on 19th May, and a one-month consultation period was permitted in which to express any further concerns. No more concerns were raised, so I have given the go-ahead for funding to be released to pay for production of the anchors. A news item on this has been placed onto the CNCC website and Facebook page.

Regarding the creation of a scheme to systematically inspect all in-situ resin anchors (see January meeting minutes): The plan is to use the CNCC-supplied online topos, and to number each anchor. A separate downloadable form will be available to print to allow efficient and simple reporting on each anchor, referencing them by their number (for simplicity), and capturing the information necessary for monitoring purposes. The form will, of course, be simple enough that it can be completed on a sporting trip by someone not doing the rigging/derigging, with minimal burden. We may be able to look at having hard copies available to collect at willing locations (possibly including ones printed on waterproof paper for the particularly wet caves). Implementation of this requires considerable work by myself, our Webmaster, and our Anchor Coordinator, and a well-orchestrated and publicised rollout. It may therefore be later in the year before anything more concrete happens.

I'm extremely pleased to say that a new access agreement is in place for Fairy Holes, thanks to top work by Andrew Hinde. It's still one permit per month, but is now open to individual BCA cavers. This hasn't been actively publicised yet as we have been finalising details on parking etc (specifically, the car park no longer exists and there are some challenges regarding opening of the main entry gate) but I think all the information is now in place for us to make this 'live'.

I have been working with our webmaster to test the new cave booking website; it's looking great, but I will let Tim and Gary discuss this more in their reports. It's all rather exciting!

In May I emailed Committee clubs about putting their surveys on the CNCC website. I have set an example in this by making my own club's surveys, Bogg Hall Rising and Excalibur/Jenga Pot, available (the latter having been downloaded more than 60 times so far). A few clubs have said yes, but there has not been quite the enthusiasm that I had hoped. I will work with the clubs who have expressed interest and hopefully the addition of some more surveys (preferably for some of the more well-visited systems) will spark further interest as time goes on.

Over the coming weeks I will be working with Maz to help circulate and publicise a survey she has designed to help her understand the training wishes and needs of cavers in our region; I must say that it looks very good and I'm really pleased to have Maz on board as Training Officer.

I will be putting together our sixth newsletter in August; anyone with any items for this, please email them to me as soon as possible.

Matt Ewles – CNCC Secretary

Treasurer's Report

Financial Status as of 30th June 2017:

Business Current Account:	£1910.91
Business Saver Account:	£18400.69

Since the AGM meeting, the following payments/receipts made:

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

Outstanding expenses of £14.32 paid to Ric Halliwell re cave access and postage.

Completion of travel expense payments for Gauber and Wilsons (matching total of £519.30 already received from NE).

£310.93 received from BCA (Grant to Regional Councils) on 7th June 2017 - re 2016 claim.

Travel expenses of £244.35 paid to the Buttered Badgers re Alum Pot Scrap Removal (this figure towards CNCC 2017 contribution to SIS).

Travel expenses for GG track repair have been distributed to BPC & CPC and matching total of £622.35 has been received from NE.

Awaiting notice re - Anchor Scheme – will need to transfer money from the Business Savings Account on receipt of invoice.

Pete Bann – CNCC Treasurer

Conservation Officer's Report

A team of CNCC volunteers are placing a plastic tube to reinforce the entrance to the Great Douk dig in the bottom of the Great Douk pothole. This dig is on the route for the many novice cavers and naturalists who visit Great Douk cave. The two-day job is being carried out with the aid of funding from the Ingleborough Dales Landscape Partnership (Stories in Stone).

Volunteers from Bradford Pothole Club, with support from CNCC, assisted Natural England in tree planting near the entrance to Wilsons Cave.

It is good to see the amount of independent conservation works being carried out by cavers in the region, a notable example being the splendid work by Buttered Badgers and others in removing the old water tank from the bottom of Alum Pot.

CNCC is always ready to try to assist cavers with conservation projects – please get in touch if you think we could be useful.

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@cnc.org.uk

Kay Easton – CNCC Conservation Officer

Access Officer

Greetings to all involved with CNCC, northern cavers and beyond. Many thanks for the vote of confidence in electing me to Access Officer at the AGM.

On 21st March shortly after the AGM I attended a Cave & Crag Access Group meeting at the National Park offices in Grassington. Also attending from CNCC were Ric and Pat Halliwell. The C&C Access Group is a sub group of the YDNP Local Access Forum established as a requirement under the CRoW legislation. Also attending were representatives of the BMC, bird groups and NP officers. The meeting is a good opportunity to network with others and to keep caving on the NP agenda as well as pushing for more help and support for improving access.

Much of the meeting discusses restrictions on access to climbing areas during the breeding season for peregrines and ravens. It is my aim to have expert advice minuted that cavers do not disturb bats and, in fact, co-exist very well together with cavers making a large number of new habitats available to them. This is important as in other areas of the country a lack of understanding has led to access to some caves and mines becoming completely closed. Although we have none of these problems here it is clear from looking at these other areas that once new conservation officers become involved matters can change very quickly. Therefore I think it is worth establishing a precedence through this group with the local authority. (Having already written this part of my report I was alerted to the issue at Roudsea Wood Caves see below).

The NP are beginning the process of writing a new Management Plan. I'd like to see caves, caving and CNCC more involved where that is feasible. I am continuing discussions on what we might be able to offer bearing in mind that we are already written into the current plan as helping to deliver it! One aspect I'd like to pursue is helping to educate NP residents on the wonderful caves in the area and the sport of caving which is attracted to them. This is something that already takes place but could be strengthened with encouragement from CNCC.

I have had some discussion with the NP about trying to get a caving feature into one of the two NP publications, so far without success. I have had better luck with a commitment to improve the caving presence on their web site. I will be following this up soon.

I had a very productive meeting with Patrick Holmes of Ingham & Yorke concerning caving on the Ingleborough Estate. We talked through many of the issues around conservation, access restrictions, permit systems, commercial caving and surface digs. The outcome was to go ahead with building a draft version of an on-line calendar based cave booking system which could replace the current permit system. I subsequently met with Gary and Matt to discuss details and Gary has now built a draft version. This draft is hot off the press and I have not yet had time to discuss it with Gary ahead of the committee meeting but hope to in the next few weeks before presenting a version for approval to the estate.

It is hoped to extend the system across other permitted areas. This should be seen as a compromise position both offering a booking service to cavers whilst satisfying landowner wishes for a managed system. It does not address the CRoW issue directly. Subject to a registration process it would be open to all cavers and not just BCA members. This has thrown up an interesting constitutional difference between CNCC and BCA. CNCC represent members clubs and northern cavers suggesting a responsibility beyond the membership. The BCA constitution seems to state that it only represents its members which is rather at odds with the role of a national governing body. However this does go some way to explain the restrictions on access to BCA members only which we have seen in access arrangements up until now. I have sought to clarify whether or not BCA wish that Access Controlling Bodies restrict access only to BCA members. The answer appears to be that they do not.

Following the sale of Braida Garth farm I visited the new tenants. The owner has a farm in Hull and the two farms are to be run to complement each other. The tenants, Tom and Lucy, were very pleasant. I explained the general layout and significance of the caves and the traditional access to caves. They seemed happy to continue with current freedoms/courtesy call arrangements. I also prompted CDG to speak about Keld Head in particular and the feedback I received was that access is likely to be even better for this site.

I attended the BCA Council meeting on 25th March together with Martel who I expect will report to the meeting. It lasted some 8 hours and was enough to put anyone off future attendance! I also had a number of meetings/conversations with members of the exec ahead of the BCA AGM within my role as CRoW Liaison Officer. I very much appreciated the support of CNCC and northern cavers in relation to my work for BCA especially at what was quite a testing time.

I attended the BCA AGM and following council meeting on 11th June and delivered the CNCC vote on the variety of motions as instructed. Andrew was also in attendance and I hope he will be able to report to the meeting rather than me.

As I write this report I hear that access has been denied to Roudsea Wood caves near Kendal on the grounds of bat conservation. Although this is a rarely visited site it would be a shame to lose all access. More importantly looms the spectre of the bat as reported above. With Andrew's help we are on the case with both access here and the wider bat issue.

Other points to note:

The matter of the NP interpretation boards on the Three Counties System for Casterton and Leck are still with the landowners awaiting consent. Otherwise everything is good to go.

In April I took a call from Julian Smith MP inquiring how we were getting on with access issues and promoting caving. It is good to encourage his engagement and I will arrange another meeting with him in the coming months.

I have kept an eye on matters relating to the Langcliffe estate but have not had time to pursue better access here yet.

I have answered a number of queries related to existing access arrangements to some of the popular caving areas. It has become clear to me that several 'special' arrangements have been made in the past which have never really been recorded in any detail and hence it is difficult to check authenticity with those in current permission giving positions. With a number of our arrangements in the process of renegotiation it is difficult to know what is best for the short term.

As a longer term discussion I would like us to review the tone we set regarding our access position especially on our web site. I feel we should be seen to be very much in support of the caver (rather than landowner or authority). We should agree a statement on CRoW – I would be happy to prepare a draft for the next meeting. We should distinguish between caves on access land and those which are not. On specific problem caves I would like to see a similar approach to that taken by the BMC. They usually summarise the access problem, rate the sensitivity, and suggest that if you are asked to leave to do so politely. They do not use phrases as simple as 'No Access'.

I look forward to the meeting and answering any questions. Please let me know if there are other matters I should be helping with.

Best regards

Tim Allen– CNCC Access Officer

Training Officer

Since being elected at the AGM, I have been working behind the scenes to put together the training survey and this is almost ready for distribution, just a few practical details to finalise. A summary of the feedback received will be put together before the next meeting and used to determine the kinds of events I organise.

In addition, I am looking to organise an advanced SRT course in the Dales towards the end of the summer and potentially lower level SRT training in the autumn.

Due to the timing of BCA training committee meetings, I didn't hear about the previous meeting in advance of it, however the next one is on 6th July, so I'm happy to do a verbal summary of that at the CNCC meeting on 8th July.

Maz Holloway – CNCC Training Officer

Webmaster

Site statistics

The site continues to perform well in the statistics.

	Unique visitors	Total visitors
February	~2600	~5600
March	~1900	~4500
April	~1700	~4700

The slight downturn coincides with no major changes to the site in the last couple of months.

Facebook

The Facebook page now has 501 likes. During the period 4 June to 1 July there were 20 new likes and a post reach (people who looked at posts) of ~5800 people with a post engagement (people who interacted with a post) of ~1100 people.

Topo and description downloads

Since adding the cave descriptions and rigging topos in December 2016, the following download totals have been counted...

	Total downloads	Top three (total)
Cave descriptions	8289	Alum/Long Churn (471) Gaping Gill system (456) Ease Gill system (372)
Rigging topos	15666	Alum/Long Churn (727) Bar Pot (377) Aquamole (363)

Recent site updates

Cave surveys

Ability to add cave surveys has been added however this has not been publicised yet as I am waiting to get a few more added. Currently the only surveys are for Excalibur/Jenga Pot and Bogg Hall Cave with kind permission from York Caving Club. I am working with Matt Ewles to obtain permission to add more.

Online cave booking system

Working with Tim Allen I have completed the first draft of the online cave booking system as discussed at a previous meeting and as outlined in Tim's report. This is currently in testing and further details should be available by the next meeting.

SSL certificate

The site has now been encrypted with an SSL certificate (the padlock shown in the browser). This has been done mostly to add security and user piece of mind for the cave booking system but also helps

with search rankings. The cave booking system will require users to register so it is important that details submitted are encrypted and secure. There is a small cost for this of around £38 per year.

Email proposal

Due to the high dependency on email, particularly on the Secretary account I would like to propose a partial upgrade of the email system to a more professional version running on the Microsoft 365 platform. This will make email more secure and reliable as well as meaning bulk (i.e. group) email is less likely to be classified as SPAM by the recipients. The upgrade would only apply to the info@ and secretary@ email accounts as well as group-sent emails.

There will be a cost for this of around £50 per year. Do the Committee agree to this?

Gary Douthwaite – CNCC Webmaster

Meet's Secretary Reports

Aygill Caverns

So far this year, permit requests for Aygill Caverns have as usual been very quiet, and only 6 permits having been issued to clubs. There have been no issues raised by the Estate Office.

Ingleborough Estate/Allotment and Newby Moss

Since the beginning of 2017, there has been slightly less activity in permit requests for caves and potholes on the Ingleborough, Allotment and Newby Moss areas, than in a similar time in 2016, the majority coming from BCA member clubs with quite a few BCA DIM's and CIM's also requesting permits.

24 BCA member clubs and 6 BCA DIM's/CIM's have been requesting permits.

A total of 108 permits have been issued to BCA member clubs and 19 permits issued to BCA CIM's/DIM's.

Overall, a total of 127 permits have been issued since January to date.

A lot of the permit requests have as usual been at short notice, sometimes the evening before they are required, and most have had their permits electronically returned within the day.

There have been no issues raised from the Ingleborough Estate/Ingham and Yorke.

Geoff Whittaker – Aygill and Ingleborough Permit Secretary

Leck Fell (2016-2017)

***Note from Matt Ewles:** In April, a few concerns were raised about the expediency of permit issuing for Leck Fell. I have worked with Andrew and am pleased to say the backlog has been addressed, and he is on top of the job, having been temporarily unable to fulfil it due to unforeseen circumstances. I am delighted to say that Andrew is keen to continue as Leck permit Secretary.*

Apart from the known 'hiccup', a good year of caving with no issues.

A total of 293 permits issued during the season – inflated by an increasingly active mid-week calendar with many clubs having set midweek meets.

No issues from the estates office [in fact nothing heard from them at all].

Bumped into tenant farm staff and gamekeepers / estate workers on a number of occasions while on the fell and none had any issues – so all good it seems.

The revised general permit and the updated Shuttleworth template are both working well – and make life easier [for me at least].

The respite of the closed season has given me a welcome break to get myself back in order – and Leck Fell caving is back in business

All the best for the 2017 / 2018 season.

Andrew J Farrow – Leck Fell Permit Secretary

Excalibur Pot

It's been a quiet year for Excalibur Pot visitors; only two permits issued so far. None of the clubs who have had permits have reported any issues, and the entrance (which is a heavily fortified construct in a riverbed to protect it from flood) has proved no problems to any group. This is thanks to the funding that the CNCC provided several years ago to help future-proof the entrance.

In April, my own club undertook a conservation day in Jenga Pot, which is now connected to Excalibur Pot (the entire system is now 2.8 km), and we have another conservation day planned at the end of July to finish the job of removing dig spoil and tools.

Matt Ewles – Excalibur Pot Permit Secretary

All other areas (Casterton, Birks Fell, Robinson's, Fairy Holes, Stump Cross, Penyghent, etc):
Nothing reported for this meeting.