

COUNCIL FOR THE NORTHERN CAVING COMMUNITY

British Caving Association

AGENDA FOR COMMITTEE MEETING

25 October 2025 at 9:30am

Clapham Village Hall (LA2 8DZ)

- 1.0 Apologies for absence, and verification of quorum
- 2.0 Declaration of conflicts of interest
- 3.0 Acceptance of minutes from June Committee Meeting
(already reviewed for one month, before publication on website)
- 4.0 Matters arising (and updates) from June Committee Meeting

OFFICER	ACTION	UPDATE
Jill B	Finalise January committee minutes	Done
Jill B	Prepare and circulate June committee minutes	Done
Jill B	Update Manual of Operations re mileage funding	Done
Todd R	Set up representation and democracy Working Group (including CDG and instructed caving community)	Done
Ian W	Initiate discussions re concerns about Anchor Scheme	Done
Gary D	Update website with new co-opted volunteers	Done

5.0 OFFICER REPORTS

(Available one week prior to meeting)

- 5.1 Chair Todd Rye
- 5.2 Secretary Jill Bolton
- 5.3 Treasurer Kath Davis
- 5.4 Conservation Officer Kay Easton
- 5.5 Access Officer James Alderson
- 5.6 Training Officer Ian Patrick
- 5.7 Other reports *(optional)*, including:
Access Co-ordinators, Web Admin, Anchors, Projects,
Archaeology, PR, Inclusivity, Y&D, E&T, BCA report

OTHER AGENDA ITEMS

- 6.0 All Party Parliamentary Group on Outdoor Recreation (Appendix 1)
- 7.0 Anchoring Projects (Appendix 2)
- 8.0 Proposal to upgrade CNCC web services (Appendix 3)

- 10.0 Any other business

- 11.0 Details of next meeting
Committee Meeting to be held on 17 January at 9:30am
Venue: Clapham Village Hall (Postcode LA2 8DZ)

APPENDIX 1
AGENDA ITEM 6.0

(for information)

Statement from the CNCC in response to the call for evidence by the All Party Parliamentary Group on outdoor recreation and access to nature

Who are we?

The CNCC is the representative body for cavers and caving clubs in the north of England, and Scotland. We work with landowners to arrange access to some of Britain's finest underground spaces, as well as organise conservation and training within our region. Our region covers some of the most expansive areas of caves, including the Three Counties System, Britain's longest at over 86km in length, as well as Britain's most famous pothole, the 100m deep shaft of Gaping Gill.

Historically there have always been issues surrounding access to caves in our region. The CNCC was originally formed by the northern caving clubs for the sole purpose of amalgamating a collective bargaining power in order to negotiate access to caves with the landowners of the Yorkshire Dales area. Since these beginnings we have expanded our remit in order to aid the northern caving community in many other ways, but access is still a big part of what we do.

Background

Caving is a recreational activity enjoyed by thousands of people around the country, and has a proud history in Britain, with cave exploration being established for over 130 years (one of our member clubs, the Yorkshire Ramblers Club, was formed in 1892). It is a physical activity, akin to hiking, mountaineering, scrambling and canyoning, but takes place below the ground. It is also Britain's last frontier of exploration, with new caves being found on a regular basis in the limestone hills around both our region and the rest of the country. This makes our sport unique, continually increasing the resource so that the sport of caving can expand.

Issues with access

Access to caves is confused at governmental levels. The British Caving Association policy is that the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 does apply to caving. This is supported by legal opinion. DEFRA disagree and this leads to confusion for both landowners, land managers and recreational users. It would be very helpful to our organisation if government changed their view and interpreted the CROW Act in the wider sense and not in one which tends to undermine the overall purpose of the legislation. This new approach could easily be taken in light of the parallels drawn from the Supreme Court Judgement in the Darwall v Dartmoor National Park case.

The CNCC maintain a large number of access arrangements with landowners using both traditional 'permit' systems and more modern online booking methods. This uses up a considerable amount of volunteer resource for our organisation, which could be better engaged elsewhere, and acts as a barrier to participation for recreational cavers. As landownership and land managers change, maintaining consensual access arrangements can be a challenge.

The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2016 clearly permits access to caves. In Northern England nearly 2000 cave entrances, 71% of all cave entrances in the Northern Cave Guidebooks, lie on access land. A clear legal right of access south of the border would help. One doesn't need a permit to hike up England's highest peak, Scafell Pike, why should one have to get one to descend England's longest cave system?

On land not covered by the CRoW Act, access continues to present challenges for our access team especially securing access to caves which are suitable for beginners and novices. An example of this is typified by the many novice caves on farmland at High Birkwith in the Yorkshire Dales National Park. For over fifty years the landowner allowed almost free access, especially to youth groups, cadets, school groups and clubs. A change of ownership in 2018 stopped all access dead and these caves have proved impossible to replace for the novice sector. However, the landowner receives huge public money subsidies and grants but none of these encourage public access to such vital cave resources. In these circumstances public subsidies and grants should also be tied to public access especially to such crucial sites.

Benefits

- * Caving has a huge number of benefits to its practitioners.
- * The most obvious benefit is physical exercise. Unlike many other activities, caving is often a full body workout which includes climbing, crawling, walking, abseiling, etc.
- * The activity has a huge mental health benefit, as it allows one to fully disconnect from the world (there is no phone signal underground) and often requires problem solving to move through a passage, rig a pitch, or route-find through a complex section of cave, etc.
- * Caving develops teamwork and a sense of responsibility to others, directly transferable skills to the workplace.
- * As a year-round sport, the 'underground pound' feeds hard cash directly into the small rural communities where caves exist.
- * Volunteer cavers assist Natural England fulfil its statutory duties in monitoring underground SSSIs. Something they are unable to do themselves. Our organisation also has many conservation projects both underground and on the surface.
- * Volunteer Cave Rescue Organisations in our area not only support those in need underground, but more often those above ground on such popular routes such as the Three Peaks walk. They also rescue livestock stuck in holes or cragfast, which assists the farming community.
- * Access to caves has little in the way of conflicts of interest with other activities.

Conclusion

Our organisation's very history is proof that improving access is beneficial not only in encouraging participation, but through education and conservation it benefits the landscape, local businesses and agriculture. Improving access improves participation. Improving access to caves allows our organisation to focus more on encouraging youth and inclusivity, conservation, training and promotion of our sport.

Todd Rye
CNCC Chair

APPENDIX 2
AGENDA ITEM 7.0
Anchoring Projects

(for approval)

EXCALIBUR POT

The entrance pitch (7m) is usually rigged from ladders, up to now off scaffolding. This is now badly corroded, does not position the ladder very well, and is not an ideal long term solution. Two anchors here should suffice, maybe three.

The second pitch (4m) can be bypassed, but this is tight, or free climbed (very exposed) so we'd propose two anchors to replace existing exploration spits which have badly corroded in-situ hangers to allow a second ladder descent for larger cavers who might struggle with the bypass.

Finally, two anchors for the 4m handline climb to the streamway to replace two badly corroding spits with in-situ hangers which were placed in 2007 as part of the original exploration.

Matt Ewles,
Anchor Team

APPENDIX 3
AGENDA ITEM 8.0

(for approval)

**PROPOSAL TO UPGRADE THE CNCC WEB SERVICES TO PROVIDE
ADDITIONAL DATA SECURITY AND RESILIENCE**

WEBSITE BACKUP AND RESILIENCE PLAN

What is the current situation?

The website is hosted on servers provided by Computer FX Ltd (of which I am the MD) at a discount to CNCC. The hosting server also provides email services to most of the CNCC email accounts with the exception of the secretary who uses a higher-grade email service provided by Microsoft 365 Business. One more Microsoft 365 licence is used for outgoing mail (such as the mailing list) to ensure reliable deliverability.

The server is backed up every night by two different systems as part of a server-wide backup performed by Computer FX.

So, what's the problem?

At the moment, there isn't a problem, however there is a huge amount of data stored on the CNCC web space that has accumulated over the years. The storage of this data is ultimately entirely run and controlled by me, and I think it is important to consider additional options to ensure data security into the future.

What are the options?

Currently the data stored online is around 9GB which is quite a lot for a website. Storing this data in a meaningful way that can be accessed by other officers if required gets quite complex.

There are several external options available, however they all cost money, and it is a cost that's on-going which is difficult for an organisation that doesn't have an income.

I have approached the BCA to investigate if we can use some of their server space as a backup repository for CNCC data. This would be a great, low-cost option that also keeps the data within the caving community rather than purely relying on external companies. I have discussed the matter with Chris Bolton and David Gibson within the BCA – both of whom have been very helpful. Although the BCA have agreed to offer server storage for free, the maximum amount of space that can be offered is 2GB leaving a 7GB shortfall, so this is not a viable option.

Several main-stream data storage companies such as DropBox and Google Drive offer free tiers that can provide sufficient storage, but all have a big disadvantage – only one account user. For this to be a future-proof system we would have to pay for a much higher tier of account in order to have multiple users who are able to access the data – myself and the CNCC secretary for example – in the event of an emergency.

Conclusion

Of the options available, I suggest that we upgrade the existing Microsoft 365 Business licence already in use by the secretary from “Exchange Online Plan 1” to “Business Standard”.

The upgrade will add Microsoft OneDrive and SharePoint to the account giving 1TB of data storage that can – if required – also be accessed by the secretary.

This solution also adds additional useful benefits:

- Access to the Microsoft apps such as Word, Excel etc so the secretary will not be required to provide these themselves if they don't have them already.
- The SharePoint storage will provide a secure place to store important CNCC documentation so it can be accessed by future people in the secretary role.
- The licence includes access to Teams Business meaning that Teams can be used to host CNCC online meetings instead of having to also pay for Zoom.

Costs

Currently CNCC pays £79.20 + VAT per year for two Exchange Online licences. Upgrading one of these licences to Business Standard will increase the cost to £154.80 + VAT. I believe this to be the best cost-to-benefit solution.

For transparency, this service will continue to be provided to CNCC by Computer FX Ltd at cost price (the same as it can be obtained directly from Microsoft).

Gary Douthwaite
CNCC Web Administrator