

COUNCIL FOR THE NORTHERN CAVING COMMUNITY

British Caving Association

DRAFT MINUTES OF COMMITTEE MEETING

VILLAGE HALL, CLAPHAM

26 October 2024

ATTENDEES

COMMITTEE MEMBERS (VOTING)

Tim Allen	TA	Individual Caver Rep	ICRep	
Ian Cross	IC	Bradford Pothole Club	BPC	
Pat Halliwell	PH	Craven Pothole Club	CPC	
Stuart Whitmey	SW	Earby Pothole Club	EPC	
Alan Jeffreys	AJ	Grampian Speleological Group	GSG	Zoom
Ray McGarry	AG	Kendal Caving Club	KCC	
Pete Monk	PM	Northern Boggarts	NB	
Alistair Rollinson	AR	Northern Pennine Club	NPC	
Sam Lieberman	SL	Red Rose Cave & Pothole Club	RRCPC	
Raymond Bell	RB	Ulster Speleological Society & Caving Club	USSCC	
Sam Allshorn	SA	Univ of Leeds Speleological Assoc'n	ULSA	
Phil Parker	PP	White Rose Pothole Club	WRPC	
Matt Ewles	ME	York Caving Club	YCC	
Adrian Turner	APT	York Univ Cave & Pothole Club	YUCPC	
Alan Speight	AS	Yorkshire Subterranean Society	YSS	

OFFICERS

Andrew Hinde	AH	Chair		
Jill Bolton	JMB	Secretary		
Pete Bann	PB	Treasurer		
Kay Easton	KE	Conservation Officer		Zoom
Gary Douthwaite	GD	Web Administrator		
Matt Ewles	ME	PR / Access Co-ordinator - Excalibur		
Alan Speight	AS	Anchor Co-ordinator		
Tony Brown	AB	Bowland Access Co-ordinator		

NON-COMMITTEE CLUBS & OBSERVERS

James Alderson	JA			
Ben Blackburn	BB _L	Burnley		Zoom
Bernard Bond	BB _o	Burnley		
Ray Duffy	RD	Red Rose		
Alison Fuller-Shapcott	AFS	Elysium		Zoom
Frank Pearson	FP			
Hannah Walker	HW	Red Rose		
Ian Walker	IW	Red Rose		

The meeting opened at 9:33 am.

1.1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Aila Taylor Kai Trusson Mark Richards Josh Young
Jon Beavan Mike Appleton Philip Withnall Tim Pickering

1.2 VERIFICATION OF QUORUM.

13 out of 14 committee clubs present at start of meeting, plus IC Rep AS (YSS) joined later, during the discussion of Officer Reports.
(Minimum is 6 committee members, plus one officer)

2.0 DECLARATION OF CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

AH - employed by Natural England, with implications re conservation and access
JMB - husband is BCA Treasurer
GD - runs IT business, supplier to CNCC

3.0 MINUTES FROM JUNE COMMITTEE MEETING

VOTE - to accept the June 2024 Committee Meeting minutes.
Proposed PH Secoded SL
Voting: 12 for, 0 against, with 2 abstentions (as not present)

Carried

4.0 MATTERS ARISING FROM JUNE COMMITTEE MEETING

OFFICER	ACTION	UPDATE
Jill B	Finalise January committee minutes	Done
Jill B	Prepare and circulate June committee minutes	Done
Matt E	Update website with approved anchoring projects (in admin area)	Done
Jill B	Set up Constitution Working Group	Done
Kai T / Tim A	Contact Langcliffe Hall Estate, re amending Memorandum of Understanding.	Ongoing
Kai T/ Tony B	Contact Duchy of Lancaster re access to Bowland caves	Ongoing
Josh W & working group	Review website content for clarity for all users, particularly relating to the CNCC workshops	Ongoing
Matt E / Gary D	Hidden Earth - new publicity materials - stand at exhibition	Done

ME suggested dropping the website review as an "Action Item", as it is an ongoing task for the working group. The Inclusivity Coordinator (JW) is preparing another article for the upcoming newsletter.

5.0 **REPORTS**

5.1 **Chair (AH)**

PH clarified that Tom Thompson's name contains 'p' (typo in report).

5.2 **Secretary (JMB)**

JMB mentioned concerns she had received about online consultations outside of scheduled meetings. AH felt there is a big difference between using these for housekeeping items (such as approving anchoring) and key policy decisions.

JMB highlighted the annual Yorkshire Dales Archaeology Day in Grassington on November 2, which several regular CNCC contributors are attending.

PM asked whether we should co-opt someone to help bring matters relating to cave archaeology to CNCC's attention. SA felt that as the CNCC struggles to fill core roles, we should avoid creating new ones. JMB added that AB has some archaeological connections and has brought several matters to us in the past. SL suggested it would be good to have a dedicated point of contact. However AH felt the Conservation Officer was already this person, at least for initial contact. In addition, the BCRA have a Special Interest Group for archaeology.

The one exploration grant request received was from a southern based group looking to do cave surveying in Austria, so this did not really qualify. ME is keen to promote the exploration grants again, and felt that this new scheme would soon gain momentum.

JMB confirmed that YUCPC SRT training facility is fully functional again.

5.3 **Treasurer (PB)**

PB announced that Barclays had finally completed the name change (Council for the Northern Caving Community). He also gave a reminder of his intention to stand down at the AGM, although is happy to mentor a new treasurer.

5.4 **Conservation Officer (KE)**

Nothing raised on report

5.5 **Access Officer (KT)**

JMB confirmed that the Langcliffe Hall Estate have now responded to KT's email and have taken the Memorandum of Understanding (with insurance liabilities removed) to their legal team. ME questioned if, as they have acknowledged our contact, we have now withdrawn from the current MoU. This would depend on whether KT's email gave notice to withdraw, irrespective of their acceptance of the revision to remove liability cover. JMB agreed to contact KT, for precise details of the wording.

5.6 Training Officer (IP)

IP emphasised the distances people are travelling for CNCC's training workshops, including London and Cornwall. He is looking to create a series of short training videos for the CNCC's YouTube channel.

ME pointed out the popularity of the "New to Caving" workshops, with recent dates getting fully booked up within days of advertising. RB expressed an interest in helping with a session, and asked about the availability of equipment hire. ME explained that no locations in our region currently hire out caving equipment.

5.7 Web Administrator (GD)

Nothing raised on report

5.8 PR & Communications (ME)

Nothing raised on report

5.9 BCA Council Representative

TA asked about the UIS conference 2029, where a potential bid to host in UK might seem desirable, but urged BCA not to expend too much energy on a bid. He emphasised the huge volunteer effort to run Eurospeleo 2016 and urged AH to ask BCA not to allow this to engulf volunteer time at the expense of BCA's core functions. PH added that the last time we hosted this event was in 1977, and it has only been in Europe a few times in more recent decades. She agreed that it is a prestigious event but takes a lot of volunteer effort.

5.10 Training & Equipment Rep (MR)

Nothing raised on report

5.11 Youth & Development Rep (AMT)

JMB noted that Jono Lester has now resigned from the BCA's Y&D role, and been replaced with Isaac Neale.

5.12 Anchor Co-ordinator (AS)

AS clarified that we have used up all the original CNCC-procured IC anchors (approx 650) and are now using the BCA's stock of anchors, which he currently holds in packs of 77 (ten packs in total). So far, one pack has been assigned to CNCC, and one to Caving Wales.

Some of the BCA anchors are stamped with a two-letter code (AA, AB . . . YZ, ZZ) but that still left around 200 unstamped ones. AS suggested that we use these unstamped anchors, and ask SA to stamp them with CNCC-unique identifiers.

SL asked if we needed to establish a minimum stock level before we procure more? Since that would depend on the lead-time, AH suggested speaking with the manufacturer.

AS commented that IC anchors have never been CE marked. The general consensus was this was okay, as they have been approved by the BCA, and CE marking is no longer relevant.

AJ said that a list of anchors in Scottish caves could be supplied if needed.

RB added that, with a colleague, he is looking to set up an anchoring team in Northern Ireland.

5.13 Access Co-ordinators

After much effort, AB has managed to track down the correct people to discuss Bowland access, with a view to modernising the agreement. A dialogue is now in progress to get access improved, and to enable all cavers (not just clubs) to visit these caves.

5.14 Individual Caver Representative

The questions raised in this report were discussed. IW agreed that the Mission Statement should be an overarching guiding principle for all officers and the committee.

ME emphasised the current wording in the Constitution, which states the aim of the role is to 'represent those who cave outside of a club structure', so while this does not exclude the IC Rep from representing all individuals irrespective of club affiliations, the constitution implies the focus should be on individuals caving outside of a club format. SL felt the role should cover any individual involved in northern caving. ME suggested that there is a good opportunity to review this as part of the Constitution overhaul. SA emphasised that, at the moment, we should leave these questions to TA's discretion and judgement.

VOTE to approve all the Officer Reports

Proposed SA Seconded AJ 15 votes in favour (unanimous) **Carried**

OTHER AGENDA ITEMS

6.0 ONLINE BOOKING SYSTEM

ME explained this was a 'periodic review' of the booking system, to check whether the committee is still happy to support it, ahead of a reminder in upcoming media. He asked for TA's thoughts, since he pitched the system to the three big estates. TA felt we had several options, including a unilateral withdrawal, but this could introduce some upset with the three estates (Ingleborough, Whelprigg and Shuttleworth) which could have knock-on effects in other areas of caving (such as digging access or the Gaping Gill winch meet).

TA couldn't see any need to withdraw at the moment, but felt that if there are any future changes to countryside access (which is possible with a new Labour government, and also the current Dartmoor legal challenges), this could merit revisiting the subject again. SL agreed that, in light of TA's thoughts, we should keep the system, with a periodic review.

AH felt that having a system in place which three major estates are subscribed to, could stand us in a good position to maintain the status quo if any one of those estates changed hands in future.

IP believed that some publicity would be beneficial, as he still hears the word 'permit' incorrectly used in respect to online booking.

ME emphasised that our language always encourages cavers to use the system, but never suggested it was mandatory. Most of the caves involved are on access land, so our official position is that they are open for all to access. He felt that the system was valued by many cavers to help spread traffic, but it only really worked if the majority of cavers use it, hence his plan for a publicity push.

RB commented that he had encountered other groups in Notts II even though he had made a booking. ME clarified that there are some caves which allow two bookings each day, specifically Lancaster Hole, County Pot, Wretched Rabbit and Notts II, with these being entrances to major systems. He called for understanding from cavers if they meet another group in a cave despite having their own booking.

Finally, in response to some comments, ME clarified that the system cannot currently display the name of the person who has booked a cave (for GDPR reasons). Introducing more features, such as breaking the day down into timeslots, would just create additional complexity for what is meant to be a simple system.

No vote was taken, but the mood of the room was in favour of continuing the online booking system.

7.0 CAVE SURVEYS

ME reminded the committee of the option to upload cave surveys to the CNCC website. SL commented that RRCPC may consider this for the Ease Gill surveys.

RB asked if CNCC would consider hosting the topos and surveys for Northern Ireland caves. ME agreed this might be good, and should be discussed after the meeting.

8.1 ANCHORING PROJECTS

The committee considered the following projects:

- High Hull Pot - for approval by committee
- Illusion Pot - for approval by committee
- AKA Hole - approved by online vote, 21 October 2024
- Simpson Pot - anchors approved 29 October 2022

The anchoring of High Hull Pot and Illusion Pot were both approved
Proposed SA Secoded AR 15 votes in favour (unanimous) **Carried**

The online approval of anchors in AKA Hole was noted
Approval from 13 committee members, with no response from NPC or USSCC

The previous approval of anchors in Simpson Pot was noted, but see below for the proposed chains.

8.2 SIMPSON POT CHAINS

This was an additional agenda item, supported by two supplementary documents on the CNCC website, requesting approval to install up to three chains to assist with pull-through trips.

IP explained that he had prepared a detailed statement, containing all the key information. Furthermore a number of arguments had already been played out on the UK Caving forum. He therefore preferred to focus on answering any questions.

TA highlighted the poll on UK Caving, which showed 90% support from over one hundred users so therefore, as IC Rep, he would be happy to support this proposal.

IW stated that this is not currently a committee member proposal, but a suggestion put forward by IP and ME. He felt that the committee should defer the matter as the proposal is not sufficiently well-developed. For example, he stated that it is not clear that there is a problem, or what the apparent problems are, or whether this needs CNCC involvement.

IW believed that it has not been shown that chains will solve the problem (eg tat may still accumulate and cave modification may increase). He suggested that a lot more information is needed before we can decide whether chains are the correct solution here, and that the current suggestions do not adequately consider the

potential drawbacks of installing chains (such as additional liability, record keeping, inspection), or hazards of known and novel failure modes (for example, a single point of failure in the ring, or user error). He expressed concern that the current suggestions are not detailed enough (eg what make and model of components).

IW felt there was a high level of uncertainty at the moment, that the proposal needed further consideration, and that he would be happy to help develop this suggestion further, if it were to be deferred.

AR disagreed with IW, and felt the suggestions were well thought through and have been thoroughly discussed, and that we can move forwards.

SA said he does not agree with all of the suggestions. He emphasised that we currently have a simple set of pre-use checks that all anchor users should perform, yet all of the anchors currently in Slit Pot show movement or wear which have gone unreported. This suggests that cavers are either not performing these checks, or are still choosing to use the anchors anyway and not reporting them. Therefore, SA felt the current system is not working, and chains would be much more complex to inspect, so it is doubtful that users will perform the necessary pre-use inspections.

SA said that IP has been consistent in his work to re-anchor Simpson Pot, so that it is now clear which two anchors are intended for pull-through use, and which are not. This was not always the case with the older anchors. The IC anchors are removable and can be replaced if they develop wear, and the previous anchors have lasted 30 years. Finally, SA said he does not agree with installing chains on either Slit Pot route, but they would make sense at Swinsto Great Aven, based on the way this has been re-anchored. He felt that for Slit Pot bypass, the only reason for installing chains would be to make things easier for cavers, rather than offering safety or conservation benefits.

ME has polled his club (YCC) of around thirty members, receiving eleven replies. All but one member was in support, and the one individual who was initially opposed changed his mind upon hearing about the anchor wear. ME was impressed by the detail in some replies, showing cavers are giving careful and well-reasoned thought to the matter.

SL said RRCPC had given about forty responses and around 80% were in support.

AR added that the NPC committee was unanimous in support of the chains.

ME also emphasised that the discussion here was about chains/rings and not about anchoring. The re-anchoring of Simpson Pot and Swinsto Hole was approved two years ago, and that work was largely complete. HW felt IP had installed two anchors on Great Aven pitch in locations specifically for chains. IP agreed that these anchors work well for chains/ring, but are also well positioned for a good Y-hang take-off for fixed rigging too, so served a double purpose.

IP said that the re-anchoring of Simpson Pot and Swinsto Hole has been a massive undertaking, as the original anchors were poorly placed for pull-throughs. In total,

over fifty new anchors have gone in during the project. He felt that when a project is approved, the anchor installer's judgement should then be trusted.

AH urged the committee to consider if they wished to decide on the matter today, given that it was added to the agenda after the publication deadline, and also whether we should take all three locations (Slit Pot, Slit Pot alternative and Great Aven) as one proposal.

AS suggested we put chains on one route initially, and monitor its usage.

SL commented that we should ensure we are satisfied with the technical specifications of any chains before they are installed.

IW expressed concern that these are not anchors. Are we in danger of the CNCC's anchor scheme developing into a fixed aid scheme? ME felt this was a valid point, and was the primary reason he had worked with IP to bring it to the committee. Until very recently, we had been clear that the only aids we supported are our own fitted anchors. However, we have slowly been moving on from that, including ground spike belays (such as at Death's Head Hole) and displaying a small number of non-CNCC anchors on our topos. ME was keen to ensure the committee is comfortable with expanding this further to include chains/rings. He was personally supportive of the CNCC broadening its remit to provide a more diverse range of options for northern caving.

SA clarified that he doesn't personally have the skills or qualifications to assess the technical suitability of a chain/ring system.

AB felt that the small minority of cavers not supporting chains might actually be better informed than the majority.

TA said that chains/rings are in use at Malham Cove, and PH added that they have been fairly standard in French caving pull-throughs for a number of years.

AR urged a move towards a proposal. After a short discussion, the exact wording of a proposal was agreed as:

"CNCC approves the installation of a chain/ring system on up to three sites (Slit Pot, Slit Pot alternative and Great Aven) subject to the chain/ring meeting the necessary technical specification."

It was clarified that, although the proposal gives approval for the installation of chains, it does not dictate this particular solution. For example, if new information becomes available, or if circumstances change, a different solution might be preferable.

VOTE Proposed: APT Seconded: AR
12 votes in favour, 0 against, 3 abstentions (PM, PP, RB)

Carried

9.0 CONSTITUTION

JMB introduced this topic, saying that she has received comments from ME and AT, but further feedback from others is welcomed (with a deadline of November 30). The draft wording should be in place for the January committee meeting and finalised for the AGM agenda, as significant changes at the AGM are unlikely to be possible.

JMB explained the intention to expand the Manual of Operations to support an updated version of the constitution, and to clarify the various roles within the CNCC, in order to better support new incoming officers.

10.0 OFFICER VACANCIES

IW emphasised the importance of succession planning to ensure that no single individual in CNCC becomes indispensable.

JMB said we have the flexibility to co-opt people as assistant officers prior to taking on a role full time.

James Alderson introduced himself as having an interest in the Access Officer role, and said he was aware we have two potentially interested individuals. Could we perhaps split the role based on geographic regions? IP felt this would need to be done informally, as the constitution requires a single named Access Officer. However, there were ample options for an assistant to work with the Access Officer, so that it was essentially a duo team. TA felt it better to avoid a run-off between two individuals, if they could reach an agreement before the AGM.

AH mentioned (earlier in the meeting) that he would be talking to a potential new treasurer.

11.0 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

None

12.0 DETAILS OF NEXT MEETING

Committee Meeting to be held on 18 January at 9:30am
Venue: Clapham Village Hall (Postcode LA2 8DZ)

Meeting closed at 11:43 am

SUMMARY OF SPECIFIC ACTION ITEMS

OFFICER	ACTION	UPDATE
Jill B	Finalise June committee minutes	Done
Jill B	Prepare and circulate October committee minutes	Done
Jill B & others	Constitution Working Group - prepare draft	
Jill / Kai T	Obtain precise wording of KT's email to Langcliffe Hall Estate, re Memorandum of Understanding.	Done
Tony B / Kai T	Contact Duchy of Lancaster re access to Bowland caves	
Matt E/ Ray B	To discuss hosting topos and surveys for Northern Ireland caves	
Andrew H	To establish lead time for manufacture of IC Anchors, directly with manufacturer, or via BCA E&T team	