

OFFICERS' REPORTS TO DCA COUNCIL MEETING, 27 NOVEMBER 2004

Item 5.1 - CONSERVATION OFFICERS REPORT

1. Conservation Work

GAUTRIES HOLE CLEAN UP!

A major clean-up operation made possible with funding from English Nature has taken place involving some 20 cavers over three weekends in October/November. Tons of old scrap metal (two skip's worth) and nearly 40 old tyres were hauled out with the help of a lorry winch and tractor and trailer. I am grateful for help received from members of the Masson Caving group and the TSG and Wayne Sheldon for his help in organising this big logistical exercise. A full report will appear in due course.

An interesting "object" was recovered from Car Pot, adjacent to Gautries, which turned out to be a very old and very heavy rear car axle assembly with remains of wooden spokes on the hubs. If this was a chunk of the car that gave the pot its name then it may have to be renamed!

Sheepwash Swallet Clean-up. A clean up of the area around Sheepwash Swallet was also carried out as part of the above exercise. **Waterfall Hole** is to be next on the list

Darfar Ridge Clean up. Work on cleaning off mud from the formations and re-taping is complete. I have made a short video (Darfar Ridge – A Conservation Project" - available to order!) of our methods including "before and after" shots, background commentary on the reasons for conservation, and the value of the cave which is an SSSI.

Long Tor Grotto. During the construction of flood prevention measures by the Environment Agency I have kept in close contact with the site foreman to ensure that they fully appreciated the value of the site, which was originally thought to be just a "drain". I arranged a trip for several members of the EA and with the help of John Barnatt took them on a tour of this interesting and extensive old lead mine.

Speedwell graffiti. John Barnatt and myself have inspected the reported deterioration of the "Miners Toast" graffiti and have found that, as is often the case, that it was not nearly so bad as expected. Nevertheless the old inscriptions are quite vulnerable now that other access routes have opened up, and we are proposing an educative approach through the caving press which will include a complete list of all the names etched on the wall in the "Derbyshire Caver".

2. UCF Meeting.

2.1 English Nature will no longer be represented at our meetings due to cost considerations. There are four evening meetings which EN attend and host, two UCF and two Conservation Monitoring Meetings. There is also an annual Cave Liaison Meeting at which DCA is represented. I expressed surprise and disappointment at this development, particularly as attendances generally were rising. However I recognise there is quite a bit of duplication and some adjustment was perhaps inevitable.

2.2 The meeting expressed some concern at the recent decline in turnout of DCA officers at meetings and I said I would raise their concern at the next DCA meeting.

3. Shaft Capping Steering Committee.

The Group recently met to consider the appointment of a company to prepare a set of Guidelines. It is expected that this will be funded jointly by English Nature, English Heritage, PDNPA and Derbyshire County Council.

4. National Trust Open day at Ilam.

Once again I attended this popular exhibition of the work of the NT, and it is encouraging that they wish caves and caving on their "patch" to be included. They are involved with conservation work and with the production of the Manifold Audit.

5. Manifold Audit.

Martin Milner is close to finalising this superb work and discussion on finalising for publication will shortly take place.

6. Pollution.

6.1. **Youds Level** has now been inspected by the H&S people and the source of the pollution confirmed. I am told that the situation is in hand but have no further news to report.

6.2. **Knotlow.** Terry Jackson has advised me that he observed extensive "muck spreading" and ploughing in the Flagg area on August 14th this year, an occurrence that may be reflected in the records.

6.3. **Devonshire Mine** I was recently advised that unsightly white spray-painted waymarks have appeared. This is being investigated.

7. Others.

I have now made contact with a representative of the Derbyshire Dales District Council and I hope that communications between us regarding their work on cave and mine sites in that area will now improve. I have already been approached regarding proposed work on the Park at Matlock and plans for the mines at PicTor. PDMHS is also involved.

Dave Webb, November 2004

Item 5.2 - HON. SECRETARY/TREASURER'S REPORT

Communications since 17th. July

Following the agreement at July's Council Meeting I have switched to circulating items by email to all those DCA Members and contacts for whom I have email addresses. This has cut our postage from 165 to 44 for each normal circulation and, in addition, all Minutes, Agendas and Information Circulars are now going onto the DCA website, thanks to DCA Webmaster Paul Johnson. Additional important items of information are now circulated by email without having to wait for the Information Circular. Hopefully this will increase our efficiency and cut our costs - which will begin to show in this year's accounts when they are made up. The main items circulated have been:

- Minutes and Officers' Reports for July 17 Council Meeting (8 Aug.)
- Letter to Members re. electronic Communications & definition of a "Club"(17 Sept.)
- Information Circular No. 2004/4, July-Sept. 2004 (17 Sept.)
- Agenda for November 27 Council Meeting (19 Nov.)

The Derbyshire Caver, No. 120, was posted out to all members on 17 September together with the Letter plus, in addition, the Information Circular to those without email contacts. Other information items were emailed out on 20 July, 25, 26 and 27 August, 9 September and 17 September. My thanks to all those who have supplied me with information, whether to pass on to other officers or for general circulation.

DDDC Abseiling Licence

Despite promises of further consultation, I heard nothing until I received the following from M.Hase, DDDC Planning Policy Manager, on 28th. September: Thank you for the comments you made on the draft abseiling licence. I am writing to advise you that the Council's Community and Environment Committee on 23rd September 2004 considered a report on the comments received and as a result made the following resolution;

1. That the abseiling licence be restricted to Pic Tor, Lovers Walk, and High Tor only and that the definition of a group be "any organised group, association, club or other body whose primary purpose of attending the site is abseiling and which is not an incidental part of any other activity such as rock climbing".
2. That delegated authority be given to the Head of Corporate Services to make the appropriate revisions to the detailed wording and subsequent issuing of the abseiling licences.

All inquires for licences from groups that that are in accordance with the definition are directed to Mary Fairman in the Council's Corporate Services Department. This is a victory of sorts in that it is now clear that the Licence refers only to the three sites listed and not, as before, to "all wards" of Derbyshire Dales D.C. The extraordinary conditions of the licence are such that it would probably be best for cavers to avoid these sites altogether!

Sheffield University Spel. Soc.

I received appeals for help from SUSS in late summer as noted in Information Circular 2004/4. All efforts to assist by other caving organisations, BCRA Chairman, etc. appear to have failed and it is clear that the University is determined to be rid of SUSS and seeks to impose impossibly expensive conditions - all done under the guise of "safety" and "risk assessment".

Membership

One lapsed member club paid late so we have lost one club and 3 individual members. However, we have two applications for individual membership at this meeting. Some organisations currently counted as "Member Clubs" will be changing to Associate Membership in the New Year.

Financial Summary

Balances at the end of the Financial Year on 30 September 2004 totalled **£5392**, almost entirely held in the Deposit Account. (At 30 Sept. 2003 the balance was £1220.) The major items of expenditure were on the P.L. Insurance scheme to pay monies owed to the Broker for the year 2003/4, and to fund the conservation work being carried out by David Webb and his team.

The present balance is around **£5103**, again mainly in the Deposit Account. All payments required to date for our P.L. insurance scheme for 2004/5 have already been made but a further £2166 is due to our brokers in due course. A further £500 will be required to fund the conservation work for the time being before we receive the monies due from English Nature on completion of the work.

Owing to my absence abroad for a month during October, the accounts have not yet been made up for the financial year ending 30 September 2004. However it is already clear that we have made a considerable profit from the sale of the three specialist publications on Masson Area, Cumberland/Wapping and Jug Holes. This, plus grants from English Nature and NCA and the Greenwatch Award have left us in an excellent position financially.

Subscriptions for 2005

Individual Members: I would propose "*That the Individual Member subscription for 2005 remain at £10 but that we give consideration to whether DCA should institute a discount for those who have taken out Direct Individual Membership of BCA.*"

Club and Associate Members: I would suggest we leave discussion of this until item 7.1 on the Agenda when we discuss the BCA subscription for club and associate members, which has yet to be settled.

J.E.Potts, 26 Nov. 2004

Item 5.3 - DCA ACCESS OFFICER'S REPORT, AUTUMN 2004

Waterways Swallet

This year Okeover Estate raised the annual fee for the license renewal from £10 to £50. Pete Mellors contacted the estate who refused to lower the amount and after consultation with Pete I wrote to the Estate myself. After a considerable period of time they replied and the fee is now back at £10. Many thanks to Pete for help with this one.

I conducted the annual inspection of all the featured for which we are responsible at Waterways on 21/11/04 and all is well. The cheque for the license will by now be with Okeover Estate.

Giants Hole

I received a request from an instructor about installing a bridge over the boggy section near the car park on the access route to Giant's. After talks with Steve Baldacci it was agreed that an access path made from railway sleepers should be laid over this area. All work and costs will be met by the instructor and his colleagues.

Lathkill Head Cave Upper Entrance

The annual inspection of this site has been carried out by myself and all is in order, the report is now with Pete Mellors. As the log book was in very poor condition I replaced it. Only ten cavers have accessed the site this year. Ian Wells at One Ash Grange reports no problems throughout the year.

Ashford Black Marble Mine (Rookery Mine)

Brian Hartshorn who undertook the annual inspection with Dave Carlisle for PICA, reported to me that the gate had been hacksawed. Bob Dearman and myself removed the gate, Bob had it welded and replaced within 24 hours. The DCA inspection of the site showed no serious deterioration and is now with Pete Mellors. A new system of "tell-tales" needs to be devised as the old ones need replacing and some showed signs of deterioration, Bob is on to this. The old marker tape is in need of replacing with the new cord.

Access Procedures

It needs to be publicised that for access to Lathkill Garden Path and Ashford Black Marble Mine the DCA Access Officer should be the first point of contact for applicants. After a meeting between Pete Mellors and myself the access system for Ashford has been slightly altered and in the case of Garden Path which had no proper system, one is now in place. At Ashford, regular users (green card holders) now should provide me with a photocopy of their current insurance upon the date of renewal. This will remove the ethos of "card for life" which could leave us legally wallowing with uninsured individuals holding on to access to the mine. If no proof of insurance reaches me by the renewal date I will contact the individual or organisation to discover the reason, and if they are uninsured I will reclaim their card. All current green card holders have been written to requesting copies of their insurance to initiate the system.

Iain Barker, 21/11/04

Item 5.4 - LEGAL & INSURANCE OFFICER'S REPORT

Liability Insurance

At a meeting called to consider the best course of action, DCA Officers decided to accept an offer of renewal of the existing Policy for the next 14 months at a premium originally quoted for a year. It had been hoped to switch to the national BCA-run scheme. However, it was felt that the national scheme did not yet match in provision or cost what was available to DCA members. Applications to renew have been brisk so far, in spite of the regrettable and seemingly endless annual rise in the per capita premium. At the same time subscribers still pay under £1.15 each a month for their liability cover.

CRoW 2000

I am not aware of any problems caused to us in the National Park by implementation of the new right to roam legislation. Enlighten me, somebody, if I am wrong on this.

Licensed Sites (Chatsworth)

I have now handed over to Iain Barker responsibility for dealing with applications for access to the Ashford Black Marble Mine. Iain will also make sure the annual safety check is done both here and at the Garden Path and Lathkill Upper Entrance. The forwarding of reports to Chatsworth, together with routine liaison on matters to do with the Licences will stay in my hands. I am grateful to Iain and Bob for dealing so promptly with damage recently done to the Ashford Mine gate. This necessitated removal of the gate for 24 hours for welding to be done on it. Chatsworth were kept informed and agreed with us not to involve the police on this occasion. If anyone has information likely to help identify the culprits, I would be happy to hear from them.

Licensed Site (Okeover)

This year Okeover Estate asked DCA for £50 to renew the annual Licence for access to Waterways Swallet. For a number of years the annual fee here has been £10. Iain asked me for my view and we subsequently both wrote letters asking Okeover to reconsider, as in effect the estate and their tenant farmer had as much to lose by pricing the Licence too high as DCA did. They reverted to the £10 charge. Iain also made the point that paying the kind of access fee Okeover proposed would set an unwelcome precedent on the wider UK caving scene. Stick around, Iain, the caving fraternity needs your kind of psychology and way with words in the face of hardnosed landowners and their agents.

Thorswood Mine

I have no news of any written access agreement having been negotiated or drafted here yet.

Sidetrack Cave

I am not aware that DCA has altered its view that formalising and controlling access here should only be undertaken as a matter of last resort.

Peter Mellors, November 2004

Item 5.6 - TRAINING OFFICER'S REPORT

DCA/NCA CAVERS WORKSHOP 2005

I have been asked to go ahead and advertise this, however the training grant may not get pushed through until training committee meeting in December!

This workshop gives opportunity for cavers to gain further knowledge whilst having fun at low cost. It is also ideal for caving clubs to supplement their training requirements.

Cheap Gear. If you have any unwanted caving related items to get shut of, please bring them along as we can flog them off for cash - paid directly to you! Make sure that you bring a 'wad' of cash with you if you intend to snap up a bargain or two! **Date: Saturday & Sunday March 5th & 6th 2005**

The venue will probably be at the 'Upper Limits Climbing Wall' in Longnor. The facilities are good, it's all indoors and there's a classroom available. I am looking into accommodation in the local area for those who travel a long way to attend. I will also speak with the local Pub landlord to see if we can put on a social on the Saturday night.

ORDNANCE SURVEY OUTDOORS SHOWS & MEDIA

It looks like I may well be sponsoring another caving stand at the London & Birmingham shows again. Anyone who wishes to help out on these, please get in touch.

SRT UNDERGROUND TRIPS

I ran a day back in June and there may well be another to follow the SRT workshop last Sunday. I will sponsor another of these trips with insurance cover and lend any kit that you need in the autumn. These trips are not an introduction to SRT, however they are perfect for newcomers or old hands wishing to pick up on techniques etc. Date: TBA

CAVING CLUB TRAINING SCHEME

There will be another one day training workshop on Sunday February 6th 2005 to 'train the trainers' and I would encourage any future training officers and potential NCA award candidates to get involved.

SRT TRAINING COURSE

The last one was run in July and I will arrange another 2 day SRT training course for those who may not be able to get training through their clubs later in the year. Date: TBA

PRE -ASSESSMENT DAY FOR CAVE LEADERS

I have just coached a couple through the scheme and I am in the middle of assessing candidates. I will have some level 2 trips coming up in the new year so it's all out to get people through their level 2 award.

SRT RIGGING AND SRT RESCUE COURSE

The last one was run in June and I will look into setting another up early in the new year. This Course is available only for SRT proficient people.

BOLTING PROGRAMME.

I have been speaking with Alan Walker of DCRO with regard to fixed anchors and the placement of bolts in Giants. I have contacted Dave to set up a training day to look at how we move forward in conjunction with DCRO. I also have 2 people in Wales who wish to come over for this course.

SRT WORKSHOP

The SRT Workshop was held last Sunday November 21st 2004 at the 'Upper Limits' Climbing wall in Longnor. Delegates: 10 members of Chesterfield Caving Club.

10.00am ish was a brew and an informal meet at the Climbing wall in Longnor. The first session looked at the caving background of all people on the course followed by an introduction to equipment used for SRT.

There were various levels of experience in the group which created an excellent forum for discussion on many topics including teaching skills etc. 2 of the course members had not done SRT before and this provided them with an excellent introduction. The wall was used at various times to look at introducing people to SRT.

The afternoon was split into 2 sessions. Basic SRT in one area and SRT self rescue in another. Some also went on to hauling multiple casualties! The venue proved to be ideal for this sort of workshop and an excellent resource.

Thanks go to new instructor on the Derbyshire scene, Dave Nolan. Dave helped with the SRT introduction session and proved to be an invaluable help in the afternoon, even though no one could understand his strong Irish accent!

Thanks also go to Frank & Bob from Chesterfield Caving Club for their help in setting this up with the club and for their enormous enthusiasm on the day. Thanks to Ken Weston again for his assistance and much welcomed hospitality on a very foggy and snowy November Sunday. This could be an ideal venue for the National workshop next year if the NCA grant comes through.

The event was great fun and a big thank you to everyone who came along. The day finished at around 4.45hrs

Nigel Atkins, November 26th 2004