

# OFFICERS' REPORTS TO DCA COUNCIL MEETING, 16 JULY 2005

## Item 5.1 - HON. SECRETARY/TREASURER'S REPORT

### Communications

Since the Council Meeting on 16 April I have circulated by post/email and, thanks to the DCA webmaster, placed on the website:

In early May:

**Information Circular 2005/2, April/May 2005**

**Minutes of DCA AGM 2005 and Annual Report (for 2004) to AGM (Posted to all)**

**Advance flyer for "Manifold / Hamps Conservation Audit" (Posted to all)**

In late June:

**Agenda for DCA SGM and Council Meeting 16 July**

**Minutes of Council Meeting 16 April & Officers' Reports**

**"The Derbyshire Caver" no. 122 + flyer for "Manifold / Hamps Conservation Audit" (Posted to all)**

**Final Reminder for 2005 subscriptions (Posted to all members whose subs. believed to be overdue)**

I hope to be able to send out Information Circular 2005/3 immediately after this meeting.

### Membership of DCA

I have now produced the three separate revised DCA application forms (now that Club and Associate join by paying a sub. to BCA whereas Individual pay direct to DCA) but have not yet put them on the website. I will do this with the necessary explanatory notes as soon as I can now.

It is still proving extremely difficult to follow up payment of Club and Associate Member subscriptions to BCA for 2005, as we need to do to ensure that we still know which are entitled to be considered paid-up members of BCA/DCA. The BCA Membership Secretary's most recent list was dated 19 May and this indicated that 14 DCA Clubs (out of 35) and 13 DCA Associates (out of 20) had not yet paid their BCA subscriptions. These were all sent "Final Reminders" in June and since then I have been contacted by 9 Club and 3 Associate members who I am assured are now in the process of paying BCA. Most of them had failed to register that they needed to complete a new BCA membership form and pay BCA, not DCA, and have had to be supplied with the appropriate BCA forms/information by me for the 2nd. time. This is a frustrating nuisance, due partly to the lateness of BCA in getting the forms out (the crucial insurance information did not come through till mid-December 2004) and partly to the failure of communications within the group members concerned.

Seven DCA Individual Members received final reminders and 3 of these have since paid. The remaining 4 have yet to contact me and hence, according to the DCA Constitution, are no longer members.

### Financial Update

Current balances are:	Current Account	£ 494.02	
	Deposit Account	<u>£6390.33</u>	
	Total	<b>£6884.35</b>	<i>(Incl. £3171 insurance premiums held.)</i>

In addition to the bank balances, £750 cash is held in hand by Dave Webb to enable him to pay the expenses associated with the work on Hungerhill Swallet. The paperwork for this will come to me when all is finished and all expenses paid. Our thanks go to the team of enthusiastic workers at Hillocks under Dave's direction who have "earned" £270 for us for the work after all expenses have been paid.

The "Manifold/Hamps Conservation Audit" is selling steadily now: 30 were printed initially, 17 have been sold and 10 are going out as complimentary copies to those experts whose help was invaluable in producing the Audit. so we only need to sell a further 3 copies to start making a profit on this. Our thanks are due to Martin Milner for his work in producing a superb publication which will benefit DCA.

The Cavers Workshop run by Nigel Atkins on 13/14 May went well; all payments due by DCA have been made and paperwork was completed and sent with Nigel's Report to the BCA Training Officer on 22nd. May, so we now await payment of the grant of £370 already agreed by BCA Training Committee.

*Jenny Potts, 15 July 2005*

*Hon. Secretary/Treasurer*

## Item 5.2 - LEGAL & INSURANCE OFFICER'S REPORT

### National Trust

The meeting in Birmingham on May 19th was, as it turned out, a national gathering. Leading figures from the National Trust's various regional offices met with BCA and regional representatives for caving and mine exploration. The objective was to agree the basis for an improved policy on access to and management of underground sites on NT land.

By the time the meeting ended, it was agreed to draw a distinction between underground "project" work (the basis in effect of access arrangements at Alderley Edge, a site which the NT held up as a model of good practice) and routine recreational visits by experienced groups affiliated to the BCA. The NT was persuaded, after some argument about liability for cavers' safety, not to formalise recreational visits in line with what could be construed as projects. As discussion centred on visiting groups affiliated to the BCA, the demand for risk assessments prior to each trip was eventually dropped. Instead, the NT agreed that DCA's longstanding and successful Lathkill Dale NNR access agreement should be considered a useful basic working model.

Soon after the Birmingham meeting I met with DCA's Access and Conservation Officers to revise the existing (but long out of date) NT guidelines in an effort to bring them more closely into line with our Lathkill Dale arrangements. The National Trust has now received the revised document and we await developments.

### Insurance

I have recently made new contact with BCA's Insurance Manager and with our own broker with a view to sounding out the likely best source of a single national liability insurance scheme for cavers from January 2006. Both BCA and ourselves have received written assurances from our brokers that neither scheme is considered to be in breach of Financial Services Authority guidelines on arranging insurance for members. However, there seems to be growing pressure to relieve DCA of the burden of continuing to administer a separate scheme, as well as to embrace the benefits that come with all cavers being insured under a single scheme. Meetings are due to be held to try and make progress on this issue. My main concern remains the same as when DCA first offered separate insurance cover, namely obtaining the best cover available for cavers' money.

*Peter Mellors, July 2005*

*Legal & Insurance Officer*

## Item 5.3 - CONSERVATION OFFICERS REPORT

### Conservation Work

#### Knotlow.

Following heightening concerns regarding the continuing problems with bad air at this site the Environment Agency has agreed to electronically monitor the occurrence of pollution episodes. Further information will be available in due course. A rain gauge has been installed at a nearby farm to provide additional information.

#### Hillocks.

There have been reports of so far unsubstantiated incidents of 'partying' in the Main Chamber. If you have any information on these activities please pass it on.

#### Hungerhill Swallet (SSSI).

Work to re-open the collapsed 'Oil Drum' entrance is nearing completion; the original 'Timbered Shaft' entrance had also collapsed but is now considered beyond recovery. This has been a very big project, which far exceeded our original estimates, and I am grateful to the Crewe CPC and especially Len Kirkham who have worked tirelessly to reopen this important system. The work is being funded through the English Nature/DCA SSSI partnership scheme. The new top is expected to have a grill that can be opened with a 'Derbyshire spanner'. I have been in touch with DCC Highways in an attempt to solve the problem of run off of water from the road, which currently discharges into the swallet. As this has been partly to blame for the previous collapse, the matter has now been taken over by English Nature who will hopefully have more clout than me!

#### Neptune Mine.

The surplus part of the pipe used at Hungerhill was used to reopen Neptune Mine in Cressbrookdale. The dig was again undertaken by Crewe who dug out literally tons of earth to rediscover the original adit entrance and place the pipe and install the original cover over the entrance.

### **Shaft Capping Steering group.**

At a recent meeting with the consultants ENTEC a draft copy of the new guidelines was produced for comment. They (ENTECC) were generally felt to have adopted a sympathetic approach to the problem and the Guidelines will eventually contain wide selection of caps, many of them using steel mesh, and a 'decision tree' to assist with selection of a suitable design. A further Stakeholder meeting will take place at a later stage before final adoption and publicity of the new Guidelines.

### **National Trust Recreational Activities Guiding Principles Meeting.**

Pete Mellors and myself made the journey to Birmingham on Thursday 19th May 2005 to represent the DCA at a meeting which included representatives from DCA, BCA, BMC, NAMHO, PDMHS, English Nature, and other groups requiring recreational access to NT property. The purpose of the day was to review the current NT Guiding Principles and Good Practice (GPs) applying to recreational user groups, which were generally felt to be outdated and could be said to present cavers in a less than favourable light. Health and Safety issues threatened to mar the proceedings, but later in the day the mood became much more positive and ended on an encouraging note. Transcripts of my presentation titled 'Caving - A Local Perspective', and that of Nick Williams, 'The structure of British Caving', can be found at <http://www.hucklow.net/NT/>. On a date following the meeting, Pete myself and Iain met at Pete's house for a debriefing and to compile our own draft of the GPs for me to take to the BCA C&A meeting the following month, from where it will go to the NT at national level. The existing GPs can be found on the NT website.

### **Bat Workshop.**

On the 6th July a group of cavers joined local bat workers in a well attended workshop organised by Jo Poll of English Nature and kindly hosted by Alan Walker at Poole's Cavern. Presentations by English Nature, briefly outlining the law concerning bat roosts, and Pete Bush of the Derbyshire Bat Group, who talked about the different species of bat, their habitats and life-cycle. This was followed by a presentation by myself on the habitat and life cycle of cavers! Later in the evening Alan led a group around the show cave, but it was not until we got outside that we were able to see and hear (by means of electronic bat detectors) several bats flying around the entrance. All in all it was an encouraging first step towards mutual understanding and many misconceptions on both sides were aired. A full account of the Workshop will follow in due course. Clubs represented were: Masson Caving Group, Orpheus Caving Club, Crewe Caving and Potholing Club, and TSG.

### **BCA Conservation and Access Meeting.**

This long awaited meeting chaired by Elsie Little dealt with several important issues including, as mentioned, the National Trust Guiding Principles. The document was 'taken apart' and opinion and feedback fed into a reconstruction which was felt to address all the issues of concern and which will be passed on to the National Trust.

Other items included a rethink on the many currently available conservation policy statements with the object of simplifying and combining them into a single comprehensive conservation policy statement. The currently available BCA leaflets, which cover a wide variety of topics, were also looked at with a view to a future review and update where appropriate.

### **New Blood needed!**

I have led the Cave Conservation Monitoring Project since its inception in July 2002: this in turn led to grant aid being made available from English Nature to DCA for SSSI clean-up and restoration projects. The work and grant is channelled through a Project Co-ordinator, and I took on this extra role, which although greatly rewarding, has resulted in a lot of additional work and responsibility. Following the supervision of 5 fairly major clean up and restoration projects I now wish to relinquish the role of Project Co-ordinator, and we will need to seek to appoint a replacement if we are to continue the good work. I am prepared to give as much help and support to the new incumbent as needed to help them get started.

*Dave Webb, July 2005  
DCA Conservation Officer*

#### **Item 5.4 - ACCESS OFFICER'S REPORT**

In terms of access problems our area appears to be very quiet at present (good!). Several on-going situations such as the Pennine Bridleway issue at Perryfoot and the Thorswood Mines are slowly coming to their conclusions satisfactorily.

I have been in liaison with Pete Mellors and Dave Webb with regard to the National Trust access agreements, hopefully with acceptable results.

*Iain Barker, July 2005  
DCA Access Officer*

#### **Item 5.5 - EQUIPMENT OFFICER'S REPORT**

Apologies for being unable to attend the DCA meeting this Saturday due to work commitments. (I will be in London.)

A bolt installation/testing course has been set up in consultation with Nigel Atkins and will take place on Sunday, 14th. August at a venue to be agreed. The course is to be run by Nigel. I will be in consultation with Nigel during the coming week to work out the details.

*Dave Cowley, July 2005  
Equipment Officer*

#### **Item 6 - BCA MATTERS**

##### **EXTRACT FROM BCA INSURANCE MANAGER'S REPORT TO BCA COUNCIL ON 11 JUNE 2005**

*Following the discussion at the AGM about introducing a class of individual membership which does not include any element of insurance cover, I have made some further investigations into the requirements of the Financial Services Authority. The proposal from DCA at the AGM was to introduce a class of Club individual member which did not include insurance since DCA club members are insured through the DCA scheme (although clearly it is not only DCA clubs who could potentially benefit from such a category).*

*For obvious reasons, I decided not to raise this issue directly with the FSA. Instead this has been discussed with RBPM (our broker) and with my own company's broker who runs a similar size of operation. The answer has come back clearly that if insurance is included as an integral member benefit, then we will not be seen to be selling insurance and hence have to be regulated as an insurance broker. However, if we introduce a class of membership which is not insured alongside others which are, then we will be seen to be selling insurance and will have to establish a scheme which is regulated by the FSA.*