

OFFICERS' REPORTS TO DCA COUNCIL MEETING, 22 OCTOBER 2005

Item 5.1 - HON. SECRETARY/TREASURER'S REPORT

Communications

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

- At the end of July: Information circular 2005/3, June/July 2005
- In October: Agenda for DCA Council Meeting 22 October
Minutes of Council Meeting 16 July and Officers' Reports

I also emailed to all members I can contact in this way Dave Webb's note about the data logger placed by the Environment Agency in Knotlow on 7 October.

The current DCA Constitution, updated to July 2005, has now been placed on the website, together with the Minutes of the DCA AGM for 2005 (previously posted out to all members).

I put on a DCA stand at Hidden Earth, using a set of excellent photos of conservation work supplied by Dave Webb. This attracted quite a bit of interest and gave me a chance to "blow DCA's trumpet".

Communications have now ground to a halt with some officers as, one by one, their email links have gone down: Dave Cowley and Nigel Atkins in early October, Iain Barker on 18th October and now my own system on 19th October. Apologies to all those who have missed out or not received replies but we're doing our best to get back in contact by post/phone.

Membership of DCA

I have not yet put on the DCA website the three separate revised DCA application forms. I will do this with the necessary explanatory notes as soon as I can now but would like to check with the Chairman first that he is happy with the wording and layout.

It is still proving extremely difficult and frustrating trying 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 lists were dated 7 September (clubs) and 30 September (associates), allowing me to chase the 12 out of 35 clubs and 12 out of 21 associate members not on BCA's list. During this last week I have contacted each of these organisations separately by post, phone or email and am beginning to achieve results:

One club has now dropped out of membership of BCA/DCA altogether;

One club and one associate say they have paid (but were not on the BCA list);

Two have since told me they now definitely "have the matter in hand" and will post off their form and money.

I await a response from the remaining 19, noting that some of those I contacted in the summer were supposed to be paying "after they had sorted it out with their club treasurer" but, since they do not appear to have done so yet, I have contacted them again.

Three DCA Individual Members have failed to pay, despite repeated reminders and hence, according to the DCA Constitution, are no longer members and I have removed them from our circulation.

Financial Update

Balances on 30th. September were:	Current Account	£ 290.42	
	Deposit Account	£6396.95	
	Cash in Hand	<u>£ 116.16</u>	
	Total	£6803.53	(Incl. £3246 insurance premiums held.)

This compares very favourably with the balance of £5415.40 on the same date last year, formerly the financial year-end. However the differing dates insurance premiums have been due this year make it difficult to compare fully until all payments due are cleared. (This year, in order to change our financial year, we have a 15-month "year" ending on 31st. Dec. 2005.) We are due approximately £1060 from English Nature for the work on Hungerhill Swallet now all work is complete and we should receive this in early November – our thanks go to the 15 people who worked on this, 6 of whom had earlier worked on the job at Hillocks. We also await payment of the £370 Training Grant from BCA.

40 copies of the "Manifold/Hamps Conservation Audit" have now been sold (in addition to the 10 complimentary copies sent out); it has covered costs and is now making a clear profit on all copies sold. The other specialist conservation publications continue to sell steadily and make us a profit.

*Jenny Potts, Hon. Secretary/Treasurer
21 Oct. 2005*

Item 5.2 - CONSERVATION OFFICER'S REPORT

Conservation Work

Knotlow: I visited Knotlow with Dave Ottewell from the Environment Agency on September 20th to help install a water quality testing meter or "logger". I prepared a notice for circulation to cavers indicating that it is installed in the "Fourways" area and asking that visitors to passages in the area avoid disturbing static water which could affect results. I also asked that the DCA Pollution Record Book be kept up to date.

I am cautiously optimistic that we shall be able to co-relate results from the meter with events on the surface which could lead to an identification of the source.

I recently recovered the most recent entries from the Record Book and was ashamed to note among the usual helpful remarks an undated entry made by someone claiming to be a caver framed in the language of a 10 year old. Fortunately it is the only example of its kind that I have encountered in over 200 entries.

Youd's and Devonshire: The graffiti has been cleaned from Devonshire Mine and Youd's Level.

Youd's level is reported to be smelling of pollution again and I would appreciate feedback from recent visitors. It may be just deep seated stuff that has "ripened" during the dry summer weather.

The overuse of Devonshire Cavern by visiting groups was the subject of concern at a recent PICA meeting. I have personally witnessed almost non-stop processions going in and out. The cave itself is robust enough to withstand quite heavy use but it is, like Carleswark, an SSSI which carries with it certain responsibilities. However the outcome is more likely to be one of access and we could eventually have a problem with the land owner and locals fed up with group after group tramping past: locals have already taken matters into their own hands by blocking the entrance with boulders. It will be almost impossible to control the numbers going in unless something occurs to force visitors to co-ordinate their visits in some way.

Hungerhill Swallet (SSSI): Work has now been completed and access restored under the DCA/English Nature partnership grant scheme. There is still some work to do on alleviating the black slime at the start of the adit but the rest of the crawl is covered with conveyor belt to reduce the likelihood of cutting knees and elbows on shards of glass and rusty metal embedded in the silt. Crewe Caving and Pothole Club are to be congratulated on a superb job. I have written to English Nature again asking that they address the road run-off drain water problem with the Highways people as this could potentially undo all the good work that has been put in.

Shaft Capping Guidelines progress: A stakeholder meeting is being planned for late November early December to present the final draft of the Shaft Capping Guidelines.

Bat Workshop: Following the successful Workshop in July there remain issues regarding trust between cavers and bat workers and there is work to do on both sides. However I believe that communication is the key to progress of any kind and I shall continue to work to bring the two "sides" together.

Hidden Earth: Conservation was well represented at our DCA stand. I was asked to produce three panels of photographs of our clean-up projects for display, and Jenny assures me that they generated a fair bit of interest, which is good. I don't know what other regions are doing but I should like to think that we lead the way!

Project Officer: You will now be aware that Wayne Sheldon has joined the Conservation Team having taken on the job of Project Officer from me. Wayne is very capable and enthusiastic and will be a welcome addition to the team.

DEFRA Legacy Quarries Project.

A company called Capita Symonds has been appointed by Defra to run a project to search for and record all quarries that have been "signed off" as no longer viable for extraction. I quote from their letter. "Certain quarries could benefit from intervention work to deliver environmental enhancement making them suitable in some cases for recreational use. Such sites are referred to as 'Legacy Quarries'. An important early activity of this project involves collecting views on priorities for intervention, and the views of a representative range of interested organisation are being sought by means of brief meetings and correspondence. We are hoping that the individuals representing these organisations will take into account the views of colleagues with responsibility for other relevant environmental aspects, such as ecology, archaeology and landscape. These views will influence the decision-making process, specifically in relation to realising the opportunities at 'Legacy Quarries' ".

In common with other recreational users such as the BMC I have expressed an interest on your behalf, but have reservations regarding the value of "intervention" to cavers since many of entrances that lie in quarries have delicate access agreements - or none at all!

Cave Conservation Monitoring Meeting.

The recent meeting stressed the need for continued co-operation from cavers in monitoring the condition of our listed cave/mine stock. We are short of a co-ordinator for the Bradwell/Bagshawe SSSI and the Stoney Middleton SSSI. We have had an offer from the Chesterfield Caving Club to do Stoney Middleton and I have offered to visit the club to discuss what is required.

An updated set of forms and CD Rom will be issued shortly.

*Dave Webb, Conservation Officer
October 2005*

Item 5.3 - ACCESS OFFICER'S REPORT

Apologies for my absence. There have been a few queries raised in the last few months and all have been dealt with satisfactorily. Everything seems to be running OK at the present.

Thanks to all those who have sent in updates for the new edition of "Caves of the Peak District". There are at least 40 new caves to include.

*Iain Barker, Access Officer
October 2005*

Item 5.4 - LEGAL AND INSURANCE OFFICER'S REPORT

Liability Insurance

I apologise for not being present at the Meeting to answer questions about what happens after December's expiry date. However, I will do my best in this Report to update members on a few pertinent matters and shed some light on what could lie ahead.

DCA's Liability Scheme has now run successfully for four years. During that time Jenny and I have shared the administrative load. It is recognised as the best cover available for recreational cavers but, for reasons best known to the insurer (Royal & Sun Alliance), it has not so far been made available to the national governing body. This has led the national body to find an alternative cover of its own which has now run for close on two years. However, for national cover to work most effectively, the need to have everyone participate, including DCA, has become increasingly apparent. This need is not a matter of financial viability. On present numbers, both schemes could continue to survive independently. Rather it stems from conditions of cover requiring full membership participation in order to validate the cover. And this is becoming as much a problem for DCA as it is for BCA. So the question arises of whether DCA should discontinue running a scheme of its own in favour of being part of the national scheme.

My short answer is yes, it should. However (and there is always a caveat in these matters, I know), I feel I must go on to advise the Meeting to postpone a final decision till a few more facts come to light about exactly what will be available in January 2006. A meeting of officers, to be

held in November, should be empowered to make that decision, as was done quite satisfactorily last year. Nick Williams has advised BCA similarly to defer a decision, and is happy to be quoted as endorsing this advice of mine to DCA. Nick and myself are currently probing the market for cover and terms we can agree on as the basis for the best possible national scheme. This cover would then be recommended to both BCA and DCA in time for January.

I already know that DCA will be offered renewal of its present cover for January 2006, but no rate has been quoted yet. As I have indicated, Royal & Sun Alliance is still not prepared to offer BCA the same cover. However, there is a possibility the same or similar cover could be underwritten by another Insurer and offered to both DCA and BCA. Nick accepts that the BCA's present policy is inferior to DCA's but expects to be offered renewal, though, like us, he doesn't yet know the rate.

Clearly, so much is still up in the air – too much Nick and I believe, for either of us to make an informed recommendation at this stage over which way cavers should commit themselves. The advice is to sit tight for a little longer till something more definite emerges. I hope the meeting will take due note and act accordingly.

*Pete Mellors, Legal & Insurance Officer
October 2006*

Item 5.6 - TRAINING OFFICER'S REPORT

BCA CAVERS WORKSHOPS 2006 at the Upper Limits Climbing Centre, Longnor

I have a grant for this from the BCA Training Committee last week. As you are all aware, this workshop gives opportunities 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 11th. And 12th. 2006.

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

BOLTING PROGRAMME

Dave and I are in the process of setting a new date and Les Sykes will come down to run it. Peter Revell has offered Bagshawe Cavern as a venue and it would be ideal. I suggest we supply the bolts as he is supplying the cave! I have a list of people interested in this training course and I will contact them directly with the new date.

SRT CAVING TRIPS

I ran two of these during the summer and they were great fun. I will set up some more for next year. These will be of an informal nature with emphasis on personal techniques improvement. The trips will be run by a CIC holder and all of the ropes, etc. will be provided. I will again sponsor these trips with insurance cover and lend any kit that you need. These trips are not an introduction to SRT, however they are perfect for newcomers or old hands wishing to pick up on techniques etc.

SRT MASTER CLASS WEEKS

1 of these was run and I will set up two more for next year.

CAVING CLUB TRAINING SCHEME

This 2 day training course in advanced SRT was run on Saturday & Sunday, August 13th. And 14th. 2005. My thanks go to those cavers who attended and should look at going through the CIC award.

SRT WORKSHOP

An SRT training day was run on Saturday, July 9th. And an underground trip will be organised this winter for those who came along.

SRT TRAINING COURSE

These 2 day training courses are run for those who may not be able to get training through their clubs. The last one was held on Saturday & Sunday, June 25th. & 26th. And I have a grant for another one in a few months time.

Date: Saturday & Sunday, January 14th. And 15th. 2006.

PRE-ASSESSMENT DAY FOR CAVE LEADERS

The last one was run on Sunday, June 3rd. 2005 and I will set up another next year. This is an excellent opportunity for cavers who have attended training courses or club training officers to test themselves out. There is no formal charge for this day for DCA members, however I will be expecting a donation made payable to DCA's funds.

SRT RIGGING AND RESCUE COURSE

This course is available only for SRT proficient people and it has limited places so please book early. The last one was run on Saturday & Sunday, July 16th. & 17th. And I have a grant for a 1 day session in November this year.

Date: Sunday, November 13th. 2005. This day is designed and run for those who are proficient in personal SRT. Refresher SRT days are available at low cost to people who wish to attend rigging courses.

LOCAL CAVE/MINE LEADER AWARD SCHEME

The following are dates of BCA training courses and assessments running in the Peak District:

Local Cave/Mine Leader Award - Training (Level 1)

Date: Saturday & Sunday, January 7th. & 8th. 2006

Date: Monday & Tuesday, November 21st. & 22nd. 2005.

Local Cave/Mine Leader Award - Training (Level 2)

Date: Saturday & Sunday, January 7th. & 8th. 2006

Date: Monday & Tuesday, November 7th. & 8th. 2005.

Local Cave/Mine Leader Award – Assessment (Level 1, Module 1 cave core skills)

Date: Monday, November 14th, 2005

Date: Tuesday, November 22nd, 2005

Date: Tuesday, December 6th, 2005

Date: Monday, December 12th, 2005

Local Cave/Mine Leader Award – Assessment (Level 1, Module 1 mine transfer)

Date: Tuesday, December 13th, 2005

Date: Wednesday, December 14th, 2005

Local Cave/Mine Leader Award – Assessment (Level 2, Module 3 vertical skills)

Date: Wednesday, November 23rd, 2005

Date: Wednesday, December 14th, 2005

CAVE INSTRUCTOR SCHEME

The following are dates of BCA CIC training courses running in the Peak District.

Date: Saturday & Sunday, January 7th. & 8th, 2006

Date: Saturday & Sunday, February 4th. & 5th, 2006

*Nigel Atkins, DCA Training Officer,
October 2005*

Nigel Atkins, DCA Training Officer, Wharfedale House, Springfield Close, Midway, Derbyshire. DE11 0DB
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Item 6.1 - REPORT FROM BCA COUNCIL MEETING, 15 OCTOBER 2005

I found the BCA Council meeting a very useful one with a number of problems identified and a clear willingness on the part of all those present to work to overcome them.

UK Sport Funding

A major concern at present is the announcement by UK Sport that it intends to cease funding all “non-Olympic sports”, although it will allow a winding down period of reduced grant next year. This brings into question BCA’s ability to continue to fund the LCMLA and CIC schemes, which it does in order to enable the existing Adventure Activities Licensing system to function for caving. It is not appropriate for ordinary cavers to fund the provision of qualifications for those who derive money for working in caving, yet we feel it is important for the BCA, as the “governing body” to maintain control over the sector. BCA Chairman, Mick Day, is pursuing this with vigour and was due to attend a meeting on Monday, 17th. October, hosted by CCPR, for a number of non-Olympic sports affected, including British Mountaineering Council, British Gliding Association / Royal Aero Club, British Hang Gliding & Paragliding Association, British Orienteering Federation, British Water Ski Federation, Mountain Leader Training UK. The British Universities Sports Association will also be represented by virtue of the problems some university clubs are now having.

BCA is also considering alternative methods of funding LCMLA and CIC schemes in the event the UK Sports Council funding does go, possibly through the Association of Caving Instructors. However, we noted that the instructors themselves are having increasing difficulty in finding suitable professional insurance.

BCA Communications with its members

There was a general concern at what was seen as the failure of BCA to communicate with its members. No BCA membership application forms had been sent out at the beginning of the year, clubs were left to locate them on the web, leading to delays and confusion over payment of subs under the new system. (I downloaded them myself and printed them to circulate to all DCA clubs and associate members!) All regional councils have suffered in the same way as DCA, although some of the problems appear to have been due to poor internal communications within the clubs themselves.

We accepted there were particular difficulties because of the massive amount of work required of the BCA Membership Secretary to set things up initially and noted that additional people had been employed by BCA to help get records processed. Some members had experienced long delays before membership cards arrived, leading to problems for some individuals who were required to produce “proof of insurance” to obtain access as well as to clubs attempting to obtain CNCC and other permits. We noted that planning was already in hand to ensure that things run more smoothly next year to allow existing members to renew membership, even though actual insurance premium rates would not be available to BCA itself until mid-December.

There was also concern that, although the BCA Handbook had been produced in good time and sent out in April, there had been no BCA Newsletter between February and the end of September. There is information relating to the BCAAGM on 25th. March 2006 which BCA is constitutionally required to supply to its members not later than 31st. December 2005 – it was not clear whether there would be a BCA N/L out in time to do this (the Editor was not present at the Council meeting). Alternative strategies for informing members were discussed and the Chairman will liaise with the N/L Editor to try to ensure the promised quarterly schedule is kept to.

The magazine SPELEOLOGY has not yet appeared (it should be 6-monthly) but this is in the hands of the BCRA Editor for the present since it is at present a BCRA production – there is a promise that the next issue should be ready soon to go to all BCA members.

There was concern that the new BCA website was still not up and running even though it should be the first port of call for cavers and should be BCA’s “showcase”. However, I received a call from the BCA Webmaster (who wasn’t at the BCA Council Meeting) on Sunday afternoon to say the new website was now up! Unfortunately, I can’t access it to check at present – maybe someone else can.

BCA Treasurer

The new BCA Treasurer, Jonathan Roberts, was seriously injured in a car accident in May, which has put him out of action for months. Bob Mehew, formerly NCA’s Treasurer, has taken over some functions for the time being while Jonathan recovers so that the ordinary day-to-day Treasurer’s business can be covered.

*Jenny Potts, DCA Rep. to BCA Council
20 October 2005*