

## **Officer Reports To The CSCC AGM 10<sup>th</sup> May 2024**

### **Chair's Report**

There is no report from the Chair since the post has been vacant for the past year.

### **Secretary's Report**

From the secretaries perspective the last year has been without incident, agendas and minutes have been produced and published on the website. Nothing much more interesting than this to report on.

Frank Tully  
CSCC Secretary

### **Treasurer's Report**

A straightforward year as far as the accounts go.

All of last year's BCA Core expenditure, totalling £5,188, was reimbursed leaving the CSCC with a much healthier bank balance.

£2000 was received from the Somerset Community Fund as a grant for the Maine's barn renovation and the total expenditure for this, matched the grant received thanks to those who gave their time and efforts for free.

The surplus Stoke Lane Gate frame was sold raising £100, and CSCC key sales came to £40.

BCA Core expenditure consisted of the Singing River Gate and replacement Maillons for Wookey Hole.

I have continued to chase for any outstanding claims from the previous C&A officer.

The number of clubs that have marked their BCA renewal form as a CSCC club, has fallen from 40 to 30. I have contacted all of those clubs and have received some responses, but total CSCC clubs is now 33 from 41 last year.

Tom Harrison  
CSCC Treasurer  
May 2024

## CSCC Accounts Summary 2023

### Income and Expenditure Account for the Year Ended 31st December 2023

		2023 £	2022 £
<b>Income</b>			
Subs		30.00	60.00
Donations	note 1	-	-
Net Interest		1.46	0.36
BCA Funding	note 2	5,188.00	2,350.90
Sundry		-	-
Somerset Community Fund Grant for Maine's Barn		2,000.00	-
Gate Sale		100.00	-
2022 Photography Workshop			30.00
Key Sales		40.00	
<b>Total income</b>		<b>7,359.46</b>	<b>2,441.26</b>
<b>Expenditure</b>	note 3	<b>Core</b>	
Officer Travel Expenses		-	-
Compton Martin Gate			654.00
Stoke Lane Main Entrance			702.00
Waterwheel Gate Repair			414.00
Manor Farm Mine Shaft			702.00
Manor Farm Cave			2,580.00
Stoke Lane Quarry			1,020.00
Nettle Pot Cave Door Repair			36.00
2022 Photography Course	note 4	50.00	100.00
Singing River Gate		800.00	800.00
Wookey Hole Maillons		36.00	36.00
Maine's Barn Renovation		1,984.50	-
<b>Total Expenditure</b>		<b>836.00</b>	<b>2,870.50</b>
<b>Surplus / (Deficit)</b>		<b>4,488.96</b>	<b>(3,766.74)</b>

### Statement of Funds Available as at 31st December 2023

	2023 £	2022 £
<b>Balance brought forwards from previous year</b>		
Current account	206.67	3,573.77
Reserve account	105.96	505.60
Cash	-	-
	<b>312.63</b>	<b>4,079.37</b>
<b>Surplus / (Deficit)</b>	4,488.96	(3,766.74)
<b>Balance carried forwards to next year</b>	<b>4,801.59</b>	<b>312.63</b>
<b>At 31st December</b>		
Current account	4,654.17	206.67
Reserve account	147.42	105.96
Cash	-	-
<b>Funds Available</b>	<b>4,801.59</b>	<b>312.63</b>

### Notes

1. Donated officer travel expenses £0.
2. Prior year's BCA claim paid in full.
3. Core expenditure is claimable from BCA. The 2023 claim will be £836.00.
4. Costs of photography course reimbursement as agreed 2023.
5. At the year end, membership was 41 clubs of which 40 were also BCA members.

### Honorary Scrutineer's Report

I have examined the above accounts. In my opinion they are in accordance with the Council's accounting records and explanations provided.

David Cooke .....

## **Conservation & Access Report - CSCC Meeting 10<sup>th</sup> May 2024**

Please find below the Conservation & Access Officer's Report. This covers the period since the last meeting in February 2024.

### **Longleat**

We continue to make very positive and significant progress with Longleat to regain access to their caves in Cheddar Gorge.

In March, the Board of Longleat gave their blessing to getting an access agreement in place. Sarah, the Longleat Estates Director, has asked that we formulate and submit a proposal. Subsequently I have met with Paul (Cheddar Facilities Manager) and Ben (Saville's Land Agent) to discuss and agree an outline access agreement that covers Recreational Caving, Cave Digging and Cave Diving. This has been written up and submitted to Longleat for their consideration.

We are hoping to have some feedback towards the end of April / beginning of May and can then move to drafting a formal agreement. Initially this agreement will be quite restrictive but both parties will seek to ease the restrictions and simplify the agreement as time progresses and trust builds.

### **Goatchurch Cavern**

A boulder fall was reported at Goatchurch Cavern. As this is one of the most popular caves on Mendip, especially with Scout and Novice groups, it was inspected the same day. Fortunately it was not a serious issue, a large block had been "washed" out of the fill to the left of the main entrance and had slipped onto the floor.



The boulder was "Plugged and Feathered" into manageable pieces and stacked out of the way. A follow-up inspection two weeks later revealed no further issues.

**Loxton Cavern**

The Cerberus Caving Club have approached Loxton Parish Council directly and appear to have entered into an access agreement that covers all the caves in the parish. This seems to supersede and replace the agreement the parish council had with CSCC stretching back some 20 years. We have written to the parish council asking for clarification and await their response.

**Singing River Mine**

The Singing River Mine access agreement has now been in place for a little over 6 months and is running smoothly. During this time there have been 13 trips, involving some 80 cavers.

**Wookey Hole Cave**

The access agreement with Wookey has run without issue over the past three months. Trip volumes are falling back from the initial high volumes. There have been 5 trips since the February CSCC meeting, involving some 26 cavers.

**Future Priorities**

In the coming months I will be concentrating on the following priorities:-

- 1) Continue negotiations with Longleat.
- 2) Clarify the access situation for Loxton Cavern

If anyone has anything else they would like progressing then please let me know.

Wayne Starsmore  
C&A Officer  
CSCC

## **Equipment Officers' Report**

Proposals for anchor practice for new exploration:

### **Anchor Practice**

#### **New exploration**

Version 0.1.2 (Draft)

When a new pitch or other vertical feature is found whilst exploring new passage, there is often a fever to explore and survey as quickly as possible. However, if the explorers are lucky enough to discover significant or interesting cave beyond there is a real likelihood that the obstacle will need to be passed by many other cavers in the future.

Good rigging often can only be done in very limited places, so the placement of the 'exploratory' anchors is important as they may reduce the possibilities for future rigging.

With this in mind the following has been drafted as a guide.

Whatever anchors are placed, at some point they will wear out or corrode. A method of replacing the anchor at the end of life is important, as often they will be in the best place for future anchors. Some types of anchor form a tension cone whether loaded or not, others form this only when loaded. As a result, anchors need to be a suitable distance away from other anchors. This distance varies with the type of anchor.

Current best practice is to use resin anchors as, if chosen well, these can be removed and the hole reused. This document is written on the assumption that the vertical obstacle will eventually be rigged with British Caving Association (BCA) approved resin anchors.

#### Descending Vertical Obstacles

The following is the preferred method of rigging a pitch discovered while exploring:

##### 1. Use of natural belay points.

This causes very little damage leaving a clean canvas to work with, but natural belays should be chosen with care for safety reasons and not to damage the scientific and aesthetic value of the passage.

##### 2. Petzl Pulse anchors or equivalent.

These require an eight or twelve millimetre hole and the anchor can be removed on every trip if required. This leaves minimal damage to the pitch head and might be suitable for long term rigging if the pitch is very rarely visited. Although not cheap, most exploration on Mendip uses explosives and when compared to that cost it is likely to be far cheaper per metre of passage.

##### 3. Concrete Screws.

Various sizes are available, but do not work well in some limestone. These can be removed and the hole used for something else.

##### 4. BCA approved resin anchors.

If done correctly this would be ideal. Modern resins are very quick to set and come to full strength, so could be used on the same trip. However, the final best anchor placements may not be apparent until sometime after the anchors are first required for exploration to continue, therefore due consideration should be made for future anchor placements.

##### 5. Removable rawl bolts.

These have been used for many decades, however the hole needed is very large, but could be reused for resin anchors. The knowledge of this use is limited.

##### 6. Spits or equivalent.

Although these do produce a cone of tension when not loaded, their small size (10mm for drilled drop in and 12mm for hand drilled) means that they can be drilled out with a core bit and the tension removed allowing either the hole to be reused or a very close location used instead.

### 7. Through bolts

Anchor should be chosen with a consideration to future removal. While remaining suitable for the rock conditions, thinner and shorter tends to make removal easier, stainless steel is harder to drill through. The holes should be always over-drilled to a depth where the bolt can be fully knocked into the rock to remove the tension and hide the anchor. Hopefully this is not what will be done, as it leaves a piece of corroding metal in the rock with unknown consequences. The over-drilling aids removal, however it is still difficult and not always successful.

### What not to use

Anchors that come with a built in plate that cannot be removed are extremely difficult to remove. If they are the type that tensions the rock, it is often not possible to relieve this tension, therefore producing a larger area that cannot be reused. It is also known that certain resin anchors, the helical ones in particular, are extremely difficult to get out and often damage a very large area when removed.

### Aven climbing

This often requires a large number of anchor placements, many of which will not be reused. Exploration should be done with the aim of leaving behind the least amount of equipment, preferably nothing. The anchors used for the climb should be removable and should be removed when the exploration of the aven has been concluded with the only anchors remaining in the cave being the anchors used for descent if natural belays are not available.

Andrew Atkinson  
CSCC Equipment Officer  
January 2024

## **BCA Reps's Report**

As reported in our last newsletter, current BCA chair Russell Myers is not standing for election at the AGM In May. Russell has served a three-year term as well as acting as secretary for nearly three years prior to that. He has steered BCA away from a period of toxicity that saw the resignation of two chairs in quick succession into a period of calm where BCA has simply got on with the job of supporting cavers through its provision of insurance, training, funding for conservation and access in the regions and the support of youth and development. All these areas are vital for cavers in general but so often BCA attracts unwarranted criticism and rarely gets the credit for the work it does. Having served as CSCC's rep on BCA Council for approximately seven years, I've seen at first hand the good it does, and I hope the new chair will continue to look forwards rather than backwards, and that he will maintain the air of calm and good-humour that has prevailed in council meetings under Russell's guidance.

In the past two months, BCA Has been successful in filling two of the vacant positions. Firstly that of treasurer, with Chris Bolton indicating a willingness to take on the role. He attended the last council meeting and I think he will bring both robust common sense and sound financial knowledge to the role. Second, Zac Woodford was co-opted to the vacant individual member position. Zac succeeded admirably in lowering the average age on council considerably.

However, Council still lacks sufficient diversity to enable it to be truly representative of British cavers and I hope this is something that can be addressed in the future. Perhaps clubs

could give some thought to staking a step to redress this at the meeting by making a nomination from the floor for the vacant group representative position.

The following nominations have been received for posts at the AGM.

Nominations

**Chair**

Rostam Namaghi (10644) Prop Josh White (14859) 2nd Jonathan Lester (17140)

**Secretary**

Allan Richardson (00022) Prop Russell Myers (00708) 2nd Jenny Potts (00062)

Aidan Kuhlman (20697) Prop Rostam Namaghi (10644) 2nd Pete Knight (09382)

**Treasurer**

Chris Bolton (07006) Prop Russell Myers (00708) 2nd Allan Richardson (00022)

**Individual Representatives**

1. Andy Eavis (07816) Prop Russell Myers (00708) 2nd Allan Richardson (00022)

2. Zac Woodford (19834) Prop Linda Wilson (02552) 2nd Jenny Potts (00062)

**Group Representative**

1. Jenny Potts (00062) Prop Russell Myers (00708) 2nd Allan Richardson (00022)

2. Vacant

**Communication's Officer**

Since the last meeting I have produced the May 2024 Newsletter. It is a little short on content compared to previous issues.

What is the CSCC newsletter for? – message for the 2024 AGM

Over the past 12 months I have attempted to steer the CSCC newsletter onto a slightly different trajectory, while keeping the essence of it the same. My wish is to use the newsletter as a channel for distributing core CSCC news (the primary reason for publishing it) but also including other material relevant to southern cavers and clubs. This is almost entirely dependent on contributions from others, but with a few exceptions little has been forthcoming. I do not have the time or inclination to continually chase stories – the frustration that results from doing so simply isn't worth it. When officers and club reps nod in agreement that this idea is sound, perhaps I am being slightly naïve in thinking something will come of it.

Nevertheless, I do wish to pursue this idea, and here is a list of how content for the newsletter could be provided with little effort.

1. Short items for "News in Brief" – One sentence (with an optional photo) is enough, although two or more sentences are better.
2. Snippets from your club newsletter or social media channels – with appropriate permissions
3. Longer items sourced as item 2.

None of the above require the extra effort of composition, which few people seem prepared to make time for these days, speaking generally not just in the CSCC world.

Peter Burgess  
CSCC Communications Officer

## **IT Officer**

In the past year I've updated, maintained and supported the various aspects of CSCC's IT. The webserver, website, access guide, calendar, email, mailing lists (Mailman, MailChimp), etc. I've also supported the Comms. Officer with various posts to the Website and Facebook.

I've added a Newsletter page and a form to add Newsletters to the website. The form simplifies the operation and allows any officer to easily upload and add a Newsletter to the website.

The front page of the website has been tweaked to make the Access Guide, Mendip Weather and BCA News more prominent.

Moving the website away from the BCA server to Krystal, the new Internet provider, has been delayed but will happen soon.

The general principle I aim to follow when developing the website is to enable updates to be done by others as well as the webmaster. Too many website rely on just the webmaster for updates and then stagnate when the webmaster is overworked or loses enthusiasm. So for example I'm very pleased to have the Secretary posting the Minutes, the C&A Officer updating the Access Guide, the Comms. Officer posting news items and the Equipment Officer maintaining the anchor placement pages.

Any suggestions for improving the website or other aspects of IT are always welcome.

Despite taking on the role of Chairman I'm happy to stand again for IT Officer.

May 2024  
David Cooke



## Loxton Caves Access Agreement

There are three significant caves and several minor caves on Loxton Parish Council (LPC) land. These are Loxton Cave, Loxton Quarry Cave and Loxton Cavern. For many years CSCC has controlled access to these caves with the agreement of LPC. Loxton Cavern was rediscovered in 2005. It is particularly notable for its history and the mining artefacts it contains. It was entered by ochre miners in 1757 and described soon after by Dr. Alexander Catcott in his diaries.

Loxton Quarry Cave and Loxton Cave are accessed via the standard CSCC key. Loxton Cavern is accessed via a leader system although for most of the time since its discovery it has been closed because the entrance has been unstable. CSCC organised the necessary stabilisation works installing a new entrance pipe and gate. The work is now complete. It has cost CSCC some £2200 to date with further expenses outstanding. This work was organised by the CSCC C&A Officer.

On the 8<sup>th</sup> March this year CSCC received the following email from Cerberus Spelaeological Society (CSS).

**From:** admin@cerberusspeleo.org.uk  
**Sent:** 08 March 2024 09:59  
**To:** Wayne Starsmore [CSCC's current C&A Officer]  
**Subject:** Loxton

Dear Wayne,

*I noted an email from you when I was away but didn't get a chance to read anything as we have internet problems in Cornwall. When returning home I would normally download everything but for various reasons it didn't happen and now I can't find many emails.*

*Anyway, here is an update on the Loxton situation .....*

*Cerberus has now entered into a formal agreement for access to all the cave and mines on land owned by the Parish Council.*

*We attended meetings of the PC and provided them with a comprehensive photographic record of Loxton Cavern including a survey and information on the features and historical importance of the site.*

*Generally, the PC, with the exception of one individual, was not aware of any of the caves; and they certainly were not aware of the importance of Loxton Cavern. The existence of the caves in general was highlighted when persons unknown tried to break into Loxton Cave by digging a hole to the side of the upper entrance, leaving it in a dangerous state being beside a footpath. We rebuilt the entrance, and this raised awareness of the existence of the caves, which in turn led to meetings with the PC. The locking and access arrangements for the caves was explained and this resulted in some concern in that there was no record of any access agreement, or the PC being approached by the CSCC about controlling access. Additionally, they had no record of anyone approaching them about excavations which led to the discovery of Loxton Cavern. I don't doubt that at some point someone representing CSCC talked to someone about access to Loxton Cave and Loxton Quarry Cave but as far as the Parish Council was concerned there were no permissions in place for digging or access.*

*There was a few month gap when they had meetings and were deciding on a course of action, following which they asked Cerberus to control access under a formal written agreement. Our status as a Registered Charity apparently hasd some influence on this decision. We suggested that access to Loxton Cave and Loxton Quarry Cave might continue under an arrangement with CSCC but they were not happy with this. Consequently, all the caves are included in the agreement, however. even though Cerberus is ultimately responsible, we would like the CSCC to continue to be responsible for Loxton Cave and Loxton Quarry Cave and access thereto.*

*Under the agreement the conditions for access to Loxton Cave and Loxton Quarry Cave are as follows:*

- 1. All visitors must be members of the British Caving Association or have equivalent liability insurance cover.*
- 2. The entrances to the caves must be kept in a safe and secure condition.*
- 3. Access to the caves is via the Council of Southern Caving Clubs (CSCC) master key system. Keys are held by all member clubs of the CSCC.*
- 4. Visitors may park in the old quarry at the top of Hillview Road. The road is narrow and steep. The number of vehicles should be kept to a minimum. Park neatly and avoid churning up the grass.*
- 5. Visitors must act in a responsible and polite manner and the site should be vacated by 10pm at the latest.*
- 6. Fires, BBQs or camping is not permitted.*
- 7. Excavations to find any undiscovered caves will be subject to approval.*
- 8. Visits to the caves that involve any element of commercial gain are not permitted.*

*A couple of primary requirements by the Council is that all visitors to any of the caves have public liability insurance and there no trips involving commercial gain.*

*It has also been stressed that failure to keep the entrances in a 'safe and secure condition' will be a breach in the terms of the agreement and may result in loss of access.*

*The agreement requires access to Loxton Cavern to be via a Warden System along similar lines to that we have been planning to implement. The number of wardens is limited. When we have finalised how the system is to be administered to comply with the conditions of the access agreement, we will update you.*

*Regards,*

*Graham*

In summary, the CSS have renegotiated the access to the LPC caves without consulting with CSCC nor informing CSCC that they had entered into direct discussion with LPC. This is despite CSS knowing that CSCC had a prior access agreement and fully expected to reinstate the leader system on Loxton Cavern once the entrance stabilisation work had been completed.

The CSCC has written to LPC who have confirmed that they wish access to be controlled by CSS.

This presents CSCC with some decisions which are set out as proposals below. Given the short time before the next meeting it is unlikely that the Reps. will feel they are in a position to vote on these proposals but they are there to aid and focus the discussion.

1. It is proposed that CSCC accept the CSS offer and administer the access to Loxton Cave and Loxton Quarry Cave as per the terms of the access agreement with LPC.
2. Should proposal 1 fail it is proposed that CSCC will provide CSS with CSCC's keys and padlocks at cost.
3. It is proposed that the CSCC negotiate with the CSS in order to restore the status-quo, i.e. that the LPC access agreement is restored to the CSCC.

The CSCC Officers have met to discuss the above. Their recommendation is to turn down proposal 1 and accept proposals 2 and 3.

David Cooke, Chairman (acting), 9 May 2024

The CSS have provided the following reply via email:

*On 09/05/2024 14:01, Rick Gledhill wrote:*

*Dear David.*

*It is unfortunate that due to work and personal commitments there will be no representative from Cerberus at the CSCC AGM.*

*I have spoken at length with Graham and have read all email communication that is available between himself, the Parish Council and CSCC C&A Officer.*

*It would seem that there has clearly been a misunderstanding and the phrase 'appropriation' of Loxton access is not correct.*

*Following a considerable amount of work to re-open the cave, stabilisation and conservation work, the subject of access was raised. It seems that the Parish Council (bar 1 member) were not even aware of the existence of the caves and their historic importance. Graham attended a Parish Council meeting and gave a presentation on the caves for the interest of those attending.*

*The Parish Council was not aware that CSCC was controlling access and had no record of there being any agreement.*

*A formal access agreement was required by the Parish Council as they were concerned with liability/insurance and other matters.*

*It was explained that this could be set up with CSCC or with CSS (following a question at the meeting) as it was understood by the Parish Council that there was no current formal access agreement in place with anyone. It was made clear to them that this was their decision.*

*Following a period of consideration and discussion, with which we had no involvement, the Parish Council asked CSS to enter into an agreement. We were not party to this decision but presumably some influencing factors may be historical, the extensive work carried out by CSS, the Society's charitable status, and being more familiar with CSS!*

*A draft agreement was circulated to the CSS Committee with the background explained and the Committee unanimously agreed to take on this responsibility.*

*At no stage was there an intent to 'appropriate' access, after all, no-one was aware there was anything in place to appropriate.*

*If the CSCC can forward to CSS Sec any existing access agreement between CSCC and the Parish Council then CSS would be more than happy to sort any discrepancies between the two agreements and suggest a way forward to a final updated document acceptable to all parties, including control. As mentioned the Parish Council aren't aware of any past agreement.*

*It is important to note that regardless which body is in control of access, that access will continue to be available and the Parish Council are happy, otherwise this could be detrimental to access in the future.*

*Yours  
Rick Gledhill  
Chair. CSS*