Council of Northern Caving Clubs

Annual General Meeting – 1st March 2014 - Hellifield Institute, Hellifield.

Meeting opened at 10.00 am

Present – K Shaw (BPC/Boggarts), T Brown (Boggarts/BPC), P Monk (Boggarts/BPC), S Allshorn (ULSA), I Peachey (ULSA), P Halliwell (CPC), R Halliwell (CPC), A Jeffreys (GSG), B Mehew (GSG), N Snape (ULSA/RRCPC), H Bradley (ULSA/RRCPC), A Hughes (YUCPC), G Douthwaite (YCC), M Ewles (YCC), J Latimer (EPC), M Ellerton (O&UCC), N Ball (O&UCC), R Duffy (RRCPC), P Judson (GOC), C Camm (WRPC), B Bond (BCC), B Blackburn (BCC), P Whittaker (BCC), F Hartley (BCC), M Hughes (BPC), I Cross (BPC), J Sloane (LUG), I Lloyd (NSG), H Lomas (YRC), S Wilson (EPC), J Tompkins (OUCC), A Walmsley (YUCPC), P Parker (WRPC), R Brooks (BPC), B Carter (BPC), F Durham (YSS), D Weare (YSS/BCA Sec), M Baines (BPC), A Speight (YSS), T Allen (NCC), A Wylie (BPC/Vibram MC), Caitlin Storry (BPC), R Martin (BPC), C Jones (LUG), A Hinde (GC), L Sykes (EUG).

Apologies – P Allright (DHSS), S Lieberman (RRCPC), V Wain (WRCPC), G Jones (CNCC TG).

The meeting was opened with the Chairman saying he was glad to see such a good number of attendees.

As soon as the meeting was open T Allen made an attempt to speak. This was declined by the Chairman who informed the meeting that T Allen was not a member of a CNCC member club and was merely an invited observer and was not allowed to speak.

The minutes from the previous meeting were accepted with no matters arising.

S Allshorn requested that the Committee be separated from the other attendees in order to have clarity of who was, or was not a committee member. The Chairman responded stating that there was no need for this as the committee are easily identifiable and that as it was an AGM technically there was no committee until after the elections.

The Chairman then read out an email / letter which had been received from the St Helens Caving Club (appended to the minutes). The letter was read out once and the Chairman offered a number of copies to be distributed.

I Peachey immediately voiced dismay at the proposal, which was quickly supported by C Camm, S Allshorn and a number of others. A Jeffreys and B Mehew asked why the letter from St Helens CC was not on the agenda and suggested that the subject be deferred to a Special General Meeting at some time in the future. T Allen wished to ask a question but after requesting to speak the Chairman reminded him that he was an observer only. I Peachey said he wished to hear T Allen's question but this request was declined by the Chairman. After further discussions it was proposed that a vote should be cast to decide whether or not there was support for an SGM.

Result: 11 votes in favour – 2 votes against so the motion was accepted.

<u>Chairman Report</u>

R Holmes read out his report which was accepted by the room.

A vote of thanks was made for the chairman.

Secretary Report

L Sykes read through his report which was accepted by the room. After the report he gave his full support to M Ewles' application for the secretary post.

A vote of thanks was made for the secretary.

Treasurer Report

The Treasurer, G Jones was not able to be present at the meeting. T Allen had a print out which was handed to The Chairman, Secretary and R Halliwell. T Allen explained that on it were a number of questions posed by a third party (an accountant who had contacted T Allen via email but did not wish to be named) and that he was passing them to the Treasurer on this person's behalf. After reading the notes a number of the questions were touched upon by L Sykes & R Halliwell, and in particular it was mentioned that they believed the CNCC had accountant's advice that they are not liable for tax, however, this would have to be deferred to the treasurer for consideration.

The report was accepted by the room.

P Judson proposed that the questions should be answered by the Treasurer and circulated to members. This was accepted.

Conservation Officer Report

The report was accepted and a vote of thanks was made for the conservation officer.

Access Officer Report

L Sykes read through his report, which was accepted by the room.

At this point A Hinde asked for a count of the voting cards which had been given out to the club representatives of full member clubs. 18 cards were counted. S Wilson requested a voting card at this point as he and the Secretary had not had chance to exchange S Wilson's letter of authority for a voting card prior to the meeting. S Wilson then received a voting card, meaning a total of 19 voting cards were therefore counted.

Training Officer Report

L Sykes read out his report which was accepted by the room.

CNCC Technical Group Report

L Sykes stated that the CNCC TG is a caving club. S Allshorn questioned why the group weren't a member of BCA. L Sykes explained that the reason went back to the formation of BCA and that CNCC TG were formed long before BCA and that there was no requirement to be a BCA member club.

The report was accepted by the room.

Leck Fell Permit Secretary Report

J Sloane read through his report. I Peachey asked a few questions regarding the rules for applying for permits on club letter headed paper and requesting a standard procedure for everybody who applies for a permit. J Sloane explained that he now uses email addresses for the ID procedure of people applying for permits i.e. once a club Meets Secretary is known to Jim, the email address is recognised and the permit goes to this email address. J Sloane added that email addresses are checked against a BCA spreadsheet.

L Sykes explained the historic reasons for the three month in advance booking and also advised that permits are available at short notice provided that the permit secretaries are at home/work to respond to the request.

The report was accepted by the room.

Casterton Fell Secretary Report

A Speight explained how he works the Casterton permits: He informs the estate office of permits issued retrospectively at the end of each calendar month (up to five permits per day at weekends; two permits per day on weekdays). He also explained the agreement with Mr Middleton re: access to Mistral, Link Pot etc.

R Duffy asked about the correct route over Casterton Fell to access the caves. L Sykes suggested adding a map with the correct route to the website, as it is no longer shown on the permits.

I Peachey asked if Leck fell was a cave specific or general fell permit. L Sykes described that if the cave for which the permit was issued was in flood, then the cavers could pick another cave on Leck Fell which was dry (e.g. if Lost John's flooding, pick a dry alternative).

I Peachey then described his problems whilst conducting scientific hydrological work on Leck Fell. He explained that his dealings with CNCC have been very difficult to say the least. L Sykes explained that the issue with I Peachey's request was that other clubs had permits issued for the dates he wanted and explained that he was willing to try to negotiate additional access for this work.

Birks Fell/Mongo Gill/Robinson's Pot Report

R Halliwell talked through his report, after which a tombola was held for the oversubscribed permit requests for Robinson's Pot. Kendal Caving Club was drawn out as the club not to receive a permit.

A Jeffreys asked about the restrictions on numbers for Robinson's Pot. R Halliwell explained that this was due to the entrance being under the window of the farmhouse.

The report was accepted by the room.

Penyghent Area Report

M Hughes talked through his report and it was accepted by the room.

Other Areas

A Hinde stated that a permit scheme is in place for Boreham Cave on behalf of the Cave Diving Group. A Speight asked about fees. A Hinde explained that it costs £100 per year for access, payable to the farmer. T Allen asked about the possible existence of a dry entrance to Boreham Cave and access to it. A Hinde had no knowledge of any dry entrance to the cave.

Permits

There was a general discussion about permits. I Peachey proposed overhauling the guidance on the website to make it clearer for anybody applying for permits. B Mehew proposed adjourning this discussion to a future meeting, which met with agreement.

A Speight offered to be a general contact for anybody with any questions in the meantime.

E&T

L Sykes went through the work E&T have been doing and the work that CNCCTG had been doing on anchors for the E&T from his notes, he also mentioned that the north was purchasing a new battery for the BCA drill and that an order for drill bits would be placed soon.

D Weare asked a question about the CNCC being represented at BCA meetings. L Sykes answered and said that the problem was getting someone to attend the BCA meetings. D Weare suggested appointing a CNCC rep to attend BCA meetings after the elections. L Sykes said that it would be discussed later in the meeting.

Membership

R Holmes read out York CC's application for membership to CNCC (this took the form of a letter to the CNCC from York CC). L Sykes proposed the application be accepted, A Hughes seconded and York CC was accepted as a full member club and the representative received a voting card, effective immediately. There are now 20 full member clubs at the meeting, all with voting cards.

T Allen questioned full membership and how a club could achieve this. He further went on to describe SUSS's (Sheffield University Speleological Society) recent application for full membership. T Allen stated that the SUSS members he had spoken to, who had been in touch with L Skyes, had reported encountering difficulties with the secretary regarding applying for full membership (the exact nature of these difficulties was not discussed). L Sykes quoted from the constitution "Full membership of the Council will only be granted to responsible and properly constituted clubs, which are owned and controlled by their own members, and are primarily based in the North of Britain". He said that he had not put them off applying for full membership; he had merely explained that the CNCC uses an imaginary line to divide north from south. This line is drawn vaguely from the Mersey in the West to the Humber in the East. He said that in his email reply he had said that Sheffield was borderline to this line so they should send an application to the CNCC for membership.

I Peachey then asked the question, on behalf of SUSS, whether they could now become full members of CNCC. L Sykes replied that they would have to apply formally and that as SUSS were close to the arbitrary line the decision on whether or not they be accepted as full members should be made by the Committee at the next appropriate Committee meeting. P Judson said that it was

unfortunate that SUSS had not submitted a formal application for full membership, as it was clear from the mood in the room that this would have been widely accepted.

L Sykes then explained some BCA/NCA history and asked D Weare about the procedure through membership of BCA and affiliation to regional bodies. D Weare clarified the situation and explained that clubs can choose to affiliate to any of the five regional Councils as they see fit.

S Allshorn proposed that any club caving in the North should be allowed to be full members. A discussion ensued amongst many of the attendees about interpretation and wording regarding full membership (mostly a discussion of interpretation of the north-south boundary) with no outcome.

Election of Officers and Committee

Chairman – R Holmes was the only candidate to stand, and was accepted.

Secretary – M Ewles and I Peachey stood for Secretary.

M Ewles read out a written statement before the election (appended). After his statement but before the election he was asked a number of questions. When questioned by S Wilson, M Ewles confirmed that at the previous committee meeting no officer could name the 14 committee clubs.

Retrospective note added by M Ewles: I misheard this question (and only realised so upon reading these minutes before posting them, and seeing what the actual question was). My confirmation was intended to be that no officer at the meeting could name all the full member clubs (I had always assumed that the committee clubs were well known).

S Allshorn asked about the concept of 'one caver, one vote' and the possibility of DIMs being considered at CNCC. This resulted in a general, informal discussion across the room. M Ewles said that involving DIMs in the CNCC was something he would like to explore if elected.

I Peachey made a brief speech (no notes used) about his reasoning behind standing for Secretary and explained that when he first stood he believed there were no other candidates. He summed up his manifesto by advising the committee to vote for M Ewles with the words "if I was you I would vote for Matt'.

M Ewles received 18 votes. I Peachey received 2 votes. M Ewles was therefore elected secretary.

Treasurer- G Jones was the only candidate to stand, and was accepted without objection.

Conservation Officer – A Hinde was the only candidate to stand, and was accepted without objection.

Training Officer – L Sykes was the only candidate to stand, and was accepted without objection.

Access Officer – J Latimer was willing to stand but this post is co-opted and will be decided at the next committee meeting.

Minutes Secretary- No candidates expressed any interest. This post is co-opted and will be decided at the next committee meeting.

Committee Members – There was a general discussion regarding the committee members and representation. R Holmes read out the names of the fourteen committee members. Three clubs (Over & Under CC, Northern Boggarts and University of Leeds Speleological Association (ULSA)) then applied to become new committee members.

This would have required a competitive vote, however, Elysium Underground Group (EUG), CNCC Technical Group and Dent House Speleological Society (DHSS) voluntarily stood down, allowing the three new clubs to be elected to the committee without objection.

The new Committee;

Bradford Pothole Club

Burnley Caving Club

Craven Pothole Club

Earby Pothole Club

Gritstone Club*

Lancashire Underground Group

Northern Boggarts Caving Club (new committee member at this meeting)

Northumbrian Speleological Group

Over & Under Caving Club (new committee member at this meeting)

Red Rose Cave and Pothole Club

University of Leeds Speleological Association (new committee member at this meeting)

White Rose Pothole Club

Yorkshire Ramblers Club

Yorkshire Subterranean Society

* A Hinde explained that the Gritstone Club were not a BCA registered Club, but they will be applying for this status immediately.

<u>BCA Representative</u>

The new secretary M Ewles offered to be the BCA representative. This was unanimously accepted.

<u>Constitutional Changes</u>

There were two proposed constitutional changes on the agenda.

1. **Membership Changes (Commercial membership)**

L Sykes gave an overview of the proposal, some questions followed. A document summarising the background to this proposal had been provided before the meeting and copies were available at the meeting for people to review.

I Lloyd asked if the land owners/estate managers were forcing the CNCC into this situation. L Sykes answered this by referring to the document and clarifying that the Estates wished for commercial access and the proposed change was just one way to achieve this.

C Camm raised concerns from WRPC about CNCC being involved in this due to liability issues. He requested on behalf of the WRPC, much more consultation with everybody concerned before any changes were made.

B Mehew raised further concerns about the CNCC issuing invoices and subsequently being liable for any consequences. He strongly urged the motion to be defeated.

S Allshorn stated that ULSA are against the proposal. He then read out a statement he had received from L Paskin of the ACI (appended).

B Mehew asked L Sykes if the ACI had been in contact with him and if they were in support or against the proposal. After a discussion, L Sykes confirmed that the ACI were against the proposal and had informed him by email of this in June 2013.

I Lloyd expressed concerns for potential implications for the CNCC if the proposal is rejected. L Sykes confirmed it would make no difference to BCA member clubs.

L Sykes read out the proposal. The vote concluded as no votes for and 20 votes against.

2. Voting changes

L Sykes read out the proposal.

S Allshorn asked if non-member clubs can request membership to CNCC. . L Sykes replied suggesting that the requirement for BCA membership should be considered as a prerequisite before applying for CNCC full membership, thus encouraging clubs to join BCA first.

There was discussion following a question regarding ambiguity of the wording in the constitution and on the website. York University CC proposed that any ambiguous wording should be amended or removed from the website. Some people had misread the wording to mean that a club could send multiple voting representatives, having the effect of abolishing the 14-member Committee.

A vote was held for the proposal: no votes for, 19 against, 1 abstention.

Any Other Business (AOB)

S Allshorn asked about the voted down proposal for commercial membership and BCA training in the Dales re: permits. L Sykes explained the current procedure and confirmed that recreational cavers always take precedence over CIC training permit requests. T Allen asked why CICs do training on Leck and Casterton Fells when they can't take their own groups there. N Ball explained that both fells are used for Cave Instructor (CIC) training and assessment and that it was to comply with the criteria of the syllabus. B Mehew then asked if any fees were involved in training on Leck and Casterton Fells. L Sykes and N Ball answered by explaining that fees were paid from the trainee to the CIC trainer/assessor (not specifically for use of the fell).

After this discussion A Speight added that it was reports in newspapers which had alerted the land owners to commercial trips on Casterton and Leck Fells.

T Allen spoke about his work into CRoW and cavers. He stated that "open potholes are covered under the CRoW Act". He claimed that this has been confirmed by Natural England. He also advised that there is a forthcoming article to be published in Descent magazine which gives an overview of all current issues regarding CRoW and caves. A discussion ensued after which I Peachey suggested that any individuals or club cavers who were working on CRoW should not be pressurised by CNCC with punitive measures.

D Weare mentioned that BCA does have a CRoW working party.

A cheque for £50.00 has been sent to CNCC from Mr Watson to contribute towards conservation work in the Little Pot area. It was proposed that a letter of thanks be sent back from the secretary.

CDG Sump Index request - L Sykes summarised a request from the CDG (Cave Diving Group) for £1500 towards the cost of publication of the Northern Sump Index. It was unclear whether this request was for a loan or a donation and was referred to the next committee meeting.

I Peachey asked if a CHECC representative could attend CNCC meetings. It was stated that they could, but in this capacity only as an observer.

To assist the new secretary, S Allshorn asked any club rep in the room if they had an issue with their club name being published as a member of CNCC. Because of the noise this did not get a response and the question was re-asked by L Sykes. All reps consented. It was agreed that the new secretary would contact any full member clubs not present to ask for their consent to allow a list of all full member clubs to be made available in future.

Meeting closed 12.29pm.

Dear Sam,

Thank you for your recent email regarding the proposal at the September 2013 CNCC meeting.

ACI has been involved in negotiations with the landowners and CNCC for some time in trying to re-establish access to the caves in the Leck and Casterton Fell areas for instructed caving groups. However, this 'proposal' was created and widely published by CNCC without our prior knowledge or agreement. We would go as far to say that it was created in an underhand fashion behind our backs whilst we thought we were still negotiating. It does not address the true variety of instructed caving that takes place, for instance there is no acknowledgement of non-commercial education or unpaid 'professional' training of cavers. It appears to focus purely on 'commercial' gain.

Based on this, we formally reject the proposal, and would welcome the opportunity for sensible discussion of this issue after the CNCC AGM.

If you would like to chat further please do not hesitate to phone, or email me.

Regards,

Lee.

Lee Paskin

ACI Secretary

Dear Mr Holmes

As a result of our club meeting at the weekend to review the CNCC AGM documents I have been asked to write to you.

One of our members views the caving forum although he rarely comments; he has raised some serious concerns about a representative from a CNCC member club and what he has been posting on the forum.

The person responsible claims to be the representative from Earby pothole Club and has used the forum to twist and mis-represent information from the CNCC web site in such a way as to incite hostilities against CNCC and some of its officials.

We think it is deplorable that someone who is a fellow caver and a member of the CNCC should behave in such a manner; this person has certainly attempted to degrade the options of CNCC officials and bring the name of CNCC, its membership and the volunteers who run caving on our behalf into disrepute.

This person has also stated on the caving forum that he and his club frequently cave on access controlled land without the permits. This in its own right is a breach of the access agreements that could of ended access for all cavers.

The CNCC constitution states (taken from CNCC website):

"In the event of a serious breach of the constitution by a member club, a Special General Meeting may be called to consider what disciplinary action should be taken, which may include recommendation of expulsion from BCA"

"All member clubs accept responsibility for the activities and behaviour of their individual members and guests in the areas subject to the agreements"

"To act as general disciplinary body and arbitrator in the event of any act considered detrimental to the Council as a whole"

It is the view of St. Helens Caving Club that this individual has breached the CNCC constitution and as the clubs are responsible for their members we hold Earby Pothole Club responsible for his actions because they must have been aware of his actions.

We are asking you as the CNCC chairman to ask the committee to discipline this club for breaches of the constitution; we are suggesting that this should include suspension of Full member status for 12 months commencing at the AGM 2014.

David Murray

Secretary St. Helens Caving Club

Speech made by M Ewles in application for Secretary role, CNCC AGM 2014

When I started attending CNCC meetings a few years ago I was inspired by the realisation that the CNCC does more than just issue permits, and that those involved give up their own time to negotiate access agreements, liaise with landowners, arrange and fund conservation projects, teach others to install eco-hangers, and generally promote responsible, safe and sustainable caving.

There have been accusations of dishonesty and fraudulent conduct by the current committee flying about these last few weeks. Having attended several meetings I believe these have no foundation; but they are symptomatic of a group that needs to modernise to become more constitutional and to push for more engagement with its member cavers.

I believe one of the first steps towards improving engagement and making the CNCC more interactive is to amend the constitution to remove the membership system and simply make all BCA-registered northern or even national clubs able to vote at meetings. Secondly, the CNCC must communicate more regularly with the caving community, to ensure that cavers know what we are doing and are able to form and present their own opinions.

Trying to find a system which is able to gather the balanced views of all cavers that the CNCC represents is a tough challenge, but one where I believe the CNCC website can be put to use. You've probably seen that the website has been upgraded over the last year. My plan would be to push the utilisation of the website further to create an interactive area which all cavers can access. Here, the CNCC can post documents, proposals, plans, and conduct polls to measure opinion of the entire caving community on important matters.

I personally would like to see greater representation for Direct Individual Members on the CNCC and their access to permits. This would naturally lead to a requirement to reconsider exactly who the CNCC should represent: Should we represent just clubs or all BCA registered cavers? As secretary I would want to see the CNCC consult cavers on this matter over the next year and to itself positively promote the benefits of DIM representation.

I think it is important to say that I support the permit system where it is required to sustain access and landowner relations. This system does a good job, and from a cavers perspective has improved immensely as more permits are available electronically and at short notice. I would like to continue to improve access to permits, ideally making it as simple as logging onto the CNCC website, checking online availability and booking a permit potentially even for that same day! This obviously requires a large amount of work from a technical perspective and isn't going to work for all situations, but I think it's a good aspiration.

In conclusion, with me as secretary I would push for the CNCC to continue with much of the excellent work that it already does, but in a more transparent, open and engaging way. I do not believe there is anything fundamentally wrong with the CNCC, but I believe it has become stuck in a rut due to a lack of change over the last several years. The proposed new approach would mean considering exactly who we actually represent, and then making sure that these people are proactively consulted on important issues in the future.