

BCRA



BRITISH CAVE RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

Chairman's Report to 2008 AGM

Sitting and writing this short report for the AGM it strikes me that the BCRA is in a very different position to which it found itself last year. At the 2007 AGM I was able to outline some exciting projects that were about to be delivered. This year I am in the position of being able to report tangible progress in all of the projects that I described. Indeed we have made so much progress you could be forgiven for believing that the Association was in a comfortable position. Unfortunately, whilst we have much to be proud of I think its fair to say we have some way to go. In the rest of this report I will outline what I personally believe have been the successes of the year and go onto outline the challenges:

Firstly then, what have we achieved this year? We have finally been able to tackle the thorny issue of the 'active library', the long term storage of large amounts of unseen material and significant quantities of material generally referred to as the 'archive'. After considerable work the Association has employed an experienced librarian, found new premises and removed all of the material from storage. Now fully immersed in a program of cataloguing we will soon be in a position to unveil a list of material that will become available in the 'active library'. Members of the Association have been able to secure a long term home for some extremely rare material with the BGS. This will ensure that the material will be easily available to all bona fide researchers whilst ensuring its survival for future generations.

The CSTRI continues to deliver a source of funding for cave science and evidence would suggest that it has promoted significant interest in cave science. The Association has continued to support a number of cave science and technology focused meets that have seen unprecedented popularity. An extremely determined volunteer has managed to rationalise the membership and C&KS database, finally making near real-time management information available to Council.

After rationalising its distribution and printing method, C&KS was produced with some colour pages inside and is well on the way to catching up with the publication of volumes 34 & 35. These publications will be available in both paper and soft copies. Without doubt C&KS continues to represent a tangible benefit to membership of the Association.

Secondly, then the challenge; although not as bad as some of the dire predictions had indicated, the overall level of BCRA membership is the smallest it has been for some years, about 200 members. Largely a result of the turbulence surrounding the creation of the BCA and the confusion over the route to BCRA membership we are left with a potential funding challenge. Council has already undertaken a programme of modernisation in order to reduce the fixed administrative costs of running the Association. An overall dearth of volunteers is disturbing and is also leading to an overall increase in costs.

Whilst I still believe that it is too early to panic we cannot afford to be complacent. The membership must take some responsibility for recruiting new members and for communicating ways of continuing to support cave science and to make the Association relevant in the 21st century.

In summary the Association has had a fantastic year, we have continued to build on success but we still have some significant challenges, we remains financially viable but we don't have room for complacency. We must continue to deliver tangible benefit for our members and where possible recruit new ones. A little early to critically examine our membership criteria I, personally, don't think the Association should rule out any viable course of action in the future.

Prior to the AGM please take a look at the updated constitution, I look forward to seeing you there. Subject to the ratification of the updated constitution, I'm also particularly looking forward to the next AGM at the Cave Science Symposium in the spring.

Steve Whitlock, BCRA Chairman