

MINUTES OF HALF YEARLY MEETING 2005

HELD ON 05.11.05 AT NORDRACH COTTAGE



The Mendip Caving Group is a Registered Charity No. 270088

Chairman: Roy Kempston

1. Apologies for absence

Mick Norton, Martin Peck, Yvonne Rowe and Bryan Pittman

2. Reduced Subscriptions

Section 6 of the Constitution and Rules ("SUBSCRIPTIONS") provides that members may apply to the Committee for *consideration* of a reduced personal subscription in three circumstances:

- (i) Members aged 60 or over
- (ii) Members living overseas for at least 6 months a year
- (iii) Members on low income.

An application made under this section is subject to the Committee's discretion and the Committee has traditionally interpreted the section as a mechanism to allow the Committee some flexibility in the amount of subs demanded from any member in 'time of hardship'.

However, in recent years, a number of applications for reduced subs have been received from members that refer to the first circumstance (i.e. aged 60 or over) as the sole/primary reason for the application. The Committee is concerned that the increasingly aged membership of the Club means that the Club would struggle to cope with everyone who was over 60 applying for reduced subs.

A wide range of discussion points were made, including the following:

- These days many people continue working well into their 60s and the finances of persons over 60 (whether retired or not) vary considerably. Thus, it does not make sense to have age as a basis for making an application for reduced subs.
- Low income does not in itself mean that a person is financially badly off (i.e. if they also have low outgoings).
- However, "low income" was originally included in section 6 because it was seen to be a more objective category than "hardship".
- Although being aged 60 or over does not automatically entitle a member to reduced subs, by having this as an express category for making an application it may suggest, and create an expectation, that a reduction will be granted on this basis.
- Non-active members (which older members are more likely to be) in a sense already pay less as they pay less insurance.
- Members have traditionally been very generous towards the club and have not applied for reduced subs unless they have genuinely been suffering financial hardship. Indeed, on the rare occasions a member has been granted reduced

subs, he/she has often repaid the reduction when his/her finances have improved. If everyone is made aware of the income needed to ensure the club's survival, and the consequences of too many people applying for reduced subs, then it is unlikely that anyone will apply for reduced subs unless they really need a reduction.

- In the long term, will more and more older members apply for associate membership? Is this a category that needs to be phased out or re-evaluated? Can the club afford for lots of members to become associate members?

The general consensus amongst those present was that the conditions for applying for a reduced personal subscription do need revision (i.e. the removal of the "Members aged 60 or over" category and a focus on financial hardship rather than low income). It would be helpful to obtain the views of the membership as a whole.

Action: The Committee to draft an appropriate amendment to the constitution to present at the AGM. The issue could also be raised in advance in the Newsletter.

3(a) Membership application procedure

It was suggested that the MCG might wish to reconsider the requirement for prospective members to be advertised in the newsletter for one month before they can be accepted as probationary members. Arguably, the period of advertisement adds little to the membership procedure as, so far, no prospective members have been refused probationary membership as a result of objections received during this period. Depending upon the date of the application and date of the next newsletter, the requirement can also add considerable delay to the membership procedure.

If the requirement was removed, a prospective member would still need to be proposed by two full members and to have attended at least one group meet (where Committee members were present) before he/she could be accepted as a probationary member. Thus, there would still be some safeguard against an "unsuitable" person joining the Club.

The Club would continue to advertise those accepted as new probationary members.

The majority of those present at the meeting appeared to support the removal of this requirement from the constitution or – at least – wished to see the matter raised at the next AGM.

If the advertising period was removed, it was suggested that perhaps the application procedure should be revised so that probationary members actually undergo a 'true' probationary period i.e. after six months (for example) the Committee reviews whether they are suitable for membership of the club.

Action: The Committee to consider and draft an appropriate amendment to the constitution to present at the AGM. .

3(b) Voting rights for long-standing probationary members

The idea of allowing long-standing probationary members (for example persons who have been probationary members for over 6 months or a year) to vote at AGMs was presented to the meeting. It received a mixed reaction from those present.

On occasion there are probationary members who – for whatever reason – do not complete their training trips. These members are often very active within, and make a valuable contribution to, the MCG and they are not necessarily 'non-cavers'. Importantly, these members also pay the same subscription rate as full members.

It is possible to argue that, in the circumstances, it is unfair that these members are denied the right to vote at an AGM. Furthermore, given the typically low turnouts at meetings, if such a member has demonstrated their interest in the club by attending it would seem sensible to allow them to vote.

Some of those present were opposed to the idea of allowing long-standing probationary members to vote on the basis that the MCG is ultimately a caving club and, therefore, only people that have reached a minimum level of caving proficiency should be able to vote. It was also suggested that the completion of a training trip outwardly demonstrates a certain level of interest in the club and caving.

Counter to the first argument is the fact that most of the matters members are called to vote upon are actually unrelated to caving, but concern the general well-being of the club (as the agenda to this meeting aptly demonstrates!).

The split appeared to be between those who believe that members that have demonstrated a long-standing commitment to the club should be able to vote, even if they have not completed a training trip, and those who believe that it is important to restrict the right to vote to people that have made the effort to obtain full membership. The constitution states that membership shall be open to "anyone over the age of 16 years with an interest in the objects of the Group". This suggests that what is most important is a person's interest in the Club's activities as a whole not their caving ability.

Associate members are also denied the vote but they pay reduced subs. In addition, associate members are either former full members who are unable to play a full part in Group activities or persons who wish to be members of the Group but are unable to take part in the regular caving activities. This is not the case for long-standing probationary members who often play a full part in Group activities and take part in regular caving activities.

Action: The Committee and the membership to consider further.

4 Showers

Linda was keen to gather the membership's views on cubicle showers versus the current layout. A wide range of comments were made, including:

- Any alterations would need to be of a high quality – we do not want an amateur DIY job that spoils the existing changing room/showers;
- The number of members staying at the cottage on a regular basis means that queuing for the shower is rarely a problem (i.e. only on busy members weekends);
- To increase privacy separate shower cubicles would need to be accompanied by separate changing areas; and
- It would be useful to know if the cottage is currently losing any guest bookings as a result of its communal showers. If so, the number of lost guest bed nights would need to be considered against the cost of making the alterations. The needs of, and the benefit to, the membership would also have to be taken into account.

Overall, most of the members present appeared to find the current arrangements satisfactory and to feel there was no pressing need to adapt the showers at this point in time.

As a side issue, the possibility of dividing the Foreman's Lounge into two separate rooms was discussed. Four bedrooms (rather than three) would provide more flexible sleeping accommodation and would be better suited to the needs of guest scout and

youth groups. These groups need to be able to sleep females separately from males, and children separately from adults.

5. Scaffold Tower

The idea of erecting a scaffold tower to assist with ladder and line and SRT training was presented to the Club. A scaffold tower could be a useful addition to the facilities on offer to the membership.

However, doubts were raised over whether erecting a tower would be possible or appropriate given the location of the cottage (i.e. near the road – in contrast to the WCC's hut) and its limited gardens. Concerns were also expressed over the need for planning permission; safety, insurance and club liability (for members and guests); and maintenance requirements etc.

Action: Linda Milne to further investigate costs, feasibility etc.

6. Overseas Meet 2006

Those present discussed whether there was support for an MCG overseas meet next summer. Overall, there seemed to be a sufficient number of members interested in participating to make organising such a meet worthwhile. Various location ideas were put forward including Greece, France and Matienzo.

7. Any other business – lounge floor tiles

There is a localised area of damaged floor by the kitchen; the decision has been taken to resurface the entire floor. Doug, Bryan P and Wayne have very kindly agreed to lay the new floor next spring (dates to be arranged). Those present at the meeting were shown a selection of possible floor tiles and they selected large, non-slip, pale quarry tiles.