

BCA AGM 13th June 2011

Chairman's Report

The next Agenda item is the Annual Directors' Report. Although technically for the year ending December 2010, I hope you will give me the customary licence to treat it more as a report "from the time of the last AGM". Apart from our Treasurer's Report and receiving of the Annual Accounts, which is the next Agenda item, I'm glad to say that we have contributions from two other Directors this evening. These include an update on the High Peak Cycle Trail, from our Secretary, Martin Wragg, and Peter Phillipson's report on our estate and the activities of the Woodland Committee.

Following the conclusion of the formal business of the AGM, we would be delighted if Members would like to take a short tour of the Cavern, to inspect the newly installed lighting system.

2010 was a good year for the Association in financial terms, despite a somewhat shaky start due to exceptional and prolonged bad weather for the first three months of the year, which I mentioned at our last AGM, and which had a significant effect on visitor numbers in the first quarter of that year. I won't go into detail, as our Treasurer will be giving his report shortly, but over the year as a whole, our trading results were good – ahead of budgets and therefore better than initially anticipated. Once again, our performance can be attributed to sound day-to-day management; the continued close monitoring of performance by your Board of Directors, our ongoing concentration on the benefits of Gift Aid, and the significant yearly contribution made by our colleagues at GoApe. The staff here at Poole's Cavern again made a very positive contribution to our efforts, which was recognised by the award of a modest Christmas bonus to managers and senior staff members.

The increase in the rate of VAT some months ago, together with steep inflationary pressures on people's disposable incomes, lead us to plan modestly for the current year, choosing to view it as a period of stabilisation after several years of development, innovation, and major capital investment. A prudent strategy is appropriate in the current financial climate, particularly as we are now bearing the full brunt of repayment of the loans taken out three years ago to fund our redevelopment.

However, there is every expectation that, under our Treasurer's guidance, and with our now established close monitoring of expenditure, we shall again return a good financial performance during the remainder of this year.

Since the last AGM, the Association has again hosted a varied and well-received programme of events, thanks largely to the continued efforts of Trevor Donald, Pat Cadwallader, and Arthur Packham on the Community and Membership Committee, under the Chairmanship of Alistair Rogerson, and with generous assistance from other members in addition. As usual, I would like to remind members that BCA is here to serve you, and we are always glad to hear of any new activities in which you would like us to become engaged, or of any events that you would like us to organise.

Apart from our regular nature-based walks, lectures and other edutainment, several events stand out over the last twelve months.

Last June, Trevor Donald organised a very successful visit from members of the Bollington Civic Society. They have now invited us to visit them, and this visit will take place on Monday, 20th June – next Monday, at 6:45 p.m. A very interesting evening is planned, and all members are invited to join the trip. We need to give final numbers to our hosts at Bollington by Thursday of this week, so, please, if you can go, give your name to Trevor Donald after the AGM this evening, or telephone him on 01298 27946.

Over last winter, Arthur Packham, BCA's semi-official photographer for many years, organised a photo competition for members, themed on the nature, wildlife and weather encountered in our woodlands. There was a very high standard of entries, truly professional in quality, and the competition was judged by Arthur and by Buxton Advertiser photographer Jason Chadwick. The quality of the entries was so high that I am sure that we will repeat the competition again very soon, at which time we would love to see photos from more and more members. For those of you who may still be wondering if you're a budding David Bailey or Lord Litchfield, Arthur is running a popular occasional course on digital photography and subsequent computer enhancement. The next session will take place here on Saturday 24th September. Places are limited, so if you would like to come along and benefit from Arthur's considerable experience, please book a place with the office, on 26978.

Three months ago, Hilary Lawrence organised an afternoon of musical entertainment for members at The Palace Hotel. The purposes of the event were to encourage members to bring along friends who might wish to join the Association, to encourage more members to take an active role in our work and the running of BCA, and to thank our members for their ongoing support. I can report that, at least in this last respect, it succeeded admirably!

The afternoon was very well attended by well over a hundred members and friends who enjoyed a variety of virtuoso performances from Flute Salad, Tideswell Male Voice Choir, violinist Ailsa Hoyle, and pianist Chris Ellis. An excellent afternoon tea was provided, and the results of our photography competition were announced and all the entries displayed. Feedback from members was very positive and enthusiastic, and many thanks are due to Hilary and her helpers, particularly Trevor and Pat Cadwallader.

BCA's Planning Committee has again this year spent a considerable amount of time, making detailed responses and suggestions to the Planning Authority on major developments proposed in and around the town. We hosted a presentation by the developers of Cowdale Quarry, as well as taking an active part in a presentation and discussion of proposals for a new Tesco superstore.

During the last twelve months, we have also been involved in, and followed proposals for, the anticipated eventual delivery of the High Peak Cycle Trail, which has again been a subject of considerable interest to our members. In order to bring you all up to date with the latest developments with regard to this project, I'm going to ask our Secretary, Martin Wragg, who is also Company Secretary to Peak Cycle Links, to give us an update on this project.

[Report on High Peak Cycle Trail, from Martin Wragg]

Ongoing Committee business aside, the exceptional achievement this year has to be the design and installation of the new Cavern lighting last winter.

You will no doubt hear much more about this project from Alan Walker during the tour following this meeting. However, in summary, we have removed all of the forty-year-old wiring and lighting systems, and replaced them with state-of-the-art programmable LED lighting. The main benefits are, firstly, that the new lights use only a fraction of the electricity of the old tungsten lights, thus making a big contribution to BCA's internal environmental goals, and secondly, that they produce virtually no heat. The heat from the old lighting had been causing problems by encouraging the growth of non-indigenous algae and other plants in the cavern. I am sure that, when you see the results, you will agree that the new lighting is a spectacular improvement.

We are particularly grateful to Alan Walker, for masterminding the design and installation of the lighting, to our Development Director, Bill Preece, for project management and successfully obtaining the vital grants needed to fund the work, and to those who provided those funds, the Derbyshire Aggregates Levy Grant Scheme, and the Lafarge Landfill Communities Fund.

These schemes provided, between them, around £500,000 per year, all of which went to help community and charitable projects in this area. The Government has now ended both schemes, preferring to keep all the quarries' tax revenues for its own use.

Our current aspirations are, as I have said, relatively modest for the coming year. We aim:-

- To continue to consolidate and optimise the Association's trading position, in order to continue strengthening the long-term financial position of BCA for the next generation.
- To continue the work of maintenance and improvement within our woodlands, which Peter Phillipson will also no doubt describe later.
- To establish both permanent and travelling exhibitions highlighting the work of the Association, and encouraging new members to join us. (This project unfortunately got squeezed out by time pressures from last year's wish list!)

Other possible projects are currently under consideration. One of which would see our café extended on to a covered decking area, with direct access through the glazed wall, allowing staff to serve up to 50% more customers at times of peak summer demand.

Another possibility is the establishment of a small, formal area of remembrance in Grin Wood. We are often asked by local people if they can place some memorial to a family member in the woods, and we have generally discouraged this over the years, on the grounds that too many plaques, benches, and other memorials might lead to unmanageable clutter. However, I do not believe that, as custodians of the woodlands, we have a right to prevent our community from choosing to remember family and loved ones in this manner, if they so wish, and so I have asked the Woodlands

Committee to investigate the setting up of a small, formal area of remembrance, perhaps where small plaques may be attached to a suitable drystone wall feature, and which can be properly managed and maintained.

As usual, I have news to report concerning BCA Directors and staff:-

Firstly, I have to report the resignation of John Boardman as Treasurer. Following his move to Cambridgeshire last year, John found it increasingly difficult to give as much time to our affairs as he would have liked and so, having remained available to advise our new Treasurer during a period of transition, he stepped down.

BCA owes a great deal to John, for the shrewd and prudent manner in which he steered us through a period of great change. He was always a source of calm and sound advice, and had a solid background in the financial sector that gave us considerable credibility in negotiations with our bankers and in our applications for grant aid.

We are also indebted to John's wife, Gil, for together, they developed the much publicised and highly popular "Ring of Trees" walk, and even wrote and produced an accompanying guidebook. We wish John and Gil every good wish in their new home, and hope they will enjoy many happy years there.

Fortunately, before he left us, John had introduced our new Treasurer, Brian Shawcross, to BCA. The original intention (according to John) was that Brian would "just have to give a hand with the day to day stuff" that John could not service from Cambridge. Luckily for us, Brian believed all this guff just as much as John didn't, and so he was left holding the ledger, is it were, whilst John waved a cheery goodbye from the other end of the A14.

Over the last twelve months we have been very happy to welcome Brian to the Board in his new role. His style is different from John's, but his skills and abilities are beyond question, and we have every confidence that with Brian at the financial helm, the Association continues to be in safe and prudent hands.

Ken Smith, who used to be Chair of our Membership and Community Committee, has retired from active service, which means that BCA is now looking for a new archivist, to take over the task that Ken began two or three years ago. Creating and maintaining a proper record of the Association's history and activities is a major project, which has not been previously addressed in our forty year history and, unfortunately, it is a task that grows in scale and difficulty the longer it is delayed. So, please, if any member here is brought to a fever pitch of excitement at the thought of burrowing around in boxes of dusty old documents, please make yourselves know to us – we have just what you're looking for.

I'm sorry to report that Rick Milling, who held the post of Senior Guide here for several years, decided to leave us to pursue his career in social work and caring. I'm sure that we will all remember Rick with great affection – tall, broad, with a generous beard and equally generous smile, he was, in many ways, Alan's right hand man, turning his hand to any task, no matter how physically demanding, with cheerful equanimity. We wish Rick every success in the future, and we have already told him

that he will be welcome back at any time!

Many of you will know that, last year, past Director Rosie Hughes, retired to go and live with her daughter, Charlotte, in Cornwall. For some reason, Rosie chose a smart town house in the middle of Penzance, with fourteen hours of hot sunshine a day, mild winters and some of the best fresh seafood in Britain, rather than stay in Buxton. We may never know why!

Rosie, together with Olive Middleton, edited our Newsletter, and when Rosie left us, Olive also indicated that she would like to retire from this task, although she still handles BCA's PR and publicity with her customary flair and professionalism.

And so, whilst Rosie's daughter, Charlotte, still designs our Newsletter, Trevor Donald has taken over the editorship for the time being. Many thanks to Trevor who, as we can see from the last couple of issues, has taken up where Rosie and Olive left off with seamless style and efficiency.

On a more serious note, I have to report that retired Director and last Chairman of our Corporate Affairs Committee, Mark Sisson, has been seriously ill. However, I have seen Mark today, and he appears to be making an excellent, and, we hope, full recovery. The Association sends him our very best wishes.

Moving on now to the work of our various Committees.

Our Planning Group has continued to be busy over the last year, particularly with the Planning Applications for Cowdale Quarry, Nestle, and Tesco.

We are still very concerned regarding the proposed housing development at Templemore, which is commencing now that the Town Green Application for the site has been defeated, but I will leave Peter Phillipson to say more about Templemore and our concerns for our estate at Sherbrook, in his report. We have a written report from Hilary available for members this evening, and she or Mike Bryant are available to answer any related questions that you may have.

The Community & Membership Committee continues its study of what you, our members, want from the Association, and all contributions to this debate will be more than welcome – please get in touch with Alistair Rogerson, or a member of his Committee. We are still looking at the practicalities of re-establishing a Civic Award programme in the near future.

Alistair has recently been liaising with our webmaster, Charlotte, in order to update our website and make it more interactive and user-friendly. Again, any ideas as to improvements in any aspect of BCA's operations - please contact Alistair or a member of his team.

The Corporate Affairs Committee, currently chaired by Hilary Lawrence, continues to be responsible for the administration of the Association; financial planning and management, forward planning, estate management and legal issues, and delivery of information to the Board. Once again, I must record our debt to our Secretary, Martin Wragg. Martin does a huge amount of work not only for BCA, but for a number of

other charities and voluntary groups with which he is involved ,and no organisation could wish for a more conscientious and meticulous Officer. Thank you, Martin.

You may recall at last year's AGM that Mike Monaghan reported on his first audit of our environmental policy, adopted the previous year. Mike continues to review our performance in line with our aims and objectives, conducts regular environmental audits, and reports back to the Board as appropriate. He is not giving a report this evening, but confirms that the installation of the new Cavern lighting is a major step forward in terms of energy conservation and the reduction of BCA's carbon footprint. Thank you for your continued involvement in this, Mike.

With the retirement of Rosie Hughes and Olive Middleton, the functions previously allocated to our Communications Committee have now been assimilated into the Membership and Community Committee for the time being, with the exception of publicity and PR, which is still very capably handled by Olive

Now that there is a lull in our capital investment programme, The Development Committee has been mothballed, but Development Director Bill Preece, has kindly agreed to join the Corporate Affairs Committee, where he can quickly take up any capital project or grant opportunity that may arise. In the interim, Bill's extensive management expertise is being put to use in a full management review of our organisation, in order that we may be sure that we have the best qualified and most appropriate staff resources available to us for the future needs of the business.

I'm now going to hand over to Peter Phillipson, who will report on the activities of the Woodland Committee.

[Report by Peter Phillipson on woodland issues and projects]

And now, it only remains for me to thank those people who give their time and energy to drive the Association forward, and who make such a valuable contribution to our success.

Firstly, thanks to Hilary Lawrence, our Vice Chairman, whose enthusiasm and support is as invaluable as her strongly held and forthright views. Personally, I could not wish for a more loyal and helpful Vice Chairman.

My sincere thanks go to the Principal Officers of the Association, Brian Shawcross and Martin Wragg, both utterly committed and reliable, and to my fellow Directors for all their seldom acknowledged but hugely appreciated efforts and commitment largely behind the scenes.

Our Committee Chairs, Hilary, Peter, Alistair and Bill, many thanks for all your time and dedication.

Olive, Trevor, and Charlotte, all your work on our website, newsletters and PR is truly appreciated.

I'd also like to pay tribute to all our active members who help with Committee service, or practical tasks including monitoring our woodlands, gardening, litter

picking etc. If I have omitted any names that should be included, please forgive me. You all know who you are – your work is indispensable to our efforts, and we need every one of you.

Next, I want to record our appreciation of our ‘front line’ staff here at the Cavern.

I’m very happy, once more, to thank Alan Walker, our Manager, on whom we depend to carry out such a diverse range of duties.

Helping Alan in the office is, of course, our administrator, Fran. Again, I am happy to pay tribute to all her hard work and dedication behind the scenes.

Our ‘front of house’ staff is led by our Senior Guides, Pru and James, each of whom is to be complimented on their commitment and enthusiasm in delivering high standards of service to our visitors, and encouraging the same high standards throughout our Guide staff who continue to serve the Association so well.

In the café, our Catering Staff, led by Paula and Denny, work extremely hard to deliver a high quality of service to our customers, which is recognised by the Board, and for which we thank them.

I would also like to mention the grant funding bodies who continue to support the Association so generously, and who play such an important role in helping us to realise our aspirations. They include:-

The Derbyshire Aggregate Levy Grant Scheme
LaFarge Industries
The Derbyshire Dales & High Peak Accessibility Partnership

This year I would also like to thank the management of Tarmac, Omya and L’Hoist for their generous offers to donate stone for our ongoing programme of footpath renewal and maintenance.

Lastly, but by no means least, I would like to thank you, our Members, for your interest, support and commitment. Apart from running Poole’s Cavern & managing our Estate, there are many other activities in which a Civic Association could, and arguably should, be involved. When all is said and done, this is Your Association, here to respond to your needs, and to provide the Service that you want. Please let us know how Buxton Civic Association can best serve you.

Thank you.