

Poole's Cavern Quality Award

The Visit England Tourist Board recently awarded the prestigious Visitor Attraction Quality Accreditation to Poole's Cavern and Buxton Country Park, and we achieved an excellent quality standard overall.

The executive summary was: Poole's Cavern and Buxton Country Park delivers a unique



Cavern staff receiving the award

and memorable visitor experience that should exceed any first-time visitors' expectations; with enthusiastic and passionate staff delivering high quality customer service standards.

The assessment included 'secret shopper' visits to the cavern, cafe and country park as well as recording the quality of telephone, email and website enquiries.

The standard of the staff's knowledge of and enthusiasm for both the cavern and the local area was especially commended as was the retail and catering service.

Suggestions of areas to be improved included upgrading the footpath signage and information in the country park woods and this valuable feedback is being acted upon by the cavern staff.



The award is a tremendous boost to the staff and especially complements the hard work by the BCA Board of Directors to implement the significant improvements to the visitor facilities in the last few years.

Alan Walker

BCA Visit Bollington and Ferneydale



Earlier in the summer members enjoyed two outdoor events. The first was a visit to Bollington as guests of the Bollington Civic

Society, including a visit to their Heritage Centre, a guided walk round Bollington (pictured above), and refreshments.

The second was a guided flower walk round the Ferneydale Local Nature Reserve at Harpur Hill, led by June Noble.

We learned a lot from both visits and hope to plan further joint events with our Bollington friends next year.

Our thanks to Sandra Edwards, Chair of Bollington Civic Society, and her colleagues for their hospitality, and to Tim Boddington and June Noble for their guided walks.

June Noble is writing a guide to wild flowers in Grinlow Wood for beginning wild flower enthusiasts.

Woodland Glades Conservation Continues



The botanically important glade areas within Grin Low woods will be receiving their annual autumn cut once again this month.

I am often asked why we do this to what seems to be a wild area of natural grassland. The woodland glade areas are associated with the 17th & 18th century lime burning industry on the hillside. Below each kiln is a wide area where waste limestone ash was tipped. This highly contaminated and very alkaline ground initially would not have been planted with trees as there would have been little nutrient in the soil.

Slowly the lime tips were colonised by lime loving species of herbaceous plants and grasses such as Northern Marsh Orchid, Burnet Saxifrage, Globeflower,

Mountain Everlasting, Creeping Willow, and Juniper, creating a unique habitat which unlike the neighbouring farm land is not grazed or fertilized by animal livestock.

The area of Grin Low was designated by the Nature Conservancy Council (now Natural England) as a Site of Special Scientific Interest in 1963, recognising the Juniper as the only surviving example in Derbyshire, and was re-designated in 1981 under the Wildlife and Countryside Act.

With continuing advice from Natural England it was recognised over 15 years ago that without careful management the glades would be encroached by rank species of grasses and invasive trees species such as Birch and

Ash and these valuable areas could be lost. At the time it was thought that rabbits grazed the glades but with outbreaks of myxomatosis it became important to look for another artificial solution.

Since then a project originally funded by Natural England has seen the glades annually cut using power brush cutters and the cuttings raked and removed from the glade. This is important to prevent the thin soil layer from becoming too enriched and therefore able to support invasive species.

This is a highly labour intensive time and the BCA woodland volunteer group are invaluable in assisting with the grass clearing and cutting back saplings on the glade edges.

We have now brought back eight or so glades to good condition, which total around seven acres of the hundred acres of Grin Low wood, and hope to enlarge some of these areas further.

Sadly funding is not currently available for this project, which makes the need for volunteer help even more important. So if anyone has a few hours to spare anytime in September and October please contact me at Poole's Cavern Visitor Centre on 01298 26978.

Alan Walker

Work in Progress

June Noble is hard at work for us on a new guide to the wild flowers in Grin Wood. Walking the many paths and glades throughout the seasons she and her husband Lyn have been making notes and taking pictures of plants in their natural habitat so that even beginners can start to identify all that they see.

Production is already underway and it is hoped to have the whole

book ready in time for Christmas.

Designed to complement the already well-loved 'Ring of Trees', one or both might perhaps make a welcome festive gift. A reminder that "When winter comes, can spring be far behind?"

June pictured with BCA members on the guided flower walk round the Ferneydale Local Nature Reserve.



SOS Bookswap for Birds!

In the Visitor Centre cafe you will find a bookcase where you can bring any books you no longer want and take away any you would like to read, or give a donation.

So far we have raised £90 in donations for the RSPB plus £161 for RSPB badges.

Our stock of books is getting low so we would appreciate any books you have finished with – all in a good cause.

Cafe Loyalty Card

If you are a regular visitor to the cafe, why not get a loyalty card which will entitle you to a free drink after you have bought nine.



Members' Events

Make Friends with your Digital Camera (Session 2)

2-4pm, Sat 24 September, Poole's Cavern

Arthur Packham will show how corrections and changes can easily be made to your pictures on a computer.

Maximum 20. Please phone the Visitor Centre office on 01298 26978 to book your place. No charge.

Organisations like BCA, which understand how human behaviour impacts on the environment, have a particularly important role to play.

Oil is being pumped from the ground much more quickly than new deposits are being discovered. Oil (and gas) won't run out completely for a long time, of course, but world oil production is probably near its peak and will start to decline rapidly within one or two decades. That's allowing for oil under the oceans, oil under the Arctic and tar-sands. If world demand continues to climb, the price will go through the roof. Every aspect of civilisation from plastics, through home heating and transport to fertilisers and manufacturing depends on oil and gas.

Transition Buxton Talk

**7.30pm, Thursday 20 October
Poole's Cavern Visitor Centre**

Members of the Buxton branch of the Transition Movement will present their ideas on this very important topic and invite a discussion on how BCA and our members could help.

Preparing to make the transition to a low oil, low carbon society by Charles Jolly

Our comfortable way of life based on cheap oil is about to change. Transition Buxton believes that together we can make this a change for the better.

Transition Buxton raises awareness and generates ideas. Our meetings are open to everyone, but mostly we work through action groups. Our groups include local food production, saving and producing energy, improved public transport and cycle-ways, recycling, re-skilling and working with schools.

Read the full article on the BCA website.

Please phone the Visitor Centre office on 01298 26978, by 17 October if you wish to come so that we can arrange refreshments. No charge.

Spookyshire Halloween Events at Poole's Cavern

Cavern Pumpkin and Bats

Daytime during the October half term holidays

Terror Tours

6.30, 7.30 and 8.30pm, 27-30 October

Pre-booking only for Terror Tours: tickets £8.00 from Poole's Cavern, 01298 26978.

Visit the Poole's Cavern website or phone us for more details.

Santa's Grotto at Poole's Cavern

10am to 2pm, 3-4, 10-11, 17-18 and 24 December

Santa will be at home in the Cavern at weekends in December, including Christmas Eve.

Advance booking only please, to avoid long queues. Phone the Visitor Centre office on 01298 26978.

Poole's Cavern will be open during Christmas week, 10am to 4pm, 27-31 December.

A Day in The Life of a Busy Visitor Attraction

by Alan Walker, General Manager Poole's Cavern

BCA is probably unique among civic societies in Britain in owning a show cave, a visitor centre and almost 200 acres of woodland. The financial and legal responsibilities involved mean our success depends on giving satisfaction to over 40,000 visitors every year. Here Alan gives us some idea of all the organisation needed behind the scenes

No two days are ever the same at Poole's Cavern and our visitors change throughout the seasons - from school groups to families, audiences for events, coach parties of senior citizens, and visitors with special needs and disabilities. All are welcomed and their needs provided for by our team of dedicated staff.

Each day begins in the same way: Pru or James, the front of house managers, open up and safety-check the cave, turning on lights, opening the exhibition area and stocking shop displays. The cafe staff, Paula and Denny, prepare the cafe area and daily specials, and check fresh food deliveries.

Fran starts the day in the back office preparing the previous days takings for banking, updating the accounts or preparing staff payroll information. I check mes-

sages and emails and reply to requests for information, group bookings, adverts and marketing. Repairs or reports of any issues in the woodland - from litter to tree inspections, damage to walls, or camp fires - are investigated and dealt with. I often meet with the Go Ape manager to check their site is OK.

Visitors arrive from 9.30am and our cave guides begin their day. We have 15 guides working one to four days each week and tours start every 20 minutes. The skills of the guides encompass teacher, actor, historian, and children's entertainer. Imagine performing four hour-long stage shows each day, making each one as fresh and enthusiastic as the first. We are very proud that the feedback from our visitors mentions the superb guides and customer service as much as the beautiful cavern and country park.

We recently achieved the prestigious English Tourist Board Visitor Quality Assurance standard.

By mid-morning the first hungry visitors are ordering meals at the cafe. The cafe assistants Kate, Kim, Ollie and Steve serve and keep the tables clean. We have a quick turnaround of customers and our homemade

soups, panini and great coffee are popular all year round.

Between tours the cave guides help in the shop. The new book and local produce display is especially popular. Managing the stock for the cafe and shop, re-ordering and sourcing new lines is a daily task during the summer months.

The visitor centre and grounds must be kept clean and well presented and staff patrol the car park, collect litter or help with weeding and gardening. Cutting the grass around the site is almost a full time job in itself in the summer months.

As the last tour starts the cafe is cleaned, bins are emptied, and floors are swept and mopped. Toilets are cleaned, re-stocked and sanitised, the tills are closed down and the takings counted, checked and locked away. Finally the cavern is walked through, lights are turned off and it's locked for the night leaving only the bats underground.

With all visitors on their way we review the day, any issues or comments from visitors and staff feedback are noted, then we lock up and secure the visitor centre until tomorrow.

Buxton Civic Association

General Manager: Alan Walker at Poole's Cavern, 01298 26978

Board Members

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Vice chair &

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Treasurer: Brian Shawcross

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