

## MEMBERSHIP IN THE BCCS

### Introduction

The BCCS has, as one of the provisions of its By-Laws, a specific upper limit on the number of its members (Article II, Section 8). This is in sharp contrast to, for example, the National Speleological Society, which is currently attempting to greatly increase its membership. Why the BCCS membership is limited is a question several times asked. The By-Laws of the BCCS were written almost a decade ago. Perhaps it is time now to attempt an answer. This article, by one of the several authors of the By-Laws, is such an attempt. The reader is cautioned that the discussion which follows presents the author's personal opinions, and he has more than once been accused of being opinionated. The official BCCS membership policies were presented in a companion article preceding this article.

### Rationale for Exclusivity

The rationale for the BCCS being a small, hence exclusive, society derives from the goals of the society and what the founders perceived as the way most likely to lead to the achievement of these goals. The purposes and objectives of the BCCS are, as the name implies, the conservation and protection of the Butler Cave-Sinking Creek System. The Constitution and By-Laws of the society do not limit its activities to Butler Cave, or even Burnsville Cove, or even Virginia; however, mainly for financial reasons, this has been the main concern of the BCCS thus far. Because the cave environment is so delicate and so easily destroyed, and because the environment once disturbed is expected to take an exceedingly long time to recover, the objectives of the BCCS are seen to be continuing and long-term.

Societies with long-term objectives seem to be of two main types, "inclusive" and "exclusive". In fact, it is possible that all societies can be classified as belonging to one of these types. For the purposes of this discussion, an "inclusive society" is one which [has] as large a membership as possible relative to the number of prospective members; while an "exclusive society" is one which has a rather small membership relative to the number of people who might like to join. Some

additional characteristics of these two types of societies include, but are not limited to the following:

Inclusive Societies

(A) Liberal, easy to meet membership requirements.

(B) Large number, though perhaps a small percentage, of members willing to do the less desirable voluntary work necessary for the attainment of society goals.

(C) Majority of members contribute only dues, rarely show up for - or participate in meetings - never help with the work, but usually show up for the parties.

(D) Large number, though perhaps a small percentage, of members would have to quit in order to threaten the existence of the society.

(E) Some examples: The Democratic Party, the National Speleological Society, and your own grotto.

Exclusive Societies

(A) Somewhat severe, sometimes impossible to meet membership requirements.

(B) Small number, though perhaps a large percentage, of members willing to do the less desirable voluntary work necessary for the society to attain its goals.

(C) Majority of members contribute more than dues, usually show up for and participate in meetings, often help with the work, and always show up for the parties.

(D) Small number, though perhaps a large percentage, of members would have to quit in order to threaten the existence of the society.

(E) Some examples: The Democratic National Committee, the Cave Research Foundation, and BCCS.

What the exclusive society attempts to do is to structure the membership requirements (property A) so that properties B and C are characteristic of an exclusive society, all the while being cognizant of the danger inherent in property D. The goals of some societies preclude their existence as exclusive societies. For example, the goals of education or the wide dissemination of information are logically inconsistent with an exclusive society; although, this has not prevented the establishment of

exclusive societies with such averred goals. An amusing example to watch has been the NSS Vertical Section.

So why did the founders of the BCCS choose to make it an exclusive society? I remember the following as being important considerations. (1) It would be possible for every member to know every other member on a more or less personal basis. (2) Each member could have a larger influence on the policy decisions of the society. (3) The founders could expect to exert some control over the activities of the society for a considerable time after its establishment. (4) Each member could expect every other member to be highly motivated and dedicated to society goals. (5) The turnover in membership would be slow, producing a leisurely paced evolution of ideas and practices. (6) Experience gained by the members in solving problems peculiar to the situation in Burnsville Cove would be retained as a society asset.

That these six statements are descriptive of the BCCS today is no accident. Okay, so now you know why the BCCS membership is limited. Suppose you want to join this weird society. How do you go about it? This is the subject of the next section.

#### Prerequisites for Membership

As has been shown in the companion article, who shall become a member of the BCCS is determined solely by the Board of Directors. Unfortunately, the By-Laws do not divulge all of the attributes which the Board of Directors is to find desirable in new members. We can perhaps get at least an idea of what these attributes are by an examination of the salient properties of new members. These might then be considered at least informal prerequisites for membership, but the reader is cautioned that they are the author's views only. (And he is not currently a member of the Board of Directors).

(1) You need to be a caver of some experience. You do not have to be a member of the National Speleological Society or any of its grottoes. It is helpful to have gained the experience, to have mastered the techniques, and to possess the equipment necessary for almost any sadistic flight of fancy which may inflict the mind of the expedition leader. While it was not so in the past, today it seems to help to have a reputation for being "up for the hard-assed trips".

(2) You need to have demonstrated the desire for, and the ability to, sustain a long-term commitment to the goals of the society. This is typically achieved by attending nearly all of the expeditions for a period of from two to four years,

accepting a position on any work crew for which you are qualified and assigned, and not bitching too loudly when things get exceedingly grim or monotonous. This includes not only surveying, photography, equipment carrying, etc. underground, but also road repair and general construction and maintenance work on the surface.

(3) You need to have demonstrated an interest in the work being done by the society, and a willingness to participate beyond that required of typical expedition attendees. This includes such activities as asking questions like: "Why are we doing this?", "Wouldn't it make more sense to do it this way?", and "Can I work on this project between expeditions?".

(4) You need to involve yourself in group discussions at expeditions and meetings. To an amazing extent the policy decisions of the expedition committee and other committees as well, are influenced by what members and nonmembers contribute at informal - often late night - sessions. As a non-member, this is a place where you can have some real influence on the society. Make your opinion known, if you have one; keep quiet and listen if you don't.

(5) Show up for the Regular Annual Membership Meetings, even though you are not a member. These meetings are usually long and sometimes boring, but they are the time when members get together to do the "business" of the society. If you find that you simply cannot stand this aspect of the BCCS, then you probably should not be a member. If you have the opportunity, attend a Board of Directors meeting also. Find out how the society works. You need to decide if you really want to be a member. You may well decide that you do not!

(6) If you decide you wish to be considered for membership, make your desire known to the Board of Directors. The best way to do this is informally through a board member, or a member who will approach the board for you. But do not bother to do this until you are far along in satisfying the previous five prerequisites. And do not expect immediate action. Once your name comes up at a director's meeting, they will be watching you and evaluating you. It may well take awhile. But then, patience is surely a virtue highly prized among BCCS members. Some slight comment is required on one final topic. The BCCS is by nature an eleemosynary society and constantly in need of additional funds. Yearly dues are \$30; a life membership costs \$1000. But the ability or lack thereof of a prospective member to acquire a life membership has not, to my knowledge, ever influenced the Board of Directors in deciding whether or not to offer that person a membership. Indeed, ten years ago when the society was being formed, few if any of the members were able to seriously

contemplate such a financial commitment. Life members have no concomitant additional power or influence in the society, and \$30 a year does not seem all that much money to invest to preserve something which continues to give both the friends and members of the BCCS so much pleasure.

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Editor's Notes:

1. This article originally appeared in *The BCCS News*, Volume 4, 1978, pp. 22-25.
2. As of September 2013, membership dues are \$60/year and life membership is \$2000.