

BCCS MEMBERSHIP

A New Member's Perspective

Fred Wefer's previous articles were written from the perspective of a person who has always been a member of the BCCS. This article is written from the perspective of a recently accepted member.

Actually, I can add little to his information other than my feelings: what it felt like to be a participating BCCS "groupie"; how I felt on being offered membership; and how I feel about the whole thing from this side.

Fred's description of the criteria for membership - official and unofficial - seem accurate. I'm not sure anyone ever verbalized them - I just picked them up from chance remarks, non-verbal signals, etc. I could tell that those qualities were highly prized, so I assumed they were a prerequisite for membership.

For a long time, I thought membership was eternally CLOSED. I was never consciously working toward it, even after I discovered that rare new members did trickle in. Membership still seemed too improbable and the monetary cost too high. But I loved Butler, admired the members' level of interest and involvement, and adored the really rotten trips. I kept coming back to enjoy these things, and to try to figure out the cave. I can't remember how long I was involved; for several years, anyway, I showed up for most of the expeditions, and sat quietly on the sidelines during meetings. I really craved the knowledge and understanding of Butler that these people - the Big Guys, the Members - had.

Being a member was out of the question, but it was hard to tell members from some of the dedicated long-time hangers-on, anyway, and I was content to be a groupie. I was as full on participant in everything (except voting) as I showed that I wanted to be. Though I knew (and know) far less about the cave system than old-timers, and lacked many skills needed in BCCS work, I've always found most members eager to support and teach me, and I've always been assigned tasks and responsibilities as sophisticated as I was prepared for. It's an exclusive society,

yes, but only in certain formal ways. I was certainly met halfway in my unwitting journey towards membership.

Perhaps because of the way I approached membership, I have some misgivings about these articles - unjustified, I hope. I'm concerned that someone seeking membership for its own sake or for free access to Butler might use our comments to "run" for membership in a political, manipulative sense. The society will suffer if persons become members whose enthusiasm and dedication are merely a charade to be dumped like spent carbide once they're "in". One should be a good member material simply because it is one's nature.

I was surprised when I'd been told that I had been selected for membership. I'd been casually asked if I were interested, but had thought the question was hypothetical. I was thrilled and flattered. Because of the exclusivity of membership, it's undeniably an ego-boost. How I feel now is, in a word, ambivalent. I know I'm a member - have been for over a year now - but I can't say I feel like a member. I was an outsider too long, perhaps. Last year, for example, when I mentioned wishing someone would do a bat study, Fred pointed out that I could plan my own. I no longer should depend entirely on other members for my activities. I was a Big Guy now, and if I were interested in a project which fulfilled the goals of the society, I could suggest and design it myself! That was one breakthrough. I have many to go before I'll perceive myself as more than a "junior member", adding leadership to my Butler repertoire. (This, of course, is a personal description; perhaps other new members have made the psychological adaptation more quickly.)

Psychological factors aside, things are still about the same for me as they were before I achieved the elevated status of membership. One significant exception is that I have contributed financially to the Society; although this was certainly possible (and I'm sure would have been encouraged!), it didn't occur until I became a member.

However, since anyone may contribute, financially and otherwise, without actual membership, why would one seek membership? I can identify three reasons:

1. To vote in Society affairs. However, as Fred pointed out, voting membership is not necessary for input and informal influence - and a member still has only 1/29th [As of September 2013, 1/55th-Ed.] of the final say;
2. To reinforce a sort of philosophical/moral long-term commitment, somewhat like religious confirmation;

3. For the honor.

The original group had to be members for the corporation to exist, and Fred has described some of the reasons members are still crucial to the Society. But I see little objective reason for an individual to seek membership (as opposed to participating non-membership); the value to the member themselves is primarily psychological...But, of course, I wouldn't give up my membership for the world!

Toni Williams

Editor's Note: This article originally appeared in *The BCCS News*, Volume 4, 1978, pp. 25-26. The articles by Dr. F L. Wefer that Ms. Trees (Williams) references also appeared in the same issue of *The BCCS News*.