

April 2015

Issue 45

# WALES UNDERGROUND

## News In Brief

- The Welsh Sports Association no longer has Overseas Expedition grants due to funding cuts.
- The Brecon Beacons National Park draft management plan is now available to download at: <http://www.beacons-npa.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/Draft-Management-Plan-Consultation.pdf>
- Work on A465 Clydach Gorge dualling has started with tree clearing and lay-by closures but all the caves remain accessible

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## Photo credits

Martyn Farr  
Richard Hill  
Gethin Thomas

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Cambrian Caving Council Newsletter

Cylchlythyr y Cyngor Ogofeydd Cymreig

## REPORT ON THE 2015 CCC AGM

The CCC AGM for 2015 was held at Betws-y-Coed and was very well attended with 18 clubs out of 50 being represented. The motion to amend the constitution was passed with a minor amendment and the meeting mandated the Council to look at further changes to the constitution to separate mine and caves from the viewpoint of conservation and also look at broadening representation.

After the officers reports there was a discussion on Ogof Draenen and rift between the PDCMG and some members of the CCC. It was decided by the meeting that the matter should be arbitrated ideally by the BCA C&A committee chair, Andrew Hinde, if PDCMG is agreeable to this

following their next meeting in June.

Peter Claughton, NAMHO Conservation officer, presented a paper discussing the issue of mine workings from an archaeological perspective and suggested the need for separate caving and mine exploration conservation policy documents.

The draft 2015 AGM minutes, accounts and officers reports are available on the CCC website.

The next AGM will take place on Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> March 2016 in mid-Wales at a venue yet to be decided, but likely in Cwm Ystwyth.

*Dave Tyson, CCC Secretary*

## ACCESS TO MINES UNDER THE NRW AGREEMENT

Following the signing of the access agreement between Cave Access Limited and Natural Resources Wales reported in the February Newsletter, work has now been completed to permit access to some of the sites in the agreement. The procedure for registration and details of the site can be found on the CAL website:

<http://www.caveaccess.co.uk>

CAL is required to maintain a register of users and keep access logs for each site in the agreement. We would welcome feedback, trip reports and photographs as this will make it easier to show the agreement is working and hopefully extend the list of sites when it is renewed. Several trips to the mines have already been completed, including an inaugural one to Parc Lead Mine the day before the CCC AGM.

*Dave Tyson, Cave Access Limited*



CAL Directors: Roy, Dave & Stuart outside Parc Mine



New Shaft in Llanrwst Mine accessed from Parc Mine

## SRT Training News

### SRT Workshop, Plas y Brenin 14th March 2015

Cambrian hosted a one-day SRT workshop to coincide with the AGM weekend. This was open to anyone affiliated to CCC. The venue was quite small so the numbers were limited and the course was soon full with a reserve of about five people. Unfortunately a few people dropped out at the last minute and only one of the reserves could then make the day. Despite that, those that did attend had a very successful day with SRT rigs adjusted and rusty or bad habits ironed out and improved. The venue was very suitable for a small group and can be hired by others. My thanks go to Gethin, Will and Dan for their expertise and advice and those that attended for making it worthwhile.

Some comments from participants are shown opposite, as well as a few pictures taken on the day.

*Richard Hill,  
CCC Training Officer*

Hi Richard,

Firstly, many apologies for the delay in getting back to you: busy time of year for us. Just wanted to thank you, Gethin and your 'associates' for all the help and guidance at P-y-B on the 14th.

It was a very useful session and it was very useful to learn the right way of doing things after too long doing things in a haphazard fashion with a slightly dubious set-up.

You were all very helpful, particularly given that you were spending a day going over simple stuff when you could have been doing something more interesting.

Thanks also to the CCC for organising it and covering the costs: it's very much appreciated that they're able to offer such professional training and it's more than a shame that some people who had booked didn't turn up.

Finally: I will, you'll be relieved to hear, be ordering a proper harness very shortly...

Regards,  
Rupert

Hi Richard,

Could I pass my sincere thanks to you and the team for the excellent course on Saturday. I learnt a lot in terms of both improving my technique and using SRT more safely. I started using SRT when it first came out which I guess was in the early 70's and was very much self taught, so it really was about time I got some proper tuition!  
Best wishes  
Tony



## 2015 DIARY

### Sunday May 17

NWCRO training day  
Plas y Brenin

### May 22-25

NAMHO Conference  
Nenthead

### June 12-14

Joint BCRC/BCA Event  
Dean Field Studies Centre

### Saturday June 27

Three Peaks Challenge fundraiser

### Sept 25-27

Hidden Earth, Mendip

## NWCRO Training & AGM — Sunday 17th May

NWCRO is holding its annual surface techniques training day at Plas y Brenin again. The day will cover aspects such as hauling, communications / use of radios, call-out procedures and first aid. The aim is to serve as both an introductory session for newer team members and a refresher for existing members as well as finding out about new equipment, procedures etc. The day will be followed by the team's AGM.

The day is also open to any experienced cave / mine explorers active in the North Wales area who want to find out more about NWCRO. If you fancy coming along then please get in touch with Kat Hawkins at [secretary@northwalescro.org.uk](mailto:secretary@northwalescro.org.uk).



## Preliminary Report on Testing Rock Anchors in North Wales Slate

Work in 2013 (see <http://www.train4underground.co.uk/bolts-in-slate-testing-project/>) had indicated that some of the anchors used in North Wales slate mines were perhaps not really up to the job. A proposal was made to BCA's Equipment and Techniques Committee for a grant to support an investigation into several anchor types which have been used in North Wales slate mines. After some discussion, the committee agreed to fund test beds in four different slate beds using Collinox, Goujon and Bolt Product anchors. In addition, Simon Wilson donated a set of IC anchors for testing. In December 2013 a total of 76 anchors were placed by Gethin Thomas in Cwmorthin and Corris and, with help from Dena Proctor, in the Cambrian Mine.

Two sets were placed in the Cwmorthin Mine in the Back Vein and the Stripey Bed Vein. One set was placed in Cambrian Mine and the final set was placed in Braich Goch Mine near Corris. The BCA anchor puller was used to do the work and because there is a large amount



*Bob and Dave manhandling the BCA puller into position*

Thanks go to Gethin Thomas, Pete Rigby, Dave Tyson, Steve Skillbeck, Richard "Rusty" Bale, Chris Mitchell, Simon Wilson, Mark Waite, Dena Proctor, Dave Grimmes, Sam Benson and Jim Bradley for helping out.

The raw data and videos of the extraction of the anchors can be seen at the above web site. Work is in progress on interpreting the data. Provisional results suggest that the order of performance was IC best with Bolt Product, Collinox and Goujon last. This appears to reflect the 'embedment' depth, which is how far the anchors reach into the rock, however there was wide variation in the peak extraction forces reflecting variable quality of rock. One point which is up for debate is whether the spacing between anchors should be much larger in slate than the usual guide of twice the depth. A small number of the extractions were accompanied by extensive exfoliation (tens of centimetres) of the cleaved slate. Although more detailed statistical tests to be conducted to confirm it, there did not appear to be a significant difference between anchors placed in slab or pillar faces, nor in orientations with respect to the cleavage plane.

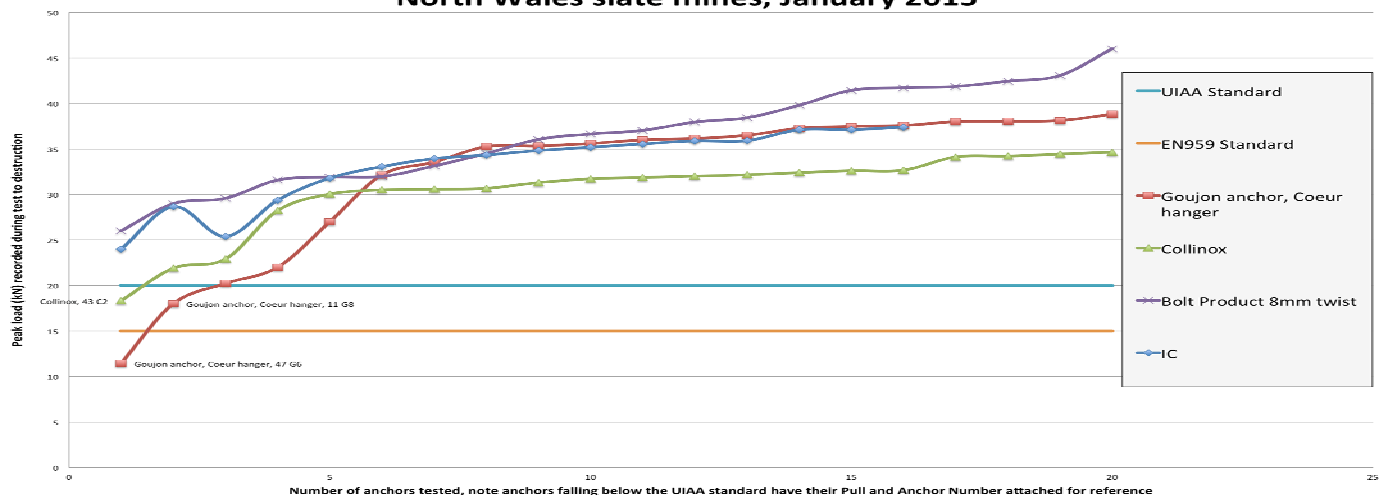


*Taking the kit up to Cwmorthin in a wheelbarrow*

gear, a moderate number of people were prevailed upon to help take the kit in a wheel barrow into each location and generally assist.

*Bob Mehew, BCA Rope Testing Officer*

### Performance of anchors in slate, peak load (in kN) based on 4 test beds in North Wales slate mines, January 2015



## Mine Workings as Archaeology

Recently an important point was raised in the Welsh Mines Society Newsletter (71.2, p. 3) regarding the conservation of mines as defined in the Cambrian Caving Council (CCC) constitution. To group mines with caves in terms of access and conservation, as has been done by CCC and no doubt by other caving bodies within the British Caving Association (BCA), is to confuse matters by linking together two very different environments.

Mines are not the same as caves. There are very different procedures and permissions required for accessing mines, and conservation has to take into account the unique subterranean archaeology of mining.

The mines themselves are archaeological features - they are man-made structures, the fabric of which holds the key to their construction, and deposits deep within their workings contain archaeological evidence - unlike caves, where archaeological deposits are generally confined to shallow levels linked to habitation. Perhaps the only common feature between a cave and a mine (including underground quarries) is the method of access, using speleological techniques. Once in a deeper cave, below any habitation deposits, and provided the 'caver' does not damage cave formations (speleothems) and environmental deposits, the structure is pretty resilient. In contrast, a mine is vulnerable to damage to both its structure and the deposits (including artefacts) within it at any level.

Care has to be taken in mines in the placing of anchor points (bolts) as, by drilling into the structure, damage is being caused possibly to irreplaceable features such as tool marks. Any digging within a mine has to record the deposits being disturbed, although the level of recording might be variable depending on factors such as the nature of the dig, its location and the date of the mine. Ephemeral features such as timbers also need recording before they are lost through the actions of man or by natural decay.

Exploring mines is a legitimate activity and can take the 'caver' into new, hidden landscapes - but care has to be taken not to destroy the features which make up that subterranean landscape.

*Peter Cloughton, NAMHO Conservation Officer*

## Castlemartin - Ogof Gofan Access

An interim cave access system for Ogof Gofan located on Range East has been agreed. Cavers should now contact the CCC Access/Conservation Officer, ideally by email (see opposite) to outline their plan and receive information about the site including how to find it and our pitch-rigging suggestions. CCC will pass your details to the National Park Ranger who will issue the permit also by email. CCC would like to receive trip reports as there is no logbook in the cave at present.

## Castlemartin - Range West Access

Cavers wishing to prospect for new caves on the restricted Castlemartin Range West cliffs need to attend a 'range briefing meeting'. This is to learn about very important safety matters and to register for a photo permit from the Defence Infrastructure Organisation (the landowner) and understand the terms of use. To attend a briefing session, just turn up at the Merrion Army Camp main gate office in good time as you will not be allowed into the meeting room late. If you miss these two remaining briefings then there are no more of them until 2016:

*Thursday 21 May at 6pm*

*Saturday 23 May at 10am (the bank holiday weekend)*

Any new caves found should be noted and reported to CCC, but not entered or dug without the express agreement of the landowner as there may be SSSI and archaeological features which need specific consent from statutory conservation bodies.

You collect your personal Range West photo permit from the gatehouse each time you want to enter the restricted area and these must be handed back there at the end of each day. You are free to explore for new caves as you wish subject to the landowner's regulations that were explained at the briefing and of course when the firing range is not in use by the military. All permits issued in 2015 are valid until 23rd May 2016. CCC would like to hear of any visits made here, and success or otherwise in finding speleologically significant or promising sites.

*Stuart France, CCC Access & Conservation Officer*

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Please send news items, short articles, club profiles and newsworthy photos for the next issue to Dave Tyson by 30th June

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## The Cambrian Caving Council

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