

July 2014

Issue 42

WALES UNDERGROUND

The Cambrian Caving Council Newsletter

Cylchlythyr y Cyngor Ogofeydd Cymreig

News in brief:

- Access 'Green Paper' on hold
- New access agreements for Greenbridge Cave and Twll Clogfaen near Merthyr Tydfil
- NRW offers temporary agreements for access to a few sites on a goodwill basis while the national level agreement is developed
- Independent cavers seek a formal legal opinion from a London QC
- BCA winds up its Access Working Party and resurrects its Conservation and Access committee
- BCA to review its 17-year old Cave Conservation Handbook

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Photo credits

Martyn Farr
Roy Fellows
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Access Land and the Welsh Government's Green Paper

The Welsh Government (WG) started a review process in 2013 to consider liberalising access to the countryside with the aim of simplifying the law and encouraging greater outdoor participation. The catalyst was Canoe Wales who contacted the Welsh Sports Association (WSA) to lobby for improved access to inland water.

The WSA asked the Welsh Government for a review and this was formally announced at the National Access Forum meeting at Llandudno. This led to some workshops and meetings for interested parties including Ramblers Wales, Canoe Wales and the British Mountaineering Council. These consultations were to feed into a Green Paper on access scheduled to appear at the end of 2013. However the process became bogged down and the publication date kept slipping, the WG citing legislative workload for the delay. There is still a commitment to support freer access, but no changes can be made before the next Assembly Member elections.

The access proponents, such as the BMC and Ramblers Wales, had been patiently waiting for the Green Paper, but in the absence of any news Elfyn Jones, the BMC Access Officer, convened a meeting with interested parties to discuss the situation. I attended on behalf of CCC and explained some of the issues relating to caving and mine exploring. The general feeling of this meeting was that the access proponents had pulled in slightly different directions while objectors (landowners and fishing) had a



Pwll Dwfn, an open cave on CRoW Access Land

more unified voice and better organisation to defeat or at least delay any changes. A Welsh Assembly representative was invited to this meeting but could not attend. Our meeting may have had some effect because a ministerial statement about the future of the Green Paper was published on the Welsh Assembly website on the same day (link below).

The group will hold further meetings to suggest and refine its proposals for freer access and provide a united voice to lobby the WG, perhaps calling on allies like NHS Wales and Visit Wales to highlight the wider benefits to society of outdoors recreation opportunities.

Dave Tyson, CCC Secretary

<http://wales.gov.uk/about/cabinet/cabinetstatements/2014/accessoutdoorrecreation/?lang=en>

Expedition Grants

Paul Dancey reports that the Welsh Sports Association has reached an agreement with Sport Wales on 2014-15 funding. WSA represents sports governing bodies in Wales, such as CCC, to government and Sport Wales which administers WG and National Lottery grant money. Whilst this offer

was an improvement on the original, it is still a substantial cut in overall funding this year. Outdoor Pursuits has been particularly badly hit this year, but at least we can offer some Expedition and Safety grants, albeit at much reduced level.

Further cuts are likely next year and so the long term future of both the Expedition

and Sports Safety Grants is becoming unpredictable.

Following its AGM, WSA has announced that its expedition funding for this year is £7,500 and a panel meeting will be convened shortly to decide how the grant will be split between prospective expeditions.

Ian Adams, CCC Treasurer



Skip in Cwmystwyth Lead Mine

Cave Registrar

Brendan Marris has recently announced his decision to step down as CCC Cave Registrar after looking after this database since 2009. We would like to thank Brendan and acknowledge his care and work to maintain these vital records and making them readily accessible online.

We are pleased to welcome Martin Laverty who has been co-opted to run the cave registry. Martin is well qualified for this role having developed the database and server side of the British Caving Library. As a bonus, he is not in any caving club at the present moment, and so is ideal for representing direct BCA members at regional level too.

2014 DIARY

July 25-27

NAMHO Conference, Bangor
www.namho.org/bangor2014/

August 22-24

EuroSpeleo, Romania
www.speleoevent.ro

Sunday 24 August

OFD Columns open day

September 26-28

Hidden Earth, Leek
hidden-earth.org.uk/index2.html

Saturday 4 October

SMWCRT Training Day, Penwyllt
www.swmcrt.org

Autumn 2014

Advanced Cave Surveying Workshop. Contact Richard Hill.

Cambrian Mines Trust

The Management and Protection Plan has been finalised and is available for download from <http://www.cambrianmines.co.uk/> and aditnow. This plan details the provisional agreement with Barratt Associates for a hydroelectric scheme that involves reinstating the original mine pipeline and rebuilding the concentrates store to house generators, and in the process provide a substantial income for the Trust.

We are working with Natural Resources Wales to address the discharge, mainly from Pughs Adit and Kingside Level, which is a major source of heavy metal pollution of the River Ystwyth.

Shropshire Caving and Mining Club are conducting explorations of the very extensive Pughs Mine which is currently accessible only by SRT. The Trust aspires to making these workings more assessable but a methodology has not yet been finalised.

I have had several inquiries regarding access, and there have been several visits by organised groups who have travelled from afar as well as a Welsh Mines Society field trip. It is hoped that the current situation of unhindered access to properly equipped groups and individuals can be allowed to continue.

Roy Fellows, Cambrian Mines Trust

Bat Walk and Talk Report

Steve Wadley from Monmouthshire Bat Group very kindly provided an educational evening for cavers on 14 June at the Pendarren Outdoor Education Centre. Our thanks go to Andy Lewington for making this venue available.

We learned about the variety of bats and their habitats that cavers could expect to find both on the surface and underground. Bat detectors

ranging from very cheap ones available at Argos for less than £10 to the professional type that record all details and identify the species were demonstrated to us.

The evening ended with a short walk using the various bat detectors to identify Noctules and Pipistrelles. Steve Wadley has agreed to run a follow-up event later this year.

Richard Hill, CCC Training Officer

Ogof Draenen

SCAFFOLD SHAFT REPAIRED

Cavers visiting Draenen on 21 June found one of the scaffolding bars at the bottom of the big wet scaffold shaft in the entrance series had broken off due to corrosion and the structure above has all become rusty. The missing bar has now been replaced. Any further instability issues should be reported directly to PDCMG.
Stuart France, CCC Conservation Officer

BOULDER SLOPE ON THE MOVE

A major rockfall has occurred at Hall of the One in the Dollimore Series. A substantial volume of boulders appears to have moved down the slope from a gully in Hall of the One through the opening to Into the Black beneath.

The consequences of this rockfall are twofold. First, the rope on the climb down between Hall of One and Into the Black was damaged in two places and has now been replaced. Secondly, a fresh layer of rocks, some rather loose, on the boulder slopes below the climb down towards the streamway requires extra care.

There is no clear explanation of the incident which appears to have been "spontaneous", although there was a very minor earthquake recorded in the Bristol Channel during the window in which this rockfall must have occurred.
Fleur Loveridge, PDCMG

CCC LETTER TO PDCMG

CCC wrote to PDCMG ahead of its June meeting asking that their plans dating from 2010 to block the Drws Cefn entrance to Ogof Draenen to cavers should be halted. PDCMG had set out a timetable during its November 2013 meeting.

Their original argument for blocking it was on conservation grounds, and anticipated over-use, which after 4 years open is now unsustainable. PDCMG's present argument now boils down to this: the landowner wants it blocked, so they refuse to delay implementation or hold talks.

The CCC executive's view, however, is that fresh negotiations should be initiated to adopt Drws Cefn officially, and it also believes that the majority of UK cavers will share its sentiments.

Dave Tyson, CCC Secretary

<http://cambriancavingcouncil.org.uk/pdf/PDCMG-140601-July%202014.pdf>

Access and Conservation News Round-Up

NATURAL RESOURCES WALES

The negotiations with NRW for an all-Wales access agreement to their underground sites are still on-going. I am the third person to hold this portfolio for CCC, and my immediate predecessor simply told me that the draft I was about to receive was “*unsignable*”. He was quite right on that, so I gave NRW a new version replacing all the troublesome clauses. This revision went to NRW in April and it awaits any substantive response from them.

NRW does understand that taking 3+ months to reply is not normal business practice, but the delay is due to more pressing matters. So, on a goodwill basis, they plan to offer us some temporary informal agreements ‘soon’ and we hope it will represent sites in North Wales, Mid-Wales and South Wales while the contract wends its way through their approval systems.

This ‘mini-deal’ is almost in the bag, and we will post further news on the CCC website.

CAVING ON CROW ACCESS LAND

Until recently BCA’s land access policy, drawn up by David Judson as their Legal Officer in the wake of Drws Cefn in 2009 (see page 2) stated that the CRow Act 2000 definitely did not cover caving. This was posted on the BCA website, printed in *Descent*, sent to landowners, and widely trumpeted. It has disappeared from the BCA website, and the reason given is that it had never gained BCA Executive’s approval. Another reversal occurred when Chairman Andy Eavis stated at the June AGM that he “*cannot see how the CRow Act does not apply to caving*”.

All of this results from some Yorkshire cavers, quite independently of BCA or any other caving institution, researching the law as it applies to cave access, in particular the CRow Act 2000 and earlier Acts granting access rights to land for leisure. Their detailed document, the size of a PhD thesis, has been passed to a London QC for review and to obtain formal legal advice.

This legal advice is expected during July and if there is a presumption towards *de jure* cave access rights on Access Land then it will upset the BCA appletart with restrictive agreements at places such as Leck Fell becoming untenable. Access rights will only apply to existing caves since ‘cave digging’ implies modification of the landscape – and that will always require explicit permission from the landowner.

Needless to say, this is potentially divisive and opinions on the matter are highly polarized.

BCA AGM AND C&A COMMITTEE MEETING

Related to the above, BCA received its Access Working Party report at its June AGM, and then wound them up. This brief is being taken over by reviving the BCA Conservation and Access Committee which has not met since 2009.

A meeting is being held on 16 August between BCA Executive and regional council C&A officers. I will be attending to represent CCC, but only in respect of Access Land in Wales since Robin Weare has announced his intention to attend this special meeting to represent the Forest of Dean’s interests independently.

Please give Robin or myself your comments or views to take to this meeting by early August so that they can be studied and collated.

BCA CAVE CONSERVATION HANDBOOK

This weighty tome, which evolved from a 1985 NCA *Protect Our Caves* leaflet, was published in 1997 by NCA, is now out of print, is not in any electronic format, and is hard to acquire. Copies may exist in club libraries but it is not on the BCA website at the time of writing this item.

BCA intends to scan it and to start work on an update. I have a copy, and I find it a somewhat controversial document. To give you a sample from its first page: “*It is extremely unlikely that any open and accessible cave in the country conforms to the definition of [well preserved]. The only cave that is near being conserved is one that has not been found [and] the next best conserved caves are those that are closed for some reason*”. Further on we read: “*Evidence generally indicates that those caves which have some form of access control have suffered less than those with open access*”. Really? I can think of good examples of open caves being well respected and gated caves with management committees doing less well. Politics aside, this handbook does contain much useful guidance on conservation methods and the legalities.

It does not take a genius to work out why this handbook review has got on the BCA ‘to-do list’ right now. BCA needs robust arguments for its position when its credibility is put on the line by recreational cavers pulling on the levers that the law provides to them so as to carry out their sporting activities unimpeded by a national governing body pursuing restrictive policies that hinder participation in the very sport that this organisation exists to facilitate and promote.

Stuart France, CCC Conservation Officer

GREENBRIGE CAVE - ACCESS



Cambrian has negotiated caver access here during recent weeks. A few loose ends remain, but both landowners are now in agreement, and we thank them for their time and generosity.

A mile away is a resurgence with an output of several million gallons a day constantly on to the beach—far more than OFD or DYO. Some of this water is pumped for the public supply.



The cave is gated and so is the approved approach route by a private footpath. There is very limited parking nearby. CCC is currently organising keys: details coming later via the website.

Fixed Aids

One bolt at the Pant Mawr Pot entrance has been replaced due to the effects of torsion. Cavers are asked always to rig a Y-hang.

Some P-hangers have been placed recently in OFD and on the Craig-ar-Nos Cave approach. Gethin Thomas is testing these in slate and on traverses too.

Please come and talk to us before placing any fixed aids of your own for community use.

Vince Allkins, CCC Equipment

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Twll Clogfaen — cave access scheme

Tony Donovan and Roy Morgan in the main, helped by others, discovered a new cave on Forestry land near Merthyr Tydfil last year. Grid Ref SO 022 084. CCC has recently agreed a temporary access agreement with NRW until the national contract (see page 3) comes into force. There is ample off-road parking nearby and the entrance is only a stone's throw from the car park area.

You will need two large adjustable spanners to get in since this is the first cave in Wales with a 'Derbyshire Lock' - in other words there is no lock, only a bolt.

The cave is about 200m long and 40m deep with some pretty formations in chambers and ends with a sump in one direction and a large aven in the other. In between is some small clean streamway which it seems floods severely. The entrance now has a fixed steel ladder in place, and the middle photo shows Roy on the original electron ladder. At 77, Roy is likely the oldest cave digger in Wales, and we send him and Tony our congratulations on this interesting find.

Please send news items, short articles, club profiles and newsworthy photos for the next issue to Dave Tyson by 30th September 2014

Wealden Cave and Mine Society — WCMS — Club Profile

The majority of our club members live in the South East of England, principally in the counties of Surrey, Sussex and Kent. In this area, but mainly in Surrey, there are a number of important mine-workings which WCMS is active in protecting and studying. The underground sand-workings in Reigate are a popular local visitor attraction, now managed by the society and opened for public visits each year.



WCMS has been caving in Wales since the 1970s, but activities in South Wales, and around the Swansea Valley in particular, have increased markedly since our 2009 renovation of the former Penwyllt Inn which is known locally as 'The Stump'. This is a traditional Welsh stone building with a slate roof and spectacular views over the hills. There is space for up to 18 members and their guests in two bunkrooms, plus two showers/WCs, a common room, kitchen and a kit-storage room.



Our Society, founded in 1967, had accumulated funds over many years with the aim of securing accommodation for its members when going away caving. Initially we focused on finding a building in Somerset, but when a lease of The Stump was offered to us by SWCC nearby, it was an opportunity we decided to grab.

The cottage had been kept reasonably weather-tight, but otherwise required a complete refit with new internal floors and walls, and full installation of wiring and plumbing to suit our requirements. We are now in the process of getting a connection to the electricity power grid, and will soon no longer need our generator. Our new connection brings the additional benefit of an upgrade to the power supply at SWCC and for Swindon Speleological Society who have been leasing the cottage next door from SWCC for many years before we arrived.

We also have the use of a unique cabin in Somerset. It dates from the late 1940s, was extended in the 1950s, and has remained much the same since. To stay there is to take yourself back 50 years to experience caving accommodation from a previous generation. It is likely there is no other caving club hut like it left in the UK.

New members are drawn to us for a number of reasons, but accommodation at such prime locations is important for some, as is being able to provide a variety of subterranean activities during the week in the otherwise barren South East.



Our interest in mines is not limited to the South East, and each year there is normally one or more visits to the mine-workings in North Wales, as well as to other places in the UK including, of course, all the major caving regions.

enquiries@wcms.org.uk