

# Cambrian Caving Council

## Statement on Large Cave Systems in Wales

### Introduction

The opening of a fourth entrance to Ogof Draenen, Twll Du, has highlighted the following:

- i) That legislation relating to sites scheduled for their cultural or historical importance can be just as significant to cave and mine explorers as that relating to sites selected for biological or geological importance. Permission for surface and underground work should thus be sought from not only landowners (or their agents) but also, for scheduled areas, Cadw and/or Natural Resources Wales.
- ii) A lack of consensus and policy on the desirability, implications, and responsibilities of opening new cave entrances

### Speleogenesis

Some large caves are unlikely to possess more than a single entrance due to their geology and hydrology, for example Dan yr Ogof. Other large caves have multiple entrances already, for example Ogof Ffynnon Ddu and Daren Cilau, with three and two entrances respectively used for routine access.

### Conservation

A single cave entrance policy is not always an appropriate strategy for large and complex cave systems, especially where the geology dictates that there could be further entrances to be discovered. It also means that there is extra wear and tear on the entrance series and strategic routes used to link up sections of a large cave; cave visitors may become more tired and careless as their journey length increases; the options are also reduced for cavers who have limited time at their disposal or who wish to focus their underground time on an activity such as cave surveying, scientific studies or cave photography, rather than on travel within the cave; also many people do not wish to camp underground with all that it entails. Cave conservation depends on visitor behavior, while visitors are inside a cave. A single entrance then is no more beneficial than multiple entrances if cave visitors lack care and consideration.

### Access Policies

A cave access strategy should aim to be inclusive and to take account of the views and needs of the whole caving community. Where possible, it needs to treat people of different abilities and ages with equality. Without this wider community backing, a single entrance policy or a key distribution system in which cave keys are not always readily available, will cause division and may soon fall into disrepute. The next stage may be cavers creating additional entrances in order to facilitate access, exploration and projects, or by the removal of gates and locks, leading to a loss of control by the cave management with potentially damaging outcomes for the cave environment and wider relationships.

### Surveying

It is important for all caves, but especially for large cave systems, that an accurate and detailed cave survey is produced and made widely available. It could be issued in stages as new sections are added and this should be done as soon as possible after their discovery rather than waiting for the completion of a full cave survey. From the very outset, the survey should show significant surface and subsurface features, both physical and historic, for example with shading or enclosing areas inside a coloured line boundary. This will help enable conservation decisions to be made, as well as providing a framework for responsible future exploration.

### Consulting Statutory Conservation Bodies

Scheduling, in a caving context, includes not only the land surface where the cave entrances are located, but also what is inside the cave – and continuing to the centre of the Earth. Recent changes to statute law have made even accidental damage into an offence. Any damage to a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) or a historic site such as a Scheduled Monument (SM) may result in Criminal Proceedings, as ignorance of the site's existence is no longer a valid excuse.

Some scheduled sites in Wales cover large areas of land. The features being conserved there may not be uniformly distributed or even obvious to the casual visitor. The scheduling of land does not rule out cave exploration activities within it, but it does mean that the intended explorers will need to have obtained

official consent before starting their activities. So if in any doubt, the statutory conservation bodies must be consulted, that is Natural Resources Wales and Cadw. Supplementary information sources include the county-level Archaeological Trusts and the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monument of Wales. All of these bodies are investing in new technology and have excellent websites providing maps, reports, photographs and other online resources. They are more than happy to advise if asked.

A very useful additional source of underground information is the Cambrian Cave Registry as it now incorporates layers and links for both SSSIs and SMs. Search under Sites at:  
<http://www.cambriancavingcouncil.org.uk/registry/CCRM.htm>