

# The 2022 Annual General Meeting of the Cambrian Caving Council was held Online on Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> March at 7:00 pm.

## Minutes As Amended by the 2023 AGM

### Attendance

Stuart France (CSS), Martyn Farr (CDG), Allan Richardson (SWCC), John Sheehy (GWENT), Steve Holding (SMT), Mark Tringham (GSS), Dan Thorne (SMWCRT), Oliver Burrows (PUG), Mike Moore (SMT), Adrian Fawcett (CSS), Nick de Gare Pitt (Brynmawr), Jennie Lawrence (Hades), Vince Allkins (SWCC), Martin Lavery (Cave Registry), Roy Fellows (CMT).

### 1. Chairman's Welcome

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the Zoom meeting, though his preference was for an "in person" meeting.

### □2. Apologies for Absence

Barry Hill (Hereford), Mary Rogers (Treasurer), Chris Howes (Morgannwg), John Hine (FoDCCAG), Frank Tully (Wessex), Richard Hill (Training Officer).

### □3. Minutes of the 2021 AGM

- a) Accuracy □ b) Matters arising

There were no comments and no matters arising.

### Acceptance of the minutes

Prop Steve Holding 2<sup>nd</sup> Martin Lavery all in favour passed.

### 4. Applications for Membership

None

### 5. The Officer's Reports are below.

#### • Chairman Report

The past year has seen mixed developments, some positive and some negative. We are all passionate about our interest in the underground world and we must try and ensure that we continue to promote ourselves and the sport. Access is, above all, a priority. The CROW situation has yet to be definitively resolved but even more disappointing is the situation regarding Cave Access Ltd (CAL). Our officers invested tremendous time and effort to set up this mine access scheme in conjunction with Natural Resources Wales (NRW) back in 2015. The licensing scheme has worked well over the six years. However, in November 2021 NRW decided to cancel the arrangement. Our Conservation and Access officer will update us on this during the meeting. It is apparent that access issues remain as sensitive as ever.

Since the outbreak of the Covid pandemic our activities have been limited and caver numbers have witnessed an inevitable slow decline. With relaxation of restrictions I feel we need to give support to events that both set our sport in a good light and increase participation. In that respect it was disappointing that major events like Hidden Earth were postponed in 2021 and that Cambrian did not feel able to support the proposed Cavefest event last year. These gatherings are invaluable on every level.

Holding meetings by Zoom has been an extremely important way of maintaining contact over the past two years but there is no substitute for face to face gatherings. Cambrian may wish to hold more virtual meetings in the future but I certainly feel that holding at least a 'live' AGM in alternating regions is crucial in order to

meet people and discuss affairs in depth. This encourages greater participation, new faces, and certainly helps foster our relationship with other like-minded bodies such as mining societies.

I have enjoyed and felt privileged to serve as the Cambrian Chairman for the last few years but I feel the time has now come for me to step down. On behalf of all cavers I thank the Committee members for their excellent work over the past year and I wish you all well for the future. These are very interesting times.

Martyn Farr  
There were no questions for the Chairman

• **Secretary Report**

A quiet year on the Secretarial front with nothing to report.

As I am also the BCA Secretary, I have attended all the meetings over the past year, BCA is now in a much more stable place with no changes to the Exec in the past year. The main BCA business of the year has been CROW, this is covered by Stuart in his report.

I am willing to stand again for the position of Secretary,

Allan Richardson

There were no questions for the Secretary.

• **Treasurer Report (Year ending 31/12/2021)**

The recently audited end of year accounts show an increase in funds of £916.64. This leaves CCC's current bank balance at £6,441.33.

2021 was once again an extremely quiet year finance wise, even more so than 2020.

I have been persuaded to stand again as treasurer, with the kind offer of assistance from John Sheehy with IT tasks.

Many thanks also to Ian Adams again for his prompt auditing.

Mary Rogers  
Treasurer

There were no questions for the Treasurer.

• **Conservation & Access Officer Report**

**COVID**

The pandemic has continued for another year with another lockdown from Christmas 2020 to March 2021 but thankfully no more of them despite the Delta variant taking hold in the spring of 2021 and the less dangerous but more contagious Omicron variant emerging in autumn. Restrictions on outdoors activities were lifted in the latter part of 2021 and should end in all other respects in Spring 2022.

There have been no Cambrian newsletters in the past year for the reason that caving activity has been depressed, although John Sheehy and I have tried to keep the website refreshed even if only with news of endless tweaking of social and travel rules by the government. Cambrian has now resumed its caver training

offering with Rich Hill busy scheduling further courses following on from successful surveying and photography courses held in early 2022. Details of upcoming courses are on the CCC website.

Commercial operators and educational bodies see light at the end of the Covid tunnel as outdoors education and adventure providers are beginning to operate once again in a meaningful way after a very damaging two years; likewise show caves that have re-opened to the public.

## **NATURAL RESOURCES WALES**

NRW has appeared dormant for another year with its offices and recreational facilities closed or unstaffed as many of its staff, it seems, worked from home, or not much, or not at all.

We were surprised therefore to be invited to a video meeting in June 2021 about the Cave Access Ltd mines access scheme. The old and new NRW contacts for the mine scheme were present. There was no agenda, little notice, and it gave me the impression of an ambush. NRW has become nervous under pressure from litigious single-interest groups, fearing they may launch legal actions such as Judicial Review of its decisions to grant explorer access against the backdrop of NRW's conservation role. NRW told us at this meeting that mine access permission had already been stopped, but this was without consulting us or putting anything into writing. We argued their decision was a breach of contract and thus it was unlawful and could be subjected to JR not by activists but by us. NRW then said they did not want to stop explorer access but they needed "access permissions to become more robust" and NRW needed to become "more commercial". They said visitor footfall was nevertheless "important to them". We pointed out to NRW that the CAL scheme had been set up to provide lawful, accountable and managed explorer access that would otherwise inevitably take place covertly on a random basis, in other words trespass by those minded to do that.

There was a long and at times lively discussion about bolts and fixed aids generally, as to who placed them, their competence, what and test documentation supported their continued use. Gethin Thomas was able to reassure them that the installers were trained and the bolts were pull-tested. NRW feels the buck stops with them as landowner - although NRW are acting on behalf of Welsh Ministers when mines are located in government forestry. CAL's agreement is thus made with the Welsh Ministers not NRW, except for Temple Mine which is on NRW land, and it is not clear if WM were in the loop or whether NRW was acting entirely on its own initiative. This all happened while the BCA Judicial Review case against the Welsh Ministers was very active.

A further discussion in a similar vein followed on bats where it emerged that NRW had little insight into seasonal patterns of bat activity. Bats catching Covid from humans got a fair airing too. NRW's view was that some sites needed bat surveys (done at explorers' expense) or seasonal access schemes. We pointed out that a seasonal access scheme had been proposed for Draethen Lead Mines by CAL and then refused by NRW so we had no confidence in them suggesting this as a model for elsewhere.

Follow-up inquiries revealed that NRW possessed little bat data from mine sites in the CAL scheme, and the only substantial longitudinal bat study results they could provide to us was for Cae Coch Sulphur mine. I offered to collect bat data with data loggers in the CAL mines on a rolling basis but said this would not happen under duress from NRW. Bat counts and seasonal checks under licence had been done at Draethen lead mines and results provided to NRW, and a summer access system has remained blocked despite relevant evidence being provided to NRW that bats do not hibernate in summer nor use the mines during daylight hours. NRW should have known that already. It makes their refusal for summer daytime access at Draethen perverse to the point of being obstructive.

The matter rested there: NRW saying they needed more bat information and the CAL licensing scheme would be replaced with a non-contractual 'permissions system' based on the same conditions on a timescale of weeks not months. Nothing then happened for 5 months until NRW called another video meeting. By this time NRW had done a business deal with Go Below enabling commercial access at the Rhiwbach mine for them alone, the padlock code had been changed, and we found ourselves locked out with no notice which was another breach of contract by Welsh Ministers.

NRW had in the meanwhile split itself up. In operational terms it was no longer a national body with national policy but instead had become six regional units which can do differently as each pleases. This new operational model implies creating six regional CAL agreements running in parallel, not one running nationally, reflecting the whim of respective area officers such as the officer for North West Wales who alone broke this particular news to us in the meeting. The agenda (or lack of one) then moved on to bats, surveys, and footfall patterns. NRW wanted more bat data but it has no budget, while the explorer side of the table would not obtain bat data while under threat of access closures by NRW as that would be a waste of our time and money as had already been amply demonstrated at Draethen. In effect NRW had once again revoked the CAL agreement, and done it again verbally and again without giving any notice, and without, it seems, authority from Welsh Ministers who are the legal counterparty. Since that meeting, the CAL directors have written to the Chief Executive of NRW alleging the various breaches of contract. A month later we had a reply that the scheme was still running as-is, and nothing further has emerged at the time of writing this report.

The Mynydd Llangattock Cave Management and Access Committee, MLCMAC, formerly an NRW committee and chaired by them, was never really wound up in any way more formal than biscuits and coffee at NRW's Abergavenny office with them symbolically handing over their spare Agen Allwedd padlocks and keys to the cavers. We assume that NRW through its NNR land lease has a contractual duty to manage cave access for the Beaufort Estate's land. But NRW don't want to run caving there anymore and have quietly 'walked off the job' without the estate being informed, it seems.

The cast-off MLCMAC will have to talk with on a formal basis the Estate eventually to set up a new access agreement, and at that point NRW's position will have to be presented to them by us. So MLCMAC has unanimously decided that it wishes to become part of CCC so as to acquire a clear status, access to existing banking and website etc. CCC already manages Ogof Capel and Ogof Gofan and some minor caves, and manages mine access through CAL. Possibly CAL should extend its remit which provides the benefit of limited liability due to being a company plus its BCA insurance as an ACB. This whole topic of CCC managing access where necessary, albeit at arm's length, in effect through specialist or local subcommittees like CAL or MLCMAC needs an airing at the AGM.

## **CAVING JUDICIAL REVIEW**

The court process started on 9th April 2020 with the filing of papers alleging that it was unlawful to have excluded caving from a Welsh Government programme to improve recreational access in Wales on the sole grounds that WG considered caving not to be an open-air recreation (i.e. NRW's mantra). David Rose as CROW liaison officer of BCA was the Complainant, not me, although it was myself as the Access Officer for Wales who had been disinvited from the WG programme.

From a caving perspective, we wanted the High Court, through a Judicial Review of the exclusion decision, to decide if the CROW Act applied to caving (or not) since the statutory interpretation issue was the foundation for the WG exclusion decision. It was also quite illogical for WG to exclude caving on the grounds that "CROW does not apply" when the whole purpose of this programme was to widen the reach of CROW rights. The government clearly had no problem with inviting mountain bikers, equestrians and wild swimmers into its programme when there are clear statutory prohibitions of their activities on CROW Access Land at the present. Thus WG was discriminatory against caving.

To cut a long story short, the case ended on 8th December 2021 via a compromise agreement whereby the government agreed to reconsider caving after all, which is a complete volte-face. The caving side has had to submit its case for a review in writing by 1st February 2022, which was done, and the government has the following 2 months to respond, also in writing, giving its reasons for its decision to improve cave access (or not) in terms of its statutory interpretation of the CROW Act.

Lawyers advise that the final court order to “reconsider and explain” the cave access issue in isolation would produce a much cleaner future potential Judicial Review case than the access improvement programme contretemps. We are now waiting for the WG response to our caving submission. This is a good piece of writing by David Rose, assisted by the BCA CROW sub-committee members and solicitor who handled the JR case. This is a link to the caving document:

<https://british-caving.org.uk/documents/representations-to-welsh-government/>

### **NATIONAL ACCESS FORUM FOR WALES (NON-STATUTORY NRW COMMITTEE)**

NRW has convened a few NAFW meetings via video in the past year but I have attended none of them. I read the minutes and email generated by NAFW. This is because I feel they are pointless self-promotion exercises for NRW, and because NRW attached itself to the High Court case as an Interested Party that possibly created the Welsh Government’s anti-caving position, and partly that the forum is not at all a forum in the sense that it provides round-table discussion opportunities on policy. Instead it is highly stage-managed by NRW, and presentational rather than consultative in style.

### **NRW MINES ACCESS SCHEME / CAVE ACCESS LTD**

As noted above, this scheme is still operating despite NRW’s unease during the past year and two attempts to close it down. Anyone wanting to obtain access permission for the CAL mines list should register at the CAL website ([caveaccess.co.uk](http://caveaccess.co.uk)) with their name and BCA number. Reports about mine visits are appreciated so that CAL gathers some footfall data about the usage of the scheme.

NRW has advised that the forest west of Tal-y-Bont, Ceredigion, is partially closed due to subsidence of footpaths (rights of way) into the disused mines, and visitors should obey the local signage.

Dave Tyson and I have been exploring and surveying the Hendre Ddu slate mine east of Corris in the past year. This is well off the beaten track and had been the last site on the CAL list to obtain a risk assessment. There is almost nothing published about it, but it turns out to be an interesting place with perhaps 1km of tunnels, a number of adits at different levels, and some quite large workings. We need to make another visit in 2022 when the weather improves to finish this off.

### **BRITISH CAVING ASSOCIATION**

Allan Richardson, now in the role of BCA Secretary as well as Cambrian’s, has to attend all the BCA council meetings. I have attended most of them in the past year as the Cambrian rep. A whole year has now gone by with no changes of personnel at the top table. I leave it to Allan to report on BCA.

### **OFDCMC**

The committee has introduced a new OFD cave key system where visiting cavers with a permit obtain a key box code in advance from the SWCC secretary and help themselves to a key on arrival at the club cottages. This is to avoid close contact with other people. The changing rooms and showers are open again to visitors at £1 per day payable in cash in a money box on site.

### **DYOCAC**

The show cave has had another difficult year again due to Covid, but the access for cavers has been maintained. We are again grateful to the business owners for allowing recreational access against the grim economic backdrop for touristic visits on which their own livelihood depends. This ACB possibly has never sought external financial support because the show cave company met the bills for high quality fixed aids and a comprehensive rescue dump in case of entrapment by floods in the wild part of the cave.

Unfortunately that level of financial support to caving is no longer practical in the present economic climate. Thus to address future maintenance costs which underpin explorer access, the DYOCAC is introducing a £5 per visit charge for cavers towards conservation and access. The official leader for booked groups is exempt from paying the new charge. For further details see the signage under the big dinosaur. Note that payments may have to be made on site and in cash.

## **PDCMG**

The gate damaged in the summer of 2020 has been repaired and refitted as of January 2022 and a replacement lock has recently been fitted. The old keys still work.

The group met by Zoom in June 2021 when very little business was transacted other than electing the same officers for further 2 year terms. The geological officer post remains vacant. The group cannot find a third trustee for the existing access agreement. They are still considering how to form a limited company with 3 directors proposed (Tim Long, Chris Densham and Chris Seal) to replace the failing trustee system. A revised entrances policy was expected to be ready to circulate to member clubs for comment by end of August 2021 and then make any adjustments to it prior to an autumn EGM to consider adopting it; but none of this has happened.

The next open meeting was in December 2021. The draft new access policy was said to have attracted comments from only three member clubs. It is to be recirculated with a clearer request for comments. There had been no progress on forming a limited company. The domain "pdcmg.org.uk" had been hijacked after its subscription lapsed so a new domain "pdcmg.org" had been bought and is hosted by BCA. Their landowner had not responded to requests to allow visits for cave instructor training. The group is concerned about bats catching covid having read the same report as NRW created by a private environmental group. SMCC have downgraded their membership of the group to being observers only. The cave logbook had been stolen and so no footfall data was presented.

The cave gate had not been fixed as of PDCMG's December meeting. The question of creating bat access via this gated entrance was discussed in the context of the upcoming gate repairs and it was deemed that bat access was too difficult to do. Peter Smith (Biology Officer) again asked that the landowner be requested to grant access through any of the entrances for his bat surveys, and the group agreed once again to seek that consent. NRW's representative said they might fund new bat research and any bat-friendly gate repairs.

A number of fixed aid ropes had been replaced in 2021 and funded by donations. A new and very robust rigid ladder for the Balcony Pitch (photo) has been funded and fitted by 'persons unknown' and the old flexible link ladder has simply gone. It was agreed PDCMG will remove the safety rope on the new ladder and require any groups needing one to bring their own. Essentially, the new ladder has been accepted but is disowned by the group.

The EGM about entrance policy is now envisaged as taking place in March or April 2022 but the group want it held in person, not by video, which may discourage some potential attendees.

I have footfall data from my electronic caver counters which cover both the original entrance and Nunnery. Drws Cefn is assumed to be so little used as not worth monitoring. In the calendar year 2021 the original entrance was used on 34 dates and in a total of 48 different hours. The Nunnery entrance was used on 35 dates and in a total of 67 different hours. The Nunnery is used twice as much as the original entrance on Saturdays, by far the busiest weekday. It is unusual for more than one group to visit the cave on any one date. I conclude that the Nunnery is now the preferred entrance for the whole cave system, accounting for 60% of the total entries/exits in 2021, not only on the Saturdays but overall too as measured across the complete year. In 2020 the Nunnery took 51% of visits and in 2019 it took 40% so its usage has been growing significantly in relative terms. These figures suggest a total annual footfall of about 200 cavers split up into about 60 groups.

In previous AGM reports I have provided 'footfall' data for bats using the entrances. This was dropped in 2021 due to vandalism of my bat counter equipment. However, I have observed the number of hibernating

bats while I was walking along Nunnery Passage in the past few years in January or February. No cave visit was made in 2021-Q1 due to the Covid lockdown. In February 2022 I saw 106 bats hibernating, which is another record for Nunnery Passage. The number of bats has been roughly doubling every year since this entrance was re-opened. This multiplying cannot go on forever since in another 3 years the Nunnery Passage alone (rather than all of Ogof Draenen) would by then have as many bats as get counted in all of Agen Allwedd which would be infeasible. Does this growth mean there is a larger bat population, or that the bats prefer the Nunnery to their former winter abode, or some of both? Anyway, the Nunnery is now an important and significant bat roost in both local and national terms, suggesting that Ogof Draenen as a whole is too.

## **CLYDACH GORGE / OGOF CAPEL**

The new Clydach Gorge dual carriageway section only opened to traffic in December 2021 although the plastic tubes that had assured the bat access into Ogof Capel throughout the road works had been removed in August. Cambrian and Costain lost contact following the departure of their liaison officer so we were not notified of any date for restoring cave access at Ogof Capel. The de facto situation is that the road and the cave are both open again, and a handy new large parking layby is available at the end of the new rust-finish metal footbridge at the upper end of Blackrock village.

To reach Ogof Capel, cross this footbridge then follow the A465 downhill to where the path to Devil's Bridge branches off. From the bottom of the first set of steps, follow the A465 along the bottom of its new grassy embankment for another 50 yards downhill until you see a clear narrow footpath on your right going down through a gap in the trees. This leads to the Ogof Capel entrance ladder. The old diagonal footpath from the A465 to Ogof Capel is now overgrown with brambles and impassable.

I have some new footfall data, based on a logbook I placed in 2011 and retrieved in 2022. This is summarized in the table below which shows very modest levels of use. The table rows for 2019-2021 are omitted because the cave was closed then due to the road works. Some coloured tapes have been replaced in 2022, the lock serviced and a new logbook left in the cave. The cave is accessed on average on 7 dates per year. It is unusual for more than one group to visit on the same date. The average group size is 3. Footfall is trending down. The leader list to arrange a visit is at:

<http://www.cambriancavingcouncil.org.uk/ogof%20capel%20leaders.html>

\*Where a group had more than one official leader then both have been counted as joint-leaders.

## **OGOFGOFAN AND CASTLEMARTIN RANGE WEST**

Cambrian's access scheme has been used only lightly in 2021. The range annual general meeting did not take place due to Covid. Anyone wanting to visit should obtain a landowner permit through me about 2 weeks in advance as the site is a tank firing range on which training schedules can change at short notice resulting in loss of public access to the coast path and thus the cave. Also call their answerphone on 01646 662367 on the day before your visit to confirm the coast is still open. This link also provides the firing schedule:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/castlemartin-firing-notice--2/>

## **POTENTIAL NAME CHANGE FOR CCC**

I have purchased the domain name 'caving.wales' while it was available and made it forward clicks to the normal CCC website. This was with a view to CCC changing its name in the not-too-distant future. This needs an airing at the upcoming AGM under AOB. Any decision would have to be postponed to a later AGM after any formal proposal was properly publicised and consulted.

A common problem that I have experienced these past 8 years is that my contacts in other sports or bodies like NRW or WG or a landowner do not understand what Cambrian is or does from its present name. Part of the problem is the word Cambrian which is no place in particular, and Council which seems a bit archaic and inconclusive as to purpose. Most of my contacts initially assume that CCC is a caving club like any other caving club rather than a national representative body, or 'governing body' or 'NGB' as many other sports or government etc refer to national-level sport organisations.

Caving, being what it is, has national bodies that are more representative than governing in character compared to other sports like football or athletics which have strong top-down systems because of the need to organise fixtures and leagues, and perhaps centrally-managed safeguarding too because of the many youth teams and organised regular youth training which does not apply in caving. What is commonplace nowadays is to name national sport bodies using the format 'Sport Country', so there is Cycling UK, Hockey Wales, Swim Wales, Welsh Athletics etc. Most of these acquired their domains before 'dot-Wales' existed, so it is hockeywales.org.uk not hockey.wales, swimwales.org and so on.

My suggestion is that CCC becomes caving.wales and I would like to open a discussion on that. If we need to clarify that 'Wales' in a caving/mining context includes parts of Shropshire and the Forest of Dean then I suggest that the explanation is put into the 'About Us' section of our website rather than complicate the organisation's main title. I realise there is a certain amount of pain for us in changing name, such as sorting out bank accounts and website, and perhaps for some CCC member clubs also needing to change references to CCC to CW instead, but I feel a name change will better equip us.

## **GOING FORWARD**

I am willing to stand again in the same role. If there is anyone willing and able to do this job or can look after some aspect of it, as Gethin Thomas and John Sheehy have kindly been doing, then I would be happy to discuss with you and create more of a team approach.

Clearly if MLCMAC is adopted into Cambrian then it would likely become an access subcommittee that necessarily would involve the CCC C&A officer (but I am already on MLCMAC as an individual). That subcommittee could then take over Ogof Capel since it is on their territory.

CAL is somewhat different because, being a limited company, it has a legal personality of its own. But sitting in those recent difficult meetings with NRW on mines, I do feel that I am representing CCC and Welsh cavers and mine explorers rather than sat in the room playing the role of a company director. Given the direction of travel of the PDCMG towards company status, which is also shared by the several mining companies Roy Fellows is involved with, and Charterhouse Caving Company over in Mendip all sharing the same or similar company model, there is a good case for using CAL to wrapper the MLCMAC (if everyone is willing) and creating stronger links between CAL and CCC (or Caving Wales) whilst not compromising the legal protections that CAL enjoys as a private company.

A further loose end left over from Dave Tyson's time as secretary that we might revisit is Cambrian individual members, akin to DIMs in BCA: cavers who are affiliated to the national body directly rather than through a club or other body. There is a provision for direct members in Cambrian's constitution but we do not have any, and as far as I know we never have. If we ever get any, then what voting rights do they get, if any? BCA got itself into a terrible mess with a 2-house voting system which belatedly has been set to rights via national online balloting under a one-caver-one-vote system. That would be overkill for Cambrian, considering what it is that we do, and that we do not have any problem with direct members right now, only a potential one. My suggestion is to consider removing the provision for direct Cambrian members (leaving only clubs/bodies as its voting members) or if necessary set up a 'direct members body' that would join any future potential individual members into a single voting entity equal to the vote of any conventional club/body at any AGM or other meeting.

Stuart France, CCC Conservation and Access Officer  
27th February 2022

Additional comments by Stuart at the meeting:-



- a) CAL has challenged NRW at Chief Executive level about their attempted summary termination of the Mines Access Agreement. This comprises two formal contracts signed as Deeds on the respective properties of the Welsh Ministers and NRW. NRW now agrees that the contracts are still active and we've had no further contact from them for 3 months now.
- b) Stuart has replaced the Aggy log book, which was installed in October 2021, showing c 500 people per year visiting Aggy. Stuart will also replace the log books in Ogof Cnwec and Craig a Ffynnon shortly.
- c) Ogof Draenen has a footfall of c 200 people per year. The electronic counters show that the Nunnery entrance to Draenen is getting more use than the main entrance at weekends.

#### Questions to Stuart

From Adrian Fawcett, re the use of water proof paper for the log books, quality chosen wasn't good enough, need in future to use something slightly thicker.

Stuart started a discussion on cave keys, could one key fit all, this is something to consider for the future, where it is politically deliverable.

#### • **CCC Training Officer Report**

CCC has started to run training events again. A CSG workshop happened in Autumn based at SWCC HQ. Due to Covid we have been unable to run our usual winter bat walk.

In February Mark Burkey ran a successful a cave photography workshop again based at SWCC. March, April and May we have 3 separate SRT workshops all based at Llangorse wall. All three dates are full.

All courses fronted by professionals are now charged for at an appropriate cost to pay for the instructor/facilitator and venue. Those run by volunteers will receive expenses. Any shortfall will be covered by BCA as long as the work is shared around.

CCC have another photography workshop and surveying workshop in the pipeline but with no confirmed date as yet.

I am happy to stand again.

Thanks

Rich

CCC Training Officer

#### Comments

People were in favour of the walks that he does with Alan Bowring.  
Martin Laverty suggested that closer links with the Geopark would be a good idea.

#### • **Equipment and Techniques Officer** □

I am running a bolting course at Penyllt this year, details to be advertised.

Vince then gave notice that he is standing down at the next AGM.

#### • **Legal and Insurance Issues**

Yet again, I have had no approaches re my position on CCC. I do remark that I do get approached for my thoughts on various matters relating to mining law, in an informal manner. As such, I have to categorically state that I do not, and never will, give "Advice", I give opinion as is the normal practice in the law profession. □ □ I have only ever been approached on one single occasion relative to my position on CCC, that was to give opinion on the format and wording of an access agreement. □ □ As I understand that my position on CCC is about to change, I feel that a 'winding up of remit' report is appropriate.

□ I look forward to serving the caving and mine exploration in whatever new capacity is decided. □ □ Kindest regards □ □

Roy Fellows

Stuart France said Legal and Insurance are really BCA matters these days, and BCA is buying in professional level advice as and when needed. It would be better to utilise Roy's knowledge as Cambrian's future "Mining Officer". Replacing an old role with a new one would imply a constitutional change in 2023, proper notice of the change having been given, but in the interim we can co-opt Roy as a Mining Adviser as well as him remaining as L&I Officer this year.

### • **Cambrian Cave Registry 2021-2022**

The format of the Register has not changed during the year but there have been over 50 new entries plus some amendments. West Wales, Gower, and North Wales have had most attention, together with many updates to the Swansea Valley area arising from work for SWCC's 75th anniversary.

□ I have been happy to welcome several new correspondents to those who have become regulars, and am always more than happy to receive news and feedback.

□ A possibly significant approach was made by the 'Team Leader Geospatial' of Natural Resources Wales early in February when they were interested in "your caving geospatial layers to utilise against our own datasets" and "in finding out if there is a possibility of NRW and yourselves discussing a data licence agreement". I immediately affirmed our readiness to cooperate, and asked for more details; no response has been received in the subsequent 3 weeks... □ □ Martin Lavery □ □ Cave Registrar

### • **Webmaster Report**

It has been a very quiet year on the website, with changes only being made in the last quarter to publicise the resumption of training courses and other newsworthy events – being mostly changes to cave access (Draenen Gate, Ogof Capel, Ogof Ffynnon Ddu and Day Yr Ogof).

I have also co-ordinated mailshots to member clubs to advertise training courses and in doing so have discovered a small number of member clubs' emails were undeliverable. These include the Welsh CDG, Adit Now and Wirral Caving Group.

I'm happy to continue in the role in 2022

John Sheehy

Webmaster

### Comments

The discussion of this report revealed that Aditnow is still available now but as a read-only version while the website is being re-developed. The Wirral Caving Group is defunct. Martyn Farr agreed to find a new contact for the Welsh CDG

### **Newsletter Editor**

Due to Covid, there has been no Newsletter in the past year.

6. Received Reports from other groups:-

#### a) **FODCCAG**

FoDCCAG report to CCC AGM March 2022.

Our unique Access & Management agreement since 1998 to enter the Crown minerals in the Forest of Dean continues to be renewed annually (this applies to the caves & mines, but coal is excluded).

It has been a quiet year, primarily due to Covid, but it is now good to see a resurgence of digging & underground exploration.

Sewage pollution of Wet Sink (Slaughter Stream Cave) unfortunately still continues (from the Joyford Mill pumping station & its associated pipework).

Work has taken place between FoDCCAG and Welsh Water to implement vastly improved Emergency Response Protocols in the event of a failure of the system outside of increased flows due to rainfall. These have been implemented on a number of occasions throughout both 2021 and already in the early months of 2022 and this has seen a vast reduction in the amount of sewage discharged into the cave. So a positive point.

However, the Welsh Water records for Combined Sewage Overflows at Joyford for 2020 indicated 3 overflows totalling 42 ½ hours,

( <https://www.dwrcymru.com/en/our-services/wastewater/combined-storm-overflows/hereford> ).

Examination of another web page claims the telemetry used was only 8% efficient, thus giving a total of about 518.5 hrs

( <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/e834e261b53740eba2fe6736e37bbc7b/page/Download-local-data/?org=theriverstrust> ).

The reason given for the Welsh Water's inaccurate records has been given as "communications issue – escalated through business as usual for communications failures )" !!

There is much interesting information on the web page, useful if any other caves or mines are affected by sewage.

FoDCCAG has undertaken its own detailed monitoring of the Joyford CSO throughout 2021, and our figures record 7 major incidents and 1 minor incident which gives a total run time of 818 hours, and if the additional run time for the minor incident is included when a discharge into storm drains was recorded, this takes the year up to 866 hours. A twenty-fold increase on the published figures for 2020.

The FoDCCAG figures are without any shadow of a doubt vastly more accurate than Welsh Water will have recorded, so it will be interesting to see what they publish.

Permits for outside visiting groups to access the caves and mines have continued to be issued, online, free of charge – contact [permits@fodccag.org.uk](mailto:permits@fodccag.org.uk)

A few years ago, Pine Martens were reintroduced to the Forest of Dean, & trail cameras have been placed outside many entrances of our SSSI mines to record the activities of the Bats & Pine Martens. One such camera has been vandalised. I have yet to receive a report concerning this.

The group continues to liaise with the local Caving Clubs and provides a route for discussions with Forestry England and other land owners within the Forest of Dean.

John Hine, Hon Sec, FoDCCAG.

Paul Taylor, Hon Chairman, FoDCCAG.

No comments on the FoDCCAG report.

## b) **SMWCRT**

### SMWCRT Callout Summary 2021

In 2021 SMWCRT was involved in 9 Rescue incidents, a decrease of 1 on the previous year. This total however included our epic 3-day rescue and the record for the longest stretcher carry in UK Rescue history to date.

The rescues for the year are listed below starting on the first day of the New Year.

Date	Location	Details
01/01/2021	Llainbanal, Preseli Mountains, Pembrokeshire	Dog fell into a rift. Dog was rescued by a member of public on scene before Team members arrived. 10 TM on standby.
01/03/2021	Odyn-Fach, near Merthyr	Two dogs had entered natural tunnels in the side of a shakehole North of Merthyr Common, near Dowlais Top. After 3 days of digging the passageways open to allow entry to rescuers, one dog was rescued. Unfortunately, the second dog could not be found, despite the use of remote cameras on extension rods for the 4th day. Long shifts digging in difficult constricted passages made progress slow and tiring for Team members. TM involved 23, 5 on standby.
08/04/2021	Bedlinog, Bargoed	Request from RSPCA to assist with rescue of a foal that had fallen down a crevice. The pony was retrieved by a local with a rope. 9 TM on standby.
09/05/2021	Pen-ffordd-goch pond (Keepers' Pond / Ogof Draenen	Police made a speculative SARCALL call. Cavers seen going underground at 07:30 and had not returned to their cars by midnight. Request to find out more info. Police had tasked other forces to attend next of kin homes. SMWCRT used contacts to make contact with partner of one of the cavers, who assured SMWCRT that the cavers had a 06.00 next day callout time. Incident involved 2 males and 1 female. 5 TM on standby.
03/07/2021	Overdue in OFD 2	Reading University trip, exit was slow due to ankle injury. Casualty damaged her foot/ankle in the streamway,

		Party including 2 males made their way back to Cwm Dwr. Assistance given at entrance via rope and harness. TM 7 deployed, 2 on standby.
23/07/2021	Porth yr Ogof	SMWCRT initially contacted by Dyfed Powys Police to report of injured person who stated he was unable to exit an unknown cave and had intermittent mobile phone reception. It transpired that he was located at the resurgence to Porth Yr Ogof and on the surface. As the incident progressed the casualty was able to further communicate with the police and it was soon established that he was located at the resurgence to Porth yr Ogof. As this was now a surface incident and with a senior CBMRT member in close vicinity this incident was handed over to CBMRT. 6 TM on standby.
04/09/2021	Pendulum Passage, OFD2	On a pull through trip in Pendulum Passage, OFD2 a rock fall caused bruising to 2 members of a party of 3. 1 person exited the cave to alert CR as assistance required by injured persons described as "walking wounded". Nature of injuries not known at start. Casualties assisted up climbs by rescuers in order to exit cave. Both had significant bruising to limbs and body. 23 TM deployed, 8 on standby.
18/09/2021	Machynlleth	Request from Police to search old mine sites and assist Mountain rescue with surface searches South of Machynlleth. Missing person had not been seen for six days. 24 hours over the two days 18th and 19th Sept. This includes additional planning & prep time evenings and

		mornings for team leaders. 9 TM assisting on Saturday– 10 TM assisting on Sunday physically on the ground - but with one other at home assisting on both days and 2 others doing several hours of work in the evening of the 18th as well, which needs to be factored in.
06/11/2021 – 08/11/2021	Upper Smithy OFD – Cwm Dwr	A caver exited OFD via Cwm Dwr to alert CR that due to a rockfall a male caver had fallen down a rift in Upper Smithy, Cwm Dwr. Casualty found to have multiple injuries. Nature of injuries meant a long and arduous stretcher carry and made the Rescue protracted and logistically difficult. Cavers from all over the UK travelled to Penwyllt to assist. This was the longest stretcher carry in UK Cave Rescue history. 280 Cave Rescuers involved including those from 9 other CR Teams and 19 on standby. Duration 54 hours.

No questions or comments on the SMWCRT report.

## 7. BCA Matters

None to report.

## 8. Elections

Election of CCC Officers and co-option of Newsletter Editor and Webmaster, also the creation of a new Committee Post.

Chairman **Adrian Fawcett** prop Stuart France 2<sup>nd</sup> Jennie Lawrence elected

Secretary **Allan Richardson** prop Martin Laverty 2<sup>nd</sup> Stuart France elected

Treasurer **Mary Rogers** prop Allan Richardson 2<sup>nd</sup> John Sheehy elected

Conservation & Access **Stuart France** prop Allan Richardson 2<sup>nd</sup> Vince Allkins elected

E & T **Vince Allkins** prop Stuart France 2<sup>nd</sup> Dan Thorne elected

Training **Richard Hill** prop Stuart France 2<sup>nd</sup> Dan Thorne elected

Legal and Insurance **Roy Fellows** prop Stuart France 2<sup>nd</sup> Vince Allkins elected

Cave Registrar **Martin Laverty** prop Allan Richardson 2<sup>nd</sup> Roy Fellows elected

Webmaster **John Sheehy** prop Stuart France 2<sup>nd</sup> Martin Laverty co-opted

Newsletter Editor **John Sheehy** prop Jennie Lawrence 2<sup>nd</sup> Vince Allkins co-opted

A temporary non-voting Committee post was created for a Mining Advisor with Roy Fellows being co-opted, prop Stuart France, 2<sup>nd</sup> Vince Allkins. This post is planned to be developed formally as Mining Officer and the P&I Officer role removed at the 2023 AGM.

## 9. AOB

a) Stuart France, as C&A officer for the past 8 years, said that the name CCC was not understood by government bodies or other sports or landowners with whom he came into contact. They generally would assume CCC was another caving club. The problem is that sports are not these days run by 'councils' and Cambrian is not a country. So a potential name change for CCC was discussed starting with the suggestion of "Caving Wales" which uses modern simpler "Sport Country" format adopted by many other national sports bodies, and moving on to alternative ideas that embraced a wider territory and a wider range of underground interests, but no clear favourite emerged from this meeting. An article will be written for a future Newsletter to broaden the discussion and clarify the issues.

b) The roles of newsletter editor and webmaster are co-options. Stuart France suggested, as part of a modernisation of CCC, that they be combined into a new single executive officer role called Information Officer, given the importance of communication and presence these days. It does not mean one person has to do all the website and Newsletter work, it could be a team effort, but only one person would have responsibility. This also implies a constitutional change so it would need to be taken to the next AGM, and explained beforehand in an article in a future Newsletter.

c) Likewise, the L&I Officer has not been consulted on L&I matters by anyone for some years, and L&I matters are managed by BCA these days, so the next AGM will be asked to abolish the position. The present incumbent, Roy Fellows, happens to be amply qualified to serve in a new Mining Officer role which can be agreed at the next AGM as it needs a constitutional change.

d) Likewise, the potential abolition of CCC Individual Membership since nobody has ever asked to be one. To be aired in a future Newsletter and taken to the next AGM.

AOB then moved off constitutional reform ideas and on to other topics:

e) MLCMAC. The meeting noted that the cave management committee for Llangattock and the Clydach Gorge had not operated normally since NRW, who owned and chaired the committee had walked away from being involved with MLCMAC about three years ago. The remaining caving members of MLCMAC have no status now and they do not feel able to form yet another Access Control Body (ACB) and they had decided between themselves to apply to be taken over by CCC as a non-constitutional subcommittee thus have a parent body, access to banking and website etc.

Concern was raised as to how this is presented to the caving world, to avoid the impression that CCC had set out to acquire an even wider ACB remit besides Ogof Capel and Ogof Gofan, Greenbridge Cave, and the creation of CAL to run a mines access scheme born of two existing and one former CCC officers. It does not need any constitutional change but an explanatory article in a future Newsletter will clearly help to explain how this situation and the solution have come about. A proposal that CCC should adopt the former MLCMAC as a sub-committee and that the people formerly involved should continue to run it on a day-to-day basis was proposed by Allan Richardson, 2<sup>nd</sup> Jennie Lawrence, and passed nem con.

f) Upper Dinas Silica Mine. Roy Fellows reported that the access problems were now resolved with the new landowner. There is also the possibility of accommodation for divers adjacent to the site. Roy was also trying to convince the owner of the accommodation to open a campsite.

g) Ogof Marros. John Sheehy asked about unsupervised caver access to Ogof Marros which is understood to be controlled by the original explorers and only with an official leader from that group. Martin Lavery and Stuart France offered to contact Phil Knight so as to investigate.

h) Next executive meeting. This would normally take place immediately after an afternoon AGM, but as this year's AGM was being held as an evening Zoom meeting it was decided to postpone it to Monday 4<sup>th</sup> April at 1900h.

10. **Date and Location** of next CCC Annual General Meeting March 2023

Date and time to be decided later.

Allan Richardson

Secretary

Cambrian Caving Council.



