

April 2017

Issue 53

W A L E S

U N D E R G R O U N D

News In Brief

- The North Wales Wildlife Trust is still in the throes of purchasing Minera Quarry and so no decision on underground access is likely for a while.
- NRW, BCA and CCC are holding a meeting to discuss the issue of CRoW and caving.
- Gwent Caving Club have found and reopened up some old mines in the Blaenavon area including a mine level near the Foxhunter car park.
- The continued work on the 'Heads of the Valleys' road will disrupt access to some of the caves in the Clydach Gorge this summer, although official closure notices at cave entrances have yet to be spotted.

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Photo credits

Richard Hill
Ian Adams

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Cambrian Caving Council Newsletter

Cylchlythyr y Cyngor Ogofeydd Cymreig

Improving Access for Outdoor Recreation

The Welsh Government has finally decided that Wales really does need a better and fairer approach to public access for outdoor recreation. Lesley Griffiths AM, Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs, in a written statement released during February, said that the responses to the WG's 2015 Green Paper consultation have convinced her that law reform is now desirable:

<http://gov.wales/about/cabinet/cabinetstatements/2017/accesstooutdoors/?lang=en>

The statement outlines the results of a consultation exercise following the publication of a green paper on access in 2015. This elicited the views of both individuals and organisations on possible changes to legislation to simplify and extend access to land for the purposes of recreation. It was noted in the July 2105 CCC newsletter that the green paper mentioned walking, cycling, rock climbing, horse riding and access to water but failed to mention anything related to caving or mine exploring—this should be a serious concern to the caving community. There are a significant number of important speleological sites in South Wales and a similar number of mining sites in Mid and North Wales.

CCC submitted a formal response and it is thought that a handful of caving clubs and individuals also responded to the survey. The government published a report in mid-2016 outlining the responses that it received. It was disappointing to find it made no mention of caving or potholing. It appears that the cycling lobby, who submitted thousands of responses, completely swamped those from the caving community. The document summarising the consultation responses can be found here:

<http://gov.wales/docs/desh/consultation/160324-access-outdoor-recreation-cons-summary-en.pdf>

The ministerial statement addresses points in the above document and notes that the existing system is too complex and burdensome. Laws need to reflect the current recreational needs and be more flexible to changes in demand and participation. There is also a need to improve the awareness and designation of public access and improve the existing advisory forums so that access rights and responsibilities are communicated to all interests.

There is the possibility of influencing the Welsh Government to extend the CRoW act to formally encompass caving, however this will require the profile of caving and other underground activities with government departments and ministers to be raised considerably.

It is clear from a recent meeting with the NRW that they are resolutely of the opinion that there is no legal right to go caving under the CRoW Act 2000 and earlier legislation. CCC is seeking the views of cavers and caving clubs on how best to obtain freer access for our sport within the new political landscape that is unfolding in Wales.

Dave Tyson, CCC Newsletter Editor

Report on the CCC AGM

The CCC AGM occurred in March at the Gloucester Cave Rescue Group Headquarters in Cinderford.

We would like to thank John Hine for organising the venue.

The minutes and officers reports from the AGM are now on the CCC website. A good turnout led to a lively discussion on various topics.

Dave Tyson stepped down from the secretary post and welcomed Rob Jones (UCET) into this role. All the remaining committee posts were uncontested and so the previous team continues.

Dave has been co-opted as Newsletter Editor to help share the load.

Rob Jones, *CCC Secretary*

2017 DIARY

28th May

Columns Open Day, Ogof Ffynnon Ddu

9-11th June

BCA Party & AGM Weekend
Rotary Centre, Castleton.

23-26th June

NAMHO Conference 2017
Godstone, Kent.

29th September—1st October

Hidden Earth Conference
Churchill Academy, Mendip

Training News

CCC ran another successful SRT workshop with 13 participants from various CCC affiliated clubs and 5 instructors on 22nd April at Llan-gorse. The participants' skill levels varied from total novice, having never tried an SRT harness before, to those looking to improve their rigging and rescue skills prior to foreign expeditions this coming summer.

The pictures here show some of the course members 'on the ropes'.

Another SRT training session is planned for North Wales on 24th September at Plas-y-Brenin. This venue is smaller and some places are already booked. There is a £10 deposit: contact me to book a place.

It is possible for clubs to organise a similar training day and obtain a grant from BCA to do this. For more details please contact me.

Richard Hill, *CCC Training Officer*



Plans for Craig y Ddinas Access Improvements

Upper Dinas Silica Mine is a popular venue for explorers and is frequently used by divers who have the task of transporting heavy equipment up to the mine. The existing route is a path to the north of the car park and involves a steep ascent and then a steep descent to the mine entrance. Natural Amenities Limited have drawn up a proposal to fit a steel pedestrian walkway which would make access safer, allow a circular walk and also provide a viewing platform. The idea generated a lot of support from interested parties.

The proposed design would be similar to that used at Carr's tourist mine at Nenthead. The idea was subsequently discussed at an on-site meeting with Paul Dann, the local NRW manager, together with their SSSI officer. NRW rejected the plan and an official response will be provided detailing the reasons.

However, they were keen to help, and have advised me of an unmarked public right of way through the land on other side of the river where there have been significant issues in the past.

I have also discovered that the tarmac road that passes the car park is actually a public road, and the Right of Way leads off this close to the farm. I am also advised that the distance to the mine by using this route is only about 400 metres and crosses the wooden footbridge directly opposite. My new plan is therefore to engage with the Local Authority about having a statutory signpost erected marking this route and to investigate possible powers of having the route cleared, say by volunteers.

My alternative plan of providing an approach to the mines, as compared to building new infrastructure there, has the advantage of costing next to nothing. So I hope the Local Authority and NRW staff will help gain the support of the landowner for improving access, not only for divers, but for everyone interested in visiting these historic mines and their setting.

Roy Fellows, *Natural Amenities Limited*

Interesting Aquatic Life in Poachers Cave

In a trip to Poacher's cave (in the Alyn Gorge, North Wales) on the 23rd March 2017, four cavers from UCET led by Ian Adams were crawling through the low streamway and came upon a fish. Nothing particularly surprising with that, except the body was translucent which suggested it was not from the surface. Knowing nothing of fish, we described it as a "cat fish" being around five inches in length.

On the 4th April 2017 the BBC published an article on a rare cave fish (named as a stone loach), found in Germany.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-39446505>

This appeared to be identical to the fish found in Poacher's cave except for the colouring. The club considered it exciting that there was a possibility that this "rare" fish exists in Wales. The streamway of Poachers cave is only just beneath the surface of the River Alyn. For a cave dwelling fish to be found there, a community must exist that has survived on the one level alone (as the fish cannot swim up internal waterfalls). A return trip was then organised to attempt to locate any such fish and capture an image of them.

On the 13th April 2017, Ian Adams and Rob Jones (Secretary of CCC) returned with the sole purpose of locating the fish. The stream bed was searched carefully on hands and knees. There were significant areas we could not get to but that did not stay our determination. In total, seven separate fish were found and they appeared to be identical in type/genus. They were definitely from the loach/catfish family and were similar to the "rare" species reported by the BBC. There were some differences. Notably the colouring was not pink but, rather, a translucent grey mottling. Their length varied from three inches (probably juvenile) to five inches. The translucence suggests these particular fish were not drawn in from the surface but, rather, have existed for numerous generations within the cave.

It is interesting to consider how many more such fish exist within the cave and, indeed, what other fish might be there which we did not see.

A two-minute video called "Cave Fish" is available on the UCET caving video channel at www.youtube.com/henllan or find the fish video here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NYOKhzcheeo>

Ian Adams, *United Cavers Exploration Team*



A couple of pictures showing specimens of the fish from different parts of the cave

Cambrian Mines Trust updates

Cwmystwyth

The steel uprights for the new road at the back of Lefel Fawr are in position, true to plumb, secured and ready to take the lengths of RSJ which are currently being prepared.

Goginan

I am close to completing this project. The road ends in solid rock, which is logical as I have climbed up into the hanging wall of the lode. I am now mucking out with intention of dropping downwards at the end in hope of breaking into the level.

Talybont

I have inspected the route downwards and can report that the concreting looks good 12 months on. However the 3rd ladder from the bottom, which was seen to be affected with dry rot at the time of the work, has become dangerous to the point where I thought it appropriate to destroy it. This has been done. Access is unaffected as it is an easy rope-assisted climb down. I intend to cast some concrete steps there later this year to improve the access. My aim is to remove all the timber eventually, but this means sourcing three new steel ladders. Any offers or suggestions for a supplier will be appreciated.

Roy Fellows, *Cambrian Mines Trust*

BCA Minimal Impact Cave Guidelines

The BCA has published a leaflet on Minimal Impact Cave Guidelines which all cavers should read. This provides guidance on how to avoid damage to caves when visiting them and also has recommendations when new cave passages are being dug.

Stuart France has a small stock of the printed version which clubs can request. There is also a downloadable version available on both the CCC and BCA websites which caving clubs could promote to their members:

http://british-caving.org.uk/wiki3/lib/exe/fetch.php?media=conservation_access:micg.pdf

Stuart France, *CCC Access/Conservation officer*

Otter Hole conservation work

Conservation work being done in Otter Hole has benefited recently from a CCC grant to buy a new liner for the pond at the Camp. The existing liner has been there for a good number of years and is starting to disintegrate so it needed to be replaced. Visiting groups who have helped to wash mud off the formations will know that the Camp is the only source of water in the Upper Series.

Thanks go to Paul Taylor for sourcing the EPDM rubber liner and fleece underlay and packing them into two monster tackle sacks for transportation to the Camp; but that was the easy bit. Jan Karvik, Raif Evans and Chris Stott accepted the challenge of getting these packages to the Camp during the recent pre-season leaders' trip. The fleece underlay when packed up was the size of a large suitcase, but it was soft and relatively light. The rubber liner, however turned into a super-heavy three-foot-long sausage, a fact that Jan's aching shoulders testified to for a couple of days afterwards.

Once at the camp there was only time to prepare the area for the new liner before returning to get back through the sump before it closed. The reconstruction of the pond needs to be done carefully and to the best standards in order to ensure maximum life span, and it was decided that it would be best done on another trip.

David Dickson, *RFoDCC*

The Cambrian Caving Council

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Please send news items, short articles, and newsworthy photographs for the next issue to Dave Tyson by **30th June 2017**